

Burma – Thailand Railway

Thanbyuzayat to 3 Pagodas

Peter Winstanley and John Brereton

1. General

Reference Peter's previous report on our visit to Burma during October 2012.

Apart from the required visa to enter Burma also required, after arriving, is a written authority to travel along the railway from the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism with copies to:

- Mon State Government and Immigration Department;
- Karen State Government and Immigration Department;
- South East Military Command;
- Three Pagodas Township Administration Department;
- Police Department; and
- Immigration Department.

Also required is a letter of authority to travel within Karen State issued by Karen State Administration - this must be obtained in person.

Documentation is inspected at the six checkpoints within Karen State.

Passport needs to be carried at all times. All checkpoints close at 4 pm and no travel can be undertaken after that time.

The only accommodation is basic at Thanbyuzayat and 3 Pagodas.

Transport can only be done by 4-wheel drive as rough dirt roads and all rivers/watercourses are forded. Travel can therefore be only done during the dry season. Some timber bridges are currently under construction. To get to most of the railway points of interest, this can only be done on foot through the jungle. As a tourist destination, it has nothing to recommend it and would only be of interest to relatives of POW's of "A" Force or military historians interested in the Burma section of the railway.

2. 00 kilo - Thanbyuzayat

Commencement of the railway with the current cemetery on the site of the original camp cemetery. Contains the graves of the dead found and exhumed north of the joining point at Konkoita, Thailand.

Between the cemetery and the railway station is the Japanese purpose built headquarters of the Kempetai with the facade still displaying the Imperial Japanese stars and columns.

The station is still original having served the Moulmein to Ye line pre war and still does. The railway commenced by looping off this line at the immediate north of the station, curving into the corner of now private buildings. At the rear of the station were constructed two train consolidation sidings, joining the line and looping onto the existing line at the south of the station.



Thanbyuzayat Cemetery now



Cemetery 1955



Kempetai Headquarters



Kempetai Headquarters



Railway Station now



Station 1943

AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL P00406.038



Site of train consolidation sidings (2) constructed at rear of Thanbyuzayat Station



Railway trace looping on to Moulmein to Ye line at north end of station and commencement of the railway



Railway trace continuing from station to private premises

3. 4 kilo - Kandaw

Green Force

Original camp site now on private property. In later years a memorial depicting the commencement of the railway is located here on state owned land on the western side of the Moulmein to Ye line. This contains a concrete wall, a cement statue (damaged) and locomotive C 0522. This area on previous visits was completely covered in vegetation but has recently been cleaned up. The engine has been recently painted in its original black livery. A museum dedicated to the railway is being marked out for future construction.



Post war memorial to the POWs



Japanese locomotive C 0522



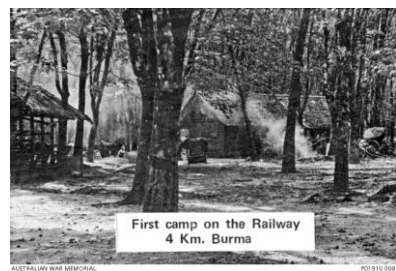
C0522



Site of new memorial museum now currently under construction



Kandaw siding 1945



First camp on the Railway
4 Km. Burma

4. 8 kilo - Wagale

Force

Now into rubber plantations as existing pre war and along the railway embankment with timber culverts. The station building foundations now support a small school for children of military personnel inside a large Mon Army Camp. Station buildings along the railway were only small, light, timber constructions and none now exist on the Burma side. Still in use are the hot springs. The POWs constructed concrete baths for the Japanese Officers and separate ones for the NCO's with related storage tanks and distribution aqueducts. The other hot springs are located at Hindat camp in Thailand.



POW built hot springs bath house for Japanese Officers



Individual baths inside



Bath for Japanese NCOs



Hot springs holding tank



Distribution aqueduct



Holding tank No.2



Railway embankment between Kandaw and Wagale



Remains of timber culvert crossing

5. 14 kilo - Thetkaw

Railway embankment through the rubber on left of the road. Located just west of the embankment is the Japanese memorial and pagoda to their railway dead (currently inaccessible due renovations. Photos are from a previous visit). A statue of a lion indicates the direction in a straight line to a large ordnance depot located on a large hill at Hlepauk.



