

The Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand Magazine

Third Quarter 1995

Dateline

• B A N G K O K •

- 
- A close-up photograph of a woman with dark hair, smiling and speaking into a black microphone. She is wearing a light blue shirt. In the background, two large, curved blades of a traditional Thai knife (Klong) are visible, held by hands. The background is filled with green foliage.
- "Free" at Last
 - Tales of Vietnam
 - Grand Opening/Club Highlights
 - Klong Warriors
 - People
 - FCCT Goes On Line
 - Kukrit Pramoj's Wrath of "Khon"

A man in a dark suit and tie stands by a large floor-to-ceiling window, talking on a mobile phone. The room is a modern living area with a striped sofa, a wooden armchair, and a coffee table. A large bouquet of yellow flowers is in the foreground. The window offers a view of a city skyline.

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• BANGKOK •

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Dateline Bangkok, the FCCT's quarterly magazine, welcomes stories, photos, opinion pieces and letters to the editor. Please contact Elizabeth Lu at 260-2644, or fax 260-2643. Payment is in FCCT chit books.

FRONT COVER

Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi addresses hundreds of Burmese supporters gathered outside her lakeside house in July, shortly after she was freed from six years of house arrest. Photo courtesy of Agence France Presse.



NATION CELEBRATES 50 YEARS OF THE REIGN OF KING BHUMIBOL ADULYADEJ.

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For this reason King Bhumibol is loved and respected by all his loyal subjects.

Long live His Majesty the King.

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A Letter from your President

At last, the new clubhouse is here! The long hours of toil and preparation are over and it is now a reality.

Initial comments from members and guests have been heartening and rewarding for the Executive Board, and in particular the Clubhouse Committee. But certain modifications are needed — as anyone who heard the early problems with the microphones will realize — and we ask for your patience and understanding while these and other teething problems are sorted out. A move like this will never go off without any hitches, but we are sure you will enjoy one of the most modern, professional clubs in the region.

We have already hosted some highly successful events at the club, including a Gala Opening presided over by Former Prime Minister General Prem Tinsulanonda. Several Wednesday night programs featuring VIP speakers have also been extremely popular. For example, the programs with Deputy Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and Finance Minister Surakiart Sathirathai both attracted capacity crowds.

Meanwhile, the club's banquet at the Oriental Hotel for Prime Minister Banharn Silpa-archa was also a tremendous success, with more than 280 people attending. The Prime Minister's speech in Thai was simultaneously translated into English and guests were able to listen to it in either English or



Thai thanks to the availability of portable ear phones. Many thanks to our very capable staff for their hard work in coordinating this important event.

May I express here our deep gratitude to Mr. A. Tamura of the Siew-National Co. Ltd. who generously donated television monitor screens valued at Baht 500,000. On-line and free-of-charge news wire services from Reuters, AFP and Kyodo — and possibly more — will be available at the clubhouse very soon. I express my thanks in advance to Rajan Moses, Michele Cooper and Y. Yasuo, respective bureau chiefs of those three agencies, for their help in persuading their head offices to provide us with their news services.

The 1995 Executive Committee has almost completed its responsibilities for the move to the new clubhouse.

I would like to take this opportunity to urge all members to actively support the club. The 40th Anniversary Appeal, launched in August, has so far accumulated less than Baht 200,000, falling far short of our goal. Work on the new clubhouse has cost nearly Baht 2.5 million more than the Jewelry Trade Center's allocated fund. So when you enjoy the FCCT's many fine programs, please remember to support the 40th Anniversary Appeal with a generous contribution.

At this juncture, I would like to inform members that Club Manager Eric Brighton left at the end of August after many years of loyal and dedicated service. In recognition of his outstanding service to the club during his 11-year tenure, the Executive Board unanimously nominated him to be an honorary life member of the club. After a few months vacationing back home in England, Eric will return to Bangkok and in the future will come to the Club only to be served.

The FCCT is forging ahead with expanded activities at the new clubhouse. Come and enjoy yourself. I look forward to seeing you there.

Panadda L.

