

# Pilgrimage to Thailand WWII sites

**The opportunity of travelling to Thailand on the 'Quiet Lion Tour' was one that Roleystone Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service's (VFRS) Ryan Sutherland accepted with great excitement.**

When reflecting on the experience, Ryan said the trip had been amazing and he had learnt so much about the courage shown by prisoners of war (POWs) building the Burma Thai Railway.

"To learn of the suffering of young Australian men, in many cases not much older than myself, had a significant impact on me and my understanding of the value of ANZAC Day," Ryan said.

"We heard tales of life in the impenetrable jungle where over a ten month period four million cubic metres of rock was shifted and 14 kilometres of bridgework were constructed by hand.

"It was confronting to hear about the hellish conditions the prisoners lived under, and remarkable to think that somehow they managed to maintain their spirits in defiance of such cruel injustice."

The presence on the tour of a number of ex POWs who had worked on the railway provided a unique opportunity for Ryan and his fellow travellers.

"Former POW Neil MacPherson OAM joined us on the tour and was an invaluable source of information about what Australians and their allies endured as captives of the Japanese Imperial Army," Ryan said.

"He read the Ode at Hellfire Pass on ANZAC Day. It wasn't so much the significance of the words as the emotion in his voice that highlighted the loss and incredible suffering that occurred on the railway."

Ryan added that the tour had been inspirational on both an educational and personal level.

"My tour experience has definitely created a desire to visit the places where family members served in the first and second world wars," he said.

"I am sure I will remember the trip and what I saw and learnt for a long time to come."



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Ryan Sutherland with the wreath he laid at Kanchanaburi War Cemetery in Thailand.

Ryan was nominated for the tour by Roleystone VFRS, with FESA providing funding.

The tours, which take in the Burma Thai Railway, River Kwai, Three Pagoda Pass, Hellfire Pass and Kanchanaburi War Cemetery, have been in operation since 1985.

They were established to honour the efforts of Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop and his fellow POWs to keep alive for current generations the memory of the hardships and sacrifices made by Australian and allied personnel in World War II.