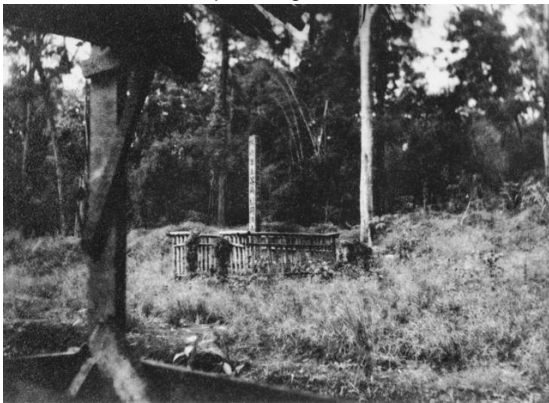
Memorial to Japanese who died on the railway



Headstones of Japanese graves



Railway trace through the rubber



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P00761.041

Cemetery in 1945

6. 18 kilo - Hlepauk.

Anderson Force

The road has now crossed the railway and is on the right side going south. Now out of the rubber with the embankment close by. Walking along the embankment and coming to a large culvert still containing the remains of the timber piles.



Railway embankment



Remains of timber embankment head for timber trestle creek crossing

7. 26 kilo - Kunhnikway

Ramsay Force

The railway here took seven bends where a recent road alignment has taken out a couple of those. Unable to exactly locate the camp site as no village is in the vicinity and have no exact camp details re-distinguishing features. However, where possible the camps were located near a water source.

8. 30 kilo - Reptu

This became the base “ hospital” camp after repeated allied bombing and strafing of Thanbyuzayat camp resulting in the deaths of nearly 70 POW’s. Three sidings were constructed here looping off the main line to the south east. The large tree at the entrance to the camp and the village is still there. A seventy year old village elder Mo Chi took us to the cemetery site where he found, as a child, remnants of bamboo crosses left by the recovery team after exhumation of bodies for re-internment at Thanbyuzayat. He also pointed out the old campsite including the camp well. Located about 50 meters further along was a concrete base and a small section of large steel pipe used for supplying water to the locomotives.



Site of Reptu Cemetery



Remains of the camp well



Locomotive water feeder pipe to overhead tank

9. 35 kilo - Tanyin

Williams Force later joined by Anderson Force to form No. 1 Mobile Force (rails and sleepers).

Road has crossed the line again which is now on the left hand side.

Embankments and a large timber bridge were constructed here. The camp consisted of four huts housing 900 men with a further 200 Romusha. A short time later a further 900 of Anderson Force was added.

Time constraints and the relatively large distance from the road means that this will be found at the next visit at the end of this year.

10. 40 kilo - Betetaung

Black Force plus 184 Americans

Road has crossed the railway again with the line on the right. Large limestone cliffs on left of road which contains large ballast quarry. Hammer and tap used to drill holes in the cliff for dynamiting. The scars still remain with the large rocks being broken up by POW's now too sick to work on the line. A few piles of graded sized rocks still remain. Camp site and cemetery on west of the line more or less opposite the quarry. An old unfinished stupa with an old and small pagoda is found adjacent to the line.



Limestone ballast quarry



Old pagoda beside the railway embankment



Railway embankment



Remains of old unidentified building beside the railway



The limestone ballast quarry is located at the foot of these cliffs

11. 45 kilo - Anankwin

No. 1 Mobile Force (Williams and Anderson)

Line here consisted of passing loops, jungle protection sidings and a turning triangle (trains are looped off the main line and proceed to the apex thence reverse along the opposite side thus now facing the other way). Bridging of the Myettaw River was one large timber trestle and a 5 pylon steel bridge. After fording the river and passing the village thence walking south then north to a right angled bend in the river and locate the southern pylon thence locate the other four in the jungle. Located the camp site and also four large concrete foundations with recesses that housed large steel posts to support the overhead locomotive replenishment water tank together with the related concrete footing to support the pipe to fill the tank after water is pumped from the creek. Under a house remain the footings for a Japanese building.