Panadda Lertlum-Ampai
1995 FCCT President

RECIPROCAL ARRANGEMENTS WITH OTHER INTERNATIONAL PRESS CLUBS

As a FCCT member, you're also entitled to visit and use the facilities of these other international press clubs:

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• **The Foreign Correspondents Association (Singapore).** c/o Asia Business Conventions Ltd., 190 Clemenceau Ave. 05-33/34, Singapore 0923 Tel: 65-3366885, Fax: 65-3365581

• **The Foreign Correspondents Club of Japan.** 20/F Yurakucho Denki Building, 7-1 Yurakucho, 1-Chome,

Chiyoda-Ku, Tokyo 100, Japan Tel: 2113161

• **The Foreign Correspondents Club of Cambodia.** No. 363 Sisowath Boulevard, Phnom Penh Tel: (855) 15-911-383, (855) 23-27757

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• **The Greater Los Angeles Press Club.** 600 North Vermont, Los Angeles, CA 90004, USA Tel: 665-1141

• **National Press Club, Australia.** National Circuit Barton, Australian Capital Territory. Australia 2600.

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FCCT GOES ONLINE

By James Fahn

Ever striving to cross new frontiers, the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand has finally thrust itself into the information age by going online.

Want to find out what's up at the FCCT but can't find the Weekly Bulletin that came in the mail? Just log on to Sala Thai, one of an estimated 40 computer bulletin board services in Bangkok. The FCCT staff will soon be posting club announcements on Sala Thai.

As a non-profit community service, Sala Thai is specifically designed "to help the Thai community become computer literate," according to the message sent to all new users. "The graphics are so simple even new users and children can use them."

To log on, you basically need a computer, a telephone line, a modem and software to operate the modem. Once you have hooked up your phone line into the modem, dial up 679-8374 or 679-8380 (the lines are often busy, so keep trying).

The first time you log on, go to the Help section and read the files. They will instruct you as to how to register (which includes filling out a resume) and use the service. You will also find out how to download Sala Thai software for both PCs and Macintosh computers so that you can enjoy the graphic interface.

To find the FCCT discussion, first click onto the conferences section. You will then be presented with a choice of icons representing forums (discussion groups), Athenaeum (atlas service), and clubs, among other offerings.

Enter Sala Thai's "Club" section. Along with some posted messages on general club-like activities, you'll see a bunch of icons of clubs bringing together scuba divers, gays and lesbians, the handicapped, computer users and, of course, the FCCT—representing journalists and other alcoholics.

Click onto the FCCT icon for the latest info and schedules of club activities. Discussion remains pretty limited on the FCCT group. Most of the current talk is about the ups and downs of the new location, and the frustrations met in getting there through Bangkok traffic.

It will be up to you to liven up the chatter.

While you're at it, be sure to check out the rest of the Sala. One of Bangkok's most popular digital hang-outs, Sala Thai is free to use although its founder Jamie Zellerbach appreciates donations.

Sala Thai now has about 900 registered users, with another 400 who pop in from time to time. Zellerbach said he set up the system so that those feeling a little lost and lonely in Bangkok would have a new community to turn to.

"A sala is a traditional Thai open-air building that used to serve as a



zens together at a line dancing jambo-ree where they got the chance to meet face to face. Or you can move over to "Athenaeum," which has a map of the world. Click onto a certain country or region to find some useful information before you go abroad.

Next try out the "Chat Room" to have a real-time conversation with other users currently logged on. One intimate feature about Sala Thai is that all registered users must fill out a resume telling a little about themselves. Many declare that they are eager to be "chatted up."

Some Sala Thai users simply eavesdrop, but not with total anonymity. Another feature of Sala Thai is that you can click on a 'history' function to find out who has read a particular message.

There are also discussion groups, where you can send in a message, a lecture, a screed, or a joke related to a certain topic, for others to consider in their own due time. Topics available so far include philosophy, health, environment, art and culture, telecoms and traffic. In the "Traffic" section, for example, Thaksin Shinawatra has received some serious abuse for his suggestion that helicopters be brought in to lift out stalled cars on Bangkok streets.

And of course, now there is the FCCT, firmly entrenched in the "Club" section. So, the next time you have the urge to discuss world affairs, the floods, club events, or place a bet on the longevity of the coalition government, just log on to Sala Thai. Now if only that Zellerbach fellow

can figure out a way to deliver a mug of ice cold beer via cyberspace.

.....

