

STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE

August 2004

Parting Shots



The Kwai River Bridge in Kanchanaburi, Thailand's western province bordering Burma, is steeped in World War II history, Hollywood and...metal truss plates? In February, WTCA member George "Sid" Ketchum and wife Pamela of PDJ Components, traveled to Thailand and visited the bridge. Ketchum became interested in the bridge after having read about its initial 1942 construction project that employed heavy timber trusses. Upon closer inspection, Ketchum discovered that metal connector plates were embedded into heavy timber beams that now serve as the railroad's foundation.

Looking to create an overland supply route for troops stationed in Burma, the Japanese Imperial General Headquarters commissioned the construction of a 250-mile single-track railway through the dense jungle from Thailand to Burma in 1942. The story of its construction is made more impressive given that materials and supplies were not easily accessible in the unforgiving jungles. Initially, Allied POWs were put to work on the project, with other Southeast Asian laborers joining the effort later. It is estimated that over 100,000 people died during the railway's construction due to the harsh heat and humidity of the jungle, flooding and Allied air attacks.

The story of the railway, its role in WWII, and the devastation caused by the bombing of the bridge was revisited in Pierre Boulle's Oscar-winning 1957 screenplay and movie *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. The existence of the bridge and the story of its construction bring the notion of truss usage around the globe just a little closer to home.

Share your stories and photos with us!. Send submissions to partingshots@sbcmag.info.

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