

A Diary of *The OCA Re-union to Thailand* *November 2011.*

By Roger Andrews



Friday 04\11\2011.

As if by magic all travelling from Heathrow, suddenly appeared at the at the Air Oman check in desk at the same time.

After checking in we all passed through security and into the departure lounge for a couple of boring hours wait. During this time Somrak Produced a small pot of earth a mixture of UK & Thai soil everyone had to take a small pinch and rub it into their head for good luck on the journey. (I'm sure the lamps in the departure lounge we swinging well following all the stories of recollection).



© AIRBUS 2009 — photo by S. RAMADIER

The flight to Muscat was good except for the food (if you liked Arabic food you were in luck).

05\11\2011

During our flight chasing into the sun we passed over Dubai where we saw the spectacular site of the man-made Palm islands stretching out into the sea below us.



We arrived in Muscat around 09:00 local time, and the heat hit us like a brick wall.

We were hustled through arrivals and strait through security to departures and onto our next plane, leaving Muscat for Bangkok at 10:30.

Another good flight (Air Oman could show some of the bigger airlines how to do things) we arrived in Bangkok once again on time, around 19:00. We all cleared immigration, some passing through the Diplomatic and VIP channel (They must have seen how important our party was!!!!). After a short wait for our transfer bus, we arrived at hotel No.1 we were fed and watered, then some-what tired out, we retired to bed.

The outward trip went like clockwork (I love it when a plan comes together).

06\11\2011

We seem to have lost a day, where did Saturday go?

During the night our numbers swelled as Neil Cambell and his wife Belinda had flown in from Australia arriving in the small hours. Following introductions at breakfast we prepared for our onward journey to Pattaya, and like a well-oiled machine, our transit bus arrived dead on time at 12:00.

One and a half hours of travelling down an eight-lane highway we arrive at hotel No.2.

There followed a joyful re-union, Taff Williams (who now resides in Pattaya) knocked on the door of Neville Wareham's room, this was the first time they had met in over 45 years when they used to play football in the same team in Singapore and at Crown. (You could see all the lamps swinging in the hotel complex as they regaled in stories from their past).



During the evening we all dined at a local restaurant, where we seemed to take over the place dragging tables and chairs together to accommodate our party, which now amounted to 13 plus 2 children.



We enjoyed good food and a sociable chat and all returned to the hotel happy (some staying in the hotel bar for a few more drinks).

07/11/2011.

Roger awoke with a head ache claiming it must have been caused by the sugar content of the fruit and ice cream he had the night before and swearing it had nothing to do with the amount of Singha beer consumed. An easy start to the day where everyone went their separate ways to enjoy the local sights (most ended up on the beach).

Olga returned sporting a tattoo of what appears to be a cat etched on to her right shoulder.



In the afternoon most gathered at the hotel pool for a refreshing dip in the water. Some ending up at the other side of the pool at the bar to check if the Singha beer was up to par (I can testify that it was).

Noel, John and Co. went off to meet up with an acquaintance that has a micro-light plane.

In the evening we went to a restaurant on the beach for dinner. We were later joined by Noel, John and Co.

Elsie was surprised with flowers to celebrate her birthday, and we were all surprised when Neil disappeared then reappeared playing happy birthday on the bagpipes.



The evening was finished off with some of us marching from the beach through Pattaya to the hotel to the shrill of the bagpipes (much to the amazement and amusement of the locals).

Finally once more to the bar for a final check of the day on the Singha beer.

08\11\2011.

Nothing planned for day, met up with everyone at breakfast, people going and visiting various locations (Shopping therapy seems to be the order of the day). After much talking about the subject Belinda got her massage.

Met at pool later in afternoon, the men swam to far side of pool to bar for some light refreshment!



All meeting up a 19:00 for dinner a short walk away from hotel. Dined at same location as first night (the proprietor was fore-warned so tables were arranged ready for us), food good enjoyed by all.