James Fahn, an American, is environment editor for *The Nation*. Before moving to Thailand five years ago, he worked and traveled in Europe and North Africa on a Watson Fellowship, focusing his research on international cooperation in physics.

.....

AUNG SAN SUU KYI OF BURMA

By Bertil Lintner

The image could not have been more powerful: a huge crowd has gathered outside the gate of the compound of Aung San Suu Kyi, Burma's opposition leader who had been under house arrest since July 1989. Reports had it that she, at last has been released. People are waiting patiently for hours in the rain. Suddenly, her face appears above the gate. The expectation on the faces of the audience turns into joy. People start clapping and cheering as they now can see that it was indeed true. It's Aung San Suu Kyi, standing on a ladder behind the gate with a loud-hailer in hand.

She smiles, looks confident and makes a brief speech to the sea of people standing along the tree-lined University Avenue, where her house is located in Burma's capital Rangoon. She tells the crowd to be patient, that things must be done step by step, that the democracy movement must maintain discipline. But it's uncertain how much the crowd hears of her actual message. Every sentence is followed by thundering applause from the people outside. When she has finished her brief speech, the first to her people in six years, the crowd starts chanting "Long live Aung San Suu Kyi! Long live Aung San Suu Kyi!"

After six long years under house arrest, Aung San Suu Kyi is back again. And she looks just as radiant and self-confident as she did when I last met her in April 1989, just a few months before armoured personnel carriers surrounded her compound on University Avenue, arrested scores of her followers who were camping there, and declared that she had been "restricted to her home" since she was posing a threat to "peace and tranquillity and the authority of the state." Her smile was as warm as it had been when she addressed gatherings of 100,000 people throughout Burma before the military crackdown six years ago. She didn't even look a bit older.

Her speech over the gate of her compound in July was in some ways almost as dramatic as her first public appearance on 26 August 1988 during the initial stages of Burma's pro-democracy movement. At that time people had begun to gather at the foot of Rangoon's Shwe Dagon Pagoda the night before. People had laid out bed rolls to pass the night; entire

families squatting in circles around their evening meals.

By morning, at least half a million people of all ages, and national and social groups in Burmese society had come together to participate in an extraordinary event that was going to take place: Aung San Suu Kyi, the then 43-year old daughter of Burma's independence hero, Aung San, was going to speak. She had returned from abroad a few months before, at a time when the country was in the midst of political upheaval. Student protests had led to the most serious challenge to the iron-fisted rule of General Ne Win since he had overthrown Burma's last democratically elected government and seized power in a coup d'état in 1962.

The mood was festive but there were several bomb-scares before the meeting could begin. Pro-democracy students and Buddhist monks in saffron robes formed human chains around the

Loudspeakers were directed towards the massive sea of people squatting on the pagoda grounds. She walked the remaining stretch up to the stage amidst deafening applause and cheers. Her initial message of democracy through unity and discipline gave way to a more personal note as she spoke in impeccable Burmese:

"A number of people are saying that since I've spent most of my life abroad and am married to a foreigner, I could not be familiar with the ramifications of this country's politics," she said over the loudspeakers. "I wish to speak very frankly and openly. It's true that I've lived abroad. It's also true that I'm married to a foreigner. But these facts have never, and will never, interfere with or lessen my love and devotion for my country by any measure or degree. People have been saying that I know nothing of Burmese politics. The trouble is I know too much. My family

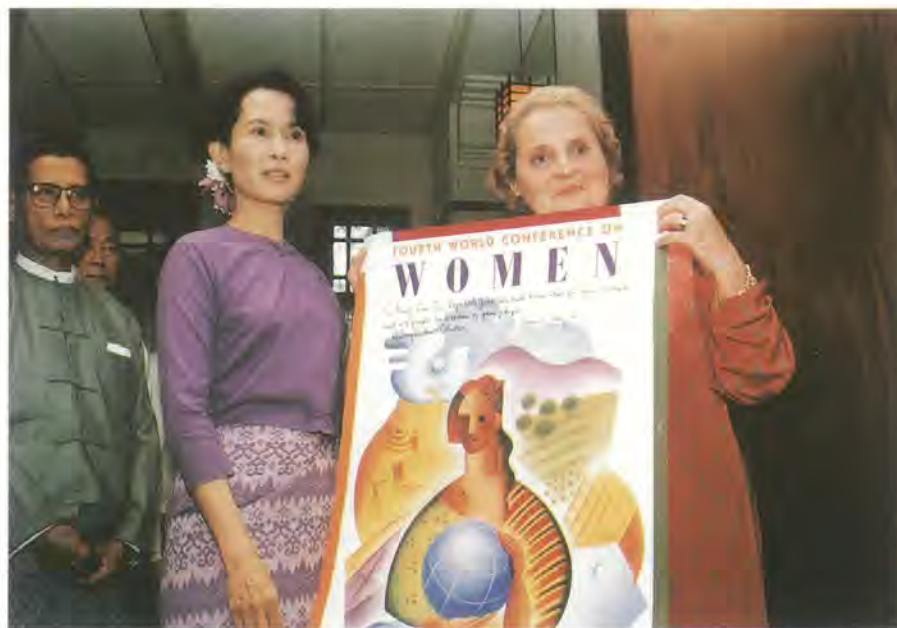


Photo courtesy of Agence France Presse

Aung San Suu Kyi meeting with U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine Albright during the ambassador's September visit to Rangoon.

stage and checked out suspicious-looking characters. The ground outside the pagoda complex was jam-packed. Even all the roads leading up to the meeting place were full of curious bystanders.

But, at last, a slim professorial woman made her way through the crowd. A huge portrait of her father had been placed above the stage alongside a resistance flag from the struggle for independence from Britain in the 1940s.

knows better than any how devious Burmese politics can be and how much my father had to suffer on this account."

Hundreds of thousands of people cheered and applauded. Her famous, almost deified father had been assassinated by a rival politician on July 19, 1947, barely six months before Burma obtained its independence from Britain. The roar reached its crescendo when she concluded: "The present

"Not only did she look like her father, she spoke like him also..."

crisis is the concern of the entire nation. I could not, as my father's daughter, remain indifferent to all that was going on. This national crisis could, in fact, be called the second struggle for independence."

Most of the people who had come to see and hear her outside the Shwe Dagon had probably done so out of curiosity. Virtually unknown when she rose to speak, by the end of that day she had won the hearts and minds of her entire audience.

"We were all surprised," a participant in the meeting commented much later. "Not only did she look like her father, she spoke like him also: short, concise and right to the point."

She had not lived in Burma for more than a quarter of a century, and she had not returned to her home country to enter politics, but to care for her dying mother, Daw Khin Kyi. Aung San Suu Kyi actually lived in Oxford, England, with her British husband and their two sons. But Burmese politics was nevertheless in her blood. Not only had her father, sometimes nick-named "the George Washington of Burma," been the architect of Burma's independence; after his assassination, his widow Khin Kyi had become the country's most famous female public figure, serving at one point as Burma's ambassador in New Delhi.

Aung San Suu Kyi was 15 when she arrived in India together with her mother. She attended Lady Shri Ram College, where she always was at the top of her class. While she could not remember her father, the memories and legends surrounding him provided her with the enduring inspiration for her own ideal. It was during her time in India that she also acquired her lasting admiration for Mahatma Gandhi's principles of non-violence.

Aung San Suu Kyi left for Britain in 1964 to further her studies at St. Hugh's College in Oxford, earning a BA in philosophy, politics and economics in 1967. For the next four years, she held various posts at the United Nations Secretariat in New York before marrying Michael Aris, a British Tibetologist, in 1972. He had been employed since 1967 as private tutor to the Royal Family of the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan. Two years after the birth of their first son Myint San Aung (Alexander) in 1973, they returned to England where Aris

took up an academic career at the University of Oxford. A second son, Htein Lin (Kim), was born in Oxford in 1977.

Aung San Suu Kyi's time in England, and her marriage to an Englishman, are perhaps the most controversial aspects of her life. Her political opponents have tried to capitalise on her long absence from her home country; the present junta in Rangoon has indicated time and again that it proves her un-Burmeseness. Some have even claimed that Aung San Suu Kyi during her studies in Oxford was deeply involved in "radical student politics."

Her friends from that time tell a completely different story. Unlike Benazir Bhutto, who served as President of the Students' Union in Oxford, Aung San Suu Kyi stayed well clear of political

It's true that I've lived abroad. It's also true that I'm married to a foreigner. But these facts have never, and will never, interfere with or lessen my love for my country by any measure or degree.

activism. Later, she devoted her energies to contributing academic papers to various seminars on South and South-east Asian culture. One of her closest Asian friends was Sunethra Bandaranaike, daughter of the late Sri Lankan leader S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike. Among her Western friends at university she was especially close to Anne Pasternak Slater, niece of dissident Soviet writer Boris Pasternak.

Throughout her time abroad, she also continued to visit Burma regularly and sent her sons to become novices in Buddhist monasteries at home. "We used to know her as 'Burmese Suu'," one of her Oxford classmates recalls. "She never took to Western ways and I remember how she would come to class in Oxford, dressed in a traditional Burmese sarong, or longyi."

It appears that her Burmese origin and the fact that she could never forget whose daughter she was, provided her with the mental stability she needed during her long stays in a variety of foreign countries. This was particu-

larly the case during her time in the United States, which coincided with the height of the Vietnam war. Her main intellectual inspiration during this time seems to have come from the civil rights movement; in Martin Luther King's speeches she found similarities with the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi with which she already was so keenly familiar.

In 1985, she was invited to the University of Kyoto to study Burmese material from World War II and, especially, documents related to her father who had spent some time in Japan in the 1940s. She also learnt Japanese, and so did her son Kim, who accompanied her to Kyoto.

During her year in Japan, Aung San Suu Kyi managed to combine single parenting with an enormous amount of research. Her friends also point out that the time in Japan proved important for her intellectual development. Being on her own and having studied her father she came to identify herself more and more with his principles. She went straight to Burma after completing her studies, before continuing together with Kim to Simla, India, in 1986 where they joined Michael and Alexander. Her husband had been admitted as a Fellow at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study at the same time as she had gone to Kyoto.

She had just started a postgraduate thesis at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London when in April 1988 her mother suffered a stroke. Aung San Suu Kyi immediately returned to Rangoon in April to look after her. For nearly four months, she tended Daw Khin Kyi in hospital, residing there herself. She just managed to bring her mother to the family home on University Avenue in Rangoon when Michael, Alexander and Kim arrived in late July and the whole situation in Burma exploded. But her way to fame and almost undisputed leadership of the movement that was about to evolve became one of the hardest for any forward-looking Third World leader struggling to cope with a brutal dictatorship.

At the time of his coup in 1962, Ne Win and the military had introduced a "Burmese Way to Socialism," which brought near complete isolation to the country and a steady economic decline of what once was one of Asia's

most prosperous economies. These atavistic policies had made Ne Win rich but the country had become desperately poor.

By March 1988, 26 years of pent-up frustrations with the iron-fisted rule of Ne Win exploded with an unprecedented fury, taking everyone, probably the Burmese themselves included, by complete surprise. Burma's students, always at the forefront of any political movement in the country's history, took to the streets by the thousands. Their protests were met with unbelievable brutality.

But this only outraged even more people and on August 8, 1988, a general strike was launched. Millions of people marched against the government in nationwide protests. An estimated 1,000-3,000 people were killed in Rangoon alone as heavily armed troops sprayed automatic rifle fire into crowds of unarmed demonstrators.

By the time Aung San Suu Kyi

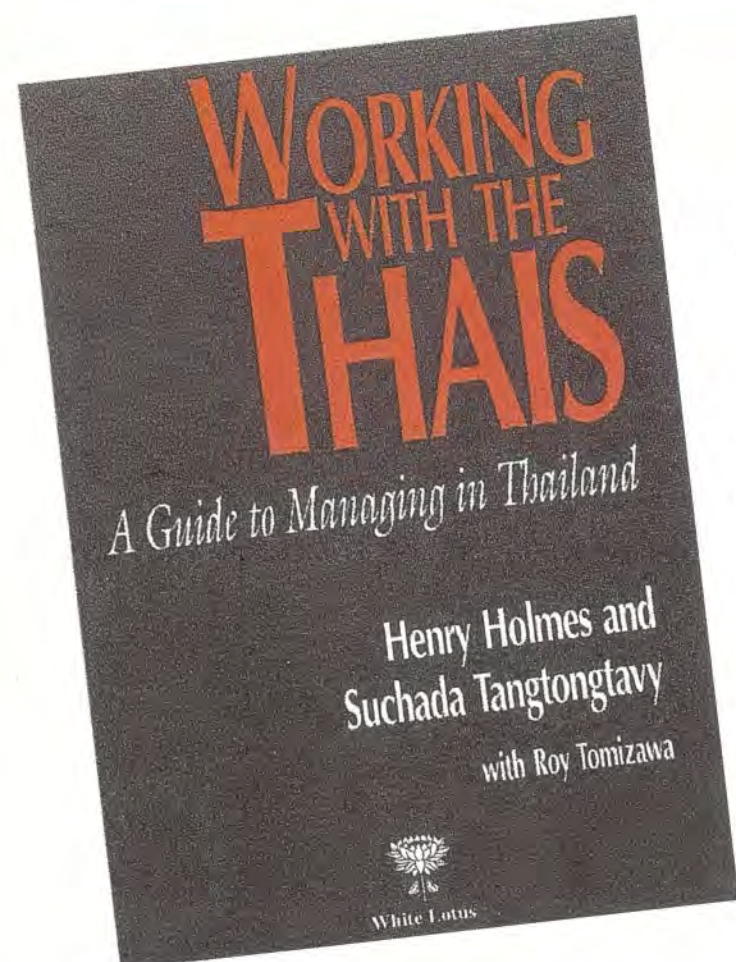
made her first public appearance on the 26th, the movement had caught fire throughout the country.

Many people had privately expressed hope that Aung San's son, Aung San Oo, who now lives in the United States, would return and lead the struggle. But despite his family background, Aung San Oo had shown little interest in politics; he had settled quietly in San Diego, California, and taken U.S. citizenship. The second son, Aung San Lin, had drowned in a pond near the family compound in Rangoon when he was still a child. It was Aung San Suu Kyi who had to shoulder the responsibility of continuing the family tradition in this "second struggle for independence."

That a woman had to take on this momentous task in a basically patriarchal society as the Burmese at first surprised many outsiders. But in Burmese history there are several instances where women have attained

positions of power and influence. Seen in this broader perspective, Aung San Suu Kyi is indeed a new phenomenon in Burmese politics, which also may help explain why she has become so immensely popular; she is a fresh breeze in a country where time has stood still for nearly three decades. Burton Levin, former U.S. ambassador to Burma, once said of Aung San Suu Kyi, "She's got charisma, she's bright, she knows how to speak, she's come to the fore." For many Burmese, she appeared as a reincarnation of her father and destined to carry out his unfinished work of leading Burma into the modern world.

Bertil Lintner, a correspondent for the Far Eastern Economic Review, is a recognized expert on Burma. This article is a condensed version of one he published in the Italian magazine Grazia.



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Note: Not all issues always available.

Letter from Vietnam

By Paul Ryan



July 1995
Ho Chi Minh City

After checking into the Riverside Hotel, I decided to brave the late afternoon monsoon thunder-squalls and see what it was like on the streets. I was immediately accosted by three pedicab drivers, one of whom offered me a bag of marijuana, the other a woman, and the last a ride.

I felt in my pants for my dong, a soft but thick wad of currency having just changed 1,000 Thai baht, and decided to decline all offers and walk to the nearby Saigon Floating Hotel lounge where I downed a B52 (layers of vodka, Bailey's and Kahlua), a drink which might be thought of as post-war saturation belly bombing.

I was not prepared for the strong feelings of wartime guilt/anguish welling up within me. After all, the Vietnam War was not my war. If anything, it was my children's war; all four were unanimously against it. My war was Korea, but, as luck would have it, I trained French pilots at an airfield near Paris for Indochina.

Was I in this pre-advisor role in any way responsible for the outcome at Dien Bien Phu in 1954? Sixty-five percent of the Frenchmen, kids really, I trained never came back from their first B26 mission either because they were overloaded with ordnance (bombs, wing rockets and 20mm nose cannon shells) and flew into mountains on takeoff, or lost their tails to wires strung cleverly by the Vietnamese between mountains.

And then as an editor on the Foreign Desk of *The New York Times* in 1968 I had done my bit to warp the Vietnam copy of correspondents Halberstam, Sheehan, and the