

FRIENDSHIP NEWSLETTER

For Thai English Students

Miracle at the Bridge over the River Kwai

A true story that happened in Kanchanaburi, Thailand during WW II

Adapted from the book, The Miracle on the River Kwai by Ernest Gordon



During World War II, the Japanese army invaded Thailand. They brought several thousand Allied soldiers and Asians from many countries with them as Prisoners of War (POWs). The prisoners were forced to build the railroad to Burma. Part of that railroad was the Bridge over the River Kwai.

Life was very difficult for the Prisoners of War. They were forced to work ten hours a day, seven days a week. They had no shoes or clothes to wear. Their food was not enough to fill their stomachs and it did not taste good. All the prisoners became sick and many thousands of them died because they were not given any medicine to treat their illnesses. Others died because the guards mistreated them. Because of these hardships, everyone looked out for himself and did not care for anyone else. Then one day, something happened that changed the lives of many of the men who were building the bridge. Here is what happened.



One evening the Japanese officer became very angry with a group of prisoners. He had counted the shovels they had used that day, and discovered that one of them was missing. He shouted at them, saying that he was going to kill *all* of them if the person who stole it did not confess. No one moved. Then one of the soldiers stepped forward and told the guard that he had taken the shovel. The guard immediately beat him to death with his gun.

Then the shovels were counted again. **They were all there!** This soldier had died so his friends could live. The story spread through the camp and things began to change.



After that, the more healthy POWs began to take care of their weaker friends. Some of them risked their lives to go out of the camp to buy bananas, an egg or medicine from the Thai. These soldiers knew they would be killed if the guard saw them. Many lives were saved from death by the love and kindness of the other prisoners.



For encouragement, the prisoners began to meet together to sing and to pray to God. They studied the Bible and learned about God and Jesus. They read Jesus' words, "The greatest love you can have for your friends is to give your life for them." They had seen one of their friends die for them.



They learned that Jesus was the Son of God and a perfect man. They learned He had died a terrible death on a cross. (This was method used 2000 years ago, to kill the most wicked men for their wrong doing.) Like the soldier who died for his friends, Jesus died to forgive the wrong doing of each person on earth. He made a way that we may be forgiven from their wrong thoughts and actions. God changed these soldier's hearts and lives. This was the miracle at the famous Bridge over the River Kwai.

Adapted by Arlene Sorenson

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Questions: Miracle at the Bridge over the River Kwai

This sheet may be used as homework to check written work of students.

1. Who wanted to have a railroad to Burma and a bridge built over the River Kwai?

Who did they force to build the railroad and bridge for them?

2. What five things show how difficult life was for the POW's at the River Kwai?

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.



3. Because of these living conditions, how did the POW's treat one another?

4. Why did the Japanese guard say he was going to kill the group of POW's?

5. What happened to the soldier who said that he had taken the missing shovel?

What did the guard do next?

Why did the soldier die?

6. How did this man's death change the hearts of the other prisoners?

What things did they begin to do for each other?



7. Why was it dangerous to try to leave the prison camp to buy things for their sick friends?

Grammar Exercise:

Read the last three paragraphs of the story again and find the verbs:

- a. Circle all the verbs that tell what the POWs did together for encouragement.
- b. Draw a box around all the verbs that tell what God and Jesus did for the POWs.
- c. Underline the words that tell what Jesus was like and what He did.

Something to Think about and English Conversation Practice:

- a. What does the word "miracle" mean? (Use your dictionary!)
- b. What was the "Miracle at the Bridge over the River Kwai?"