On return from restaurant to hotel Jess made the mistake of allowing Olga into a souvenir shop (the shop was very small) but it took over half an hour for her to emerge back out onto the street with a big cheer from us all. All tired so retiring early in anticipation of travelling to Ubon tomorrow.

09\11\2011.

Neville and Elsie not feeling to well this morning (up throughout the night with a touch of the trots). Next to follow was Olga catching the trots at Bangkok airport.

On checking in his baggage for the flight to Ubon, Neil was over weight and had to pay excess baggage and lighten the load, He was about to discard a bottle off duty -free Ballantine whiskey when Olga took pity on him and put it in her luggage.



Arrived in Ubon, our numbers now swelling by another two, Jim Curtis and Jimmy James were there met us at Ubon International Airport (The old US Air force base, which has now been upgraded. We collected our hire busses and set sail for the hotels (hotel number 3).

10\11\2011.

We had a good day today. We were invited to join the Loi Krathong festival at a village called Lau-Soh-Kho about 40 minutes from Ubon festival. It was a sort of water sports event with canoe racing and greasy pole boxing over water. Jim Curtis & Jimmy James put on an impromptu boxing bout to the amusement of the local kids.

Singing and dancing on a large stage followed in the afternoon.

We were treated like VIP's. They even laid out a special meal for us, I'm afraid I only made a pretence to eat as not sure of the condition of the food.



While we were sat at the meal the local abbot of the nearby monastery seemed to take a liking to me and spent some time talking to me and no one else in the party. (I think he was sizing me up for fitting of the saffron robes)



On the return to our hotel our numbers swelled again with the arrival of Bill & Jean Edwards

In the evening we dined Thai style at a riverside restaurant at Huay Wang Nong, on the outskirts of Ubon with all of us eating drinking and enjoying the local festival.

11\11\2011.

Remembrance day. We joined the ceremony at the memorial to “Little Mother Ubon” (A Thai lady who assisted POW’s of the Japanese during WW2 and greatly revered by the people of Ubon). Once again treated as VIP’s we were seated under an awning reserved for dignitaries. Jess laid a wreath on behalf of the British Legion, I on behalf of the Operation Crown Association and Neville for the REME.



Neil played the bagpipes during the laying of the wreaths, and Jim Curtis gave an excellent speech much appreciated by the Thais and he along with the District Governor lit the Flame of remembrance.



The whole affair was very dignified and moving. After the parade we had a buffet lunch at a Falang bar. Before we left Jimmy James gave us a performance by losing his hotel safe box key but after about an hour found it in his case we then began our bus trip up to Mukdahan. We had a break in the trip at Amnat Cheroen where we visited the Golden Buddha. Most dined within the hotel in the evening

12/11/2011

Settling in to the Ploy Palace hotel (hotel number 4) we have a free day to explore Mukdahan. Most chose to visit the Indo China Market at the riverside a vast and colourful market which seemed to stretch into the distance for ever and it was on two levels.

The majority of us decided to dine out this evening. We descended on a town centre restaurant, once again causing havoc re-arranging the tables and a party of Indians moved tables to a to accommodate us all. The menu was all in Thai so we gestured and pointed at the items on the menu, and with the help of the Indians who spoke Thai and English we made our choices (all I can say is don't order fish and chips).



Neil had to wait almost two hours for his order to be completed, the meal was quite an experience, we had, had a good laugh drank plenty of beer and left happy.

13/11/2011

Today was the reason I had come on the trip, we visited Crown Camp and Airfield.

As we arrived you could not help but notice that Crown Avenue (the road into the airfield) has recently been resurfaced and that two new buildings have been constructed on the edge of the airfield parking area.

We spent some time wandering around what was once the camp, trying with difficulty to visualise the place as it was 45 years ago. We found the swimming pool (it was still full of water) this enabled us to get our bearings, the stumps from the posts of Nash Gate were still visible. The whole place was now overgrown and with paddy fields encroaching into what was the NAAFI and the cinema area.

We moved on to the Airfield, the run offs at both ends of the strip have recently been surfaced dressed and 6 concrete slabs have been replaced on the main strip and a start to resealing the expansion joints has begun.

A toast was made to Crown and some Tiger beer poured onto the concrete, we then formed up on the Runway marker number (number 21) and Neil marched up and down between us playing a lament on the Bag pipes.



After driving the length of the strip we came across some Thais using the parking area for drying and bagging rice (An excellent use of a multi million pound airfield)

We then came across a group of Thai soldiers outside the two new building making fence poles. We got little info from them other than the airfield was to be fenced off. (Noel later found out that the Thai Army intend to

start flying into the airfield soon and also that civil flights might also begin)After we let the strip we. went back through the village and up the Nash road towards Nash Gate.



Today brought back memories buried deep down within me and which had been held at bay for over 45 years..... Today was a good day !!!!!!!!!!!.

14/11/2011.

We started today by visiting The Mukdahan Tower, Noel's sister-in-law who works for that department was able to get us in and up the viewing tower for free. We were able to get many photos of Mukdahan and surrounding area from the top of the tower.

On our decent back to terra-firma a small impromptu presentation was made to Noel's wife Somrak and his two children in appreciation of all the work and organization they have done in putting together this trip.

After the Visit to the tower it was off to the Post Crown Road. The road now not recognisable from all those years ago (Well surfaced in blacktop and widened) other than its long straight stretches and sweeping curves.

After travelling along the road we came to a large new Temple Pha Nam Yoi at Nong Phok, this place is beyond description it oozes opulence with its intricate designs internally and externally.



Finally the day was rounded off by dinner a small cafe in Loeng Nok Tha run by an Ex pat Englishman where they only do English food. I had Cottage pie followed by Apple crumble and custard (Oh! What an oasis) beer was local though so we sank a few singhas.

15/11/2011.

Some of the group went to watch the locals harvesting the rice paddys, and some stayed in Mukdahan and relaxed or went shopping, a relaxing day had by all.



16/11/2011.

Today we travel back to Bangkok.

Roger's turn to feel unwell up most of night with upset tummy (and with a tummy his size it was quite an upset).

The day started with another performance from Jimmy James who at breakfast suddenly realises he has a 09:30 flight from Ubon to Bangkok (unlike the rest of us who have an evening flight). The aid of Jim Curtis is enlisted to get Jimmy from Mukdahan to Ubon within a short space of time, driving at speed and in a straight a line as possible they make the airport with less than 5 minutes to spare.

We booked out of the hotel for a leisurely drive down to Ubon arriving around 17:00 (Roger laid prone across 3 seats for the whole drive still suffering and remembering very little of the ride). The opportunity for a walk around Old Ubon was taken by all (Less Roger still out for the count in the minibus).

Uneventful flight via Air Asia to Bangkok finally booking into hotel number 5 around 23:00.

17/11/2011.

Following the morning meal most of the party took the Skytrain to a large shopping mall in Bangkok for some final retail therapy and site seeing.



Most dined locally to the hotel and then retired early in preparation for the homeward bound flight early next morning.

18/11/2011.

We all gathered in the hotel lobby at 02:30 (les Neil and Belinda whose flight to Australia was leaving in the evening).

All stumbling around the Bangkok airport in the early hours for a 06.30 flight to Muscat.



We finally arrived back at Heathrow around 17:40 GMT.

A very tired group of people said farewell to each other and went their separate ways until the next time!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

In conclusion.

Thanks To Noel and Somrak Jackson whose organization the whole trip was a great success, the Group gelled well, all enjoyed themselves and ended the trip having thoroughly happy and lasting memories of a Journey and time well spent

Group members for the November 2011 Reunion were:-

Roger Andrews
Olga Baldwin
Jess Baldwin
Neville Wareham
Elsie Round
Jimmy James
Taff Williams
Jim Curtis
Bill Edwards
Jean Edwards
John Hamnett
Freda Hamnet
Neil Campbell
Belinda Campbell
Noel Jackson
Somrak Jackson