Jungle covered bridge pylon



Concrete bridge pylon No. 1



No. 1 pylon



No. 2 pylon with stupa



No. 3 pylon



No. 4 pylon



Concrete base for replenishment pipe supplying overhead locomotive water tank



The four concrete foundations for the overhead locomotive water tank

12. 50 kilo - Thanbaya

Bruce Hunt's F Force "hospital" camp. Over 1700 desperately sick and unable to work came here to die and about half did. With the assistance of Bruce Hunt's map found 'A' well thence further east to a large concrete footing for the railway. Proceeded to the southern creek and found the remains of the distinctive timber crossing consisting of two sets of three piles each. The northern creek crossing contains old railway sleepers. Across the padi field to the immediate east is the eastern creek with 'C' well and the cook house site. The camp here straddled the railway with the cemetery on the south west corner.



Cemetery site



Corner camp and cemetery site



Campsite



Remains of "A" well



Concrete railway footing north creek crossing



Two sets of three piles of the southern creek timber crossing



Southern creek crossing



Cemetery 1945 with members of war graves survey party

13. 55 kilo - Khon Khan

Albert Coates A Force "hospital" camp where he performed his amputations on leg ulcer patients. He came here on a stretcher suffering from a severe bout of scrub typhus contracted at 75 kilo camp at Meiloe. This site is reached from the left hand side of the road, through the village thence a long walk through the jungle to the embankment. Travel south to the Khon Khan River till the first pylon is reached. This steel bridge consisted of four pylons. Further east down river is the passing loop which crosses the river by a timber trestle. The camp and cemetery are located on the western side of the southern embankment in a betelnut plantation. Captain Brereton was the last to leave here with 202 Australians and 58 Dutch where he returned to 105 kilo camp.



Railway embankment head at Khon Kahn River



Camp site



Camp site Khon Kahn



No. 1 pylon



No.2 pylon



No. 3 pylon



No. 4 pylon

14. 60 kilo - Taungzun

No. 1 mobile force found masses of dead romusha in the dilapidated huts here as a result of cholera. Jungle protection loop embankment is on right of the road here with the main line a fair way in through the jungle on the left. The river running parallel to the road prevented any further travel to the camp site. Will have to visit here next time by walking along the trace from Ronsi.



Railway passing loop embankment (not main line)

15. 62 kilo - Ronsi

3 group "hospital" camp with several jungle sidings and a turning triangle.

Again the jungle protection loop on the right. Walking along the river to the east and the large embankments with the remains of the steel bridge are found. The pylons are lying on their sides due to allied bombing. Just east are the remains of the large timber trestle bridge. Camp and cemetery sites are located to the east of the southern end of the timber bridge.



Remains of the two concrete pylons of main steel bridge as a result of allied bombing (both pylons lying on their sides)



Remains of the large timber trestle bridge adjacent to the steel bridge



Construction of timber bridge 1943

16. 65 kilo - Kami Mezali

3 Group Headquarters Camp

Camp is located on right of road on the higher ground on the northern side of the Mezali River. Following the river to the west the remains of the POW built road fords the river.



Camp site



Camp site on high ground to the right of the riverbed



Campsite

17. 70 kilo - Mezali

No. 1 Mobile Force moved here after occupation by the Burmese. Also 5 group "hospital" camp. A large Burmese cemetery here has not been located and recovered. Impenetrable jungle prevented the long walk along the river to locate the steel bridge that crossed the river here. To be done in the near future on next trip.



Concrete footing of timber trestle bridge crossing



Embankment head on left hand side of river



Remains of original POW built road between this camp and Meiloe

18. 75 kilo - Meiloe

Black, Green and Ramsay Force Camp

On opposite side of the river with the camp and cemetery on the east side of the railway. Was a low lying fever infested camp and is still so evidenced by the malaria warning notices. Again the jungle prevented access to the railway on this occasion. To be done next trip.



Impenetrable jungle in the vicinity of Meiloe camp

19. 80 kilo - Aparaine

No. 5 group and No. 1 Mobile Force Camp

Located the concrete pylons of the steel bridge crossing the Aparon River with ground around heavily cratered due to allied bombing. Remains of a rail at the foot of the southern pylon. 3 creek crossings are here crossed by small timber trestles. Embankment on right side of road.



Embankment head second creek crossing



Aparaine bridge concrete pylon



Second concrete pylon



Rails at foot of concrete embankment head



Remains of timber piles at third river crossing



Concrete base of locomotive water replenishment pipe

20. 82 kilo - Aparon

Site of the steel bridge crossing the Zami River. Concrete pylons found with ground heavily cratered due to allied bombing. The cemetery never located due to bombing. A long walk through the jungle is required to meet the embankment thence south along the embankment to the bridge remains. One of the steel spans lies here. Passing loop and jungle protection sidings were located here. The POW camp was located a little south of the bridge towards Lawa.



Concrete pylon north bank



Concrete pylon south bank



Northern pylon



Remains of steel railway span



Railway embankment just before reaching the bridge



Bridge post war



Bridge after construction

21. Tadein

Located on the northern bank of the Zami and up river of Aparon bridge. This is now the location of a Karen village. A single vehicle punt is used for crossing when the river is too high to ford. Both a Romusha camp and the Japanese camp were located here. The railway did not pass through here.

22. 85 kilo - Lawa

No. 5 Group Camp

Railway on left of road but camp site not able to be identified as now distinguishing features exist. A large Burmese cemetery exists here but not located and not recovered.



Railway embankment

23. 95 kilo - Kyondaw

F Force transit camp for the sick moving to Thanbaya from the northern Thailand camps. Many died here. Reached after several crossings of the Zami. The embankment still contains numerous teak sleepers. Unable to locate the camp site as there are no distinguishable features.



Concrete footing for timber culvert



Railway embankment



Railway embankment with sleeper



The Blue Haze – a tribute to Leslie Hall

24. 100 kilo - Regue

No. 5 Group Camp

Embankment on left of road, however the railway crosses numerous creeks and small waterfalls as we are now at the headwaters of the Zami. Concrete footings for timber trestles and a concrete block with steel pipe for locomotive water replenishment near small dam are found here. To get an accurate picture will require walking along the full trace. Not clear as to where the camp was.



Concrete footing Zamie river crossing



Second timber river crossing



Second timber river crossing



Embankment



Concrete footing between Regue and Kyondaw



Remains of railway crossing north Regue



Second river crossing north of Regue



Locomotive water replenishing pipe and base in the vicinity of left hand photo



Crossing after the war with timber trestle still surviving

25. 105 kilo - Aunganaung

Black, Green and Ramsay Forces and later used as a consolidation camp for POW's returning to Thailand at the completion of the railway.

Just north of here the embankment merges into the existing road until reaching the outskirts of 3 Pagodas. The camp site and cemetery easily located as it was immediately to the right

of the railway. The site slopes downhill and the creek is located on the southern side of the camp.



Camp site



Camp site



Looking up slope from camp to railway



Railway trace – now a road.
Camp on right hand side.



Creek on southern side of the camp.



Entrance to cemetery now



Entrance to cemetery 1945 with war graves survey party

26. 108 kilo - Payathanzutaung

Green Force and later No.1 Mobile Force moved here after marching from 95 kilo. Again the camp and cemetery located on the immediate right of the railway, now the road.



Campsite



Road now railway trace here; camp on left hand side.

27. 110 kilo - 3 Pagodas

The road leaves the embankment and proceeds through the town. The embankment is now on the left behind private property. Existing rails with old teak sleepers are located here terminating at the border alongside a small concrete wall monument.



Memorial stone



Railway embankment



Embankment



Original railway terminating at border



Looking north from railway termination