

Return to Burma

I promised Dorothy when I returned from the War in 1946 to take her to all the countries I had visited during the War. In 1980, therefore, we went to Burma. It was not easy to do so but I had discovered it was possible by visiting Thailand and from there taking a five-day excursion into Burma.

All went smoothly, and Dorothy and I found ourselves in a party of 13 at Mingaladon Airport, Rangoon. We elected Peter and Marlene to be leaders of our party. They were an American couple who had formed their own travel agency, and they were brash enough to be able to throw their weight about when dealing with the other tour operators, guides, customs officers, indeed pretty well everyone. The rest of our party were happy to let them take the strain.

We were a mixed bunch; thirteen in all. Peter and Marlene were American, there were three Italian men. There were two Belgians (Army men, I think). Two others were civilians working in the Middle East, and four of us were from England – Richard (an Army Officer) and his wife Philippa, Dorothy and me. Our penultimate stop in Burma was Mandalay and we were due to catch a train back to Rangoon at 5 p.m. Time was important (to our courier Margaret, anyway, the rest of us didn't care a hoot). Time grew short and one of our number was missing – Richard, who later came racing in and joined us in a mad dash for the railway station.

At Margaret's insistence we held a post-mortem on Richard's naughtiness – and Peter our leader decided that I, as an Army Captain when Richard was a mere boy, was the senior officer who should give Richard a telling off. So a bit later I asked Richard why he had delayed us and he told me he was attached to a Ghurkha Unit who during World War 2 had stormed and captured Mandalay Hill; he could not resist running up the hill as a mark of respect to his Unit. All my Army severity came back to me. I told him how naughty he had been and that if I had been in his position I would have done the same. He looked as contrite as I looked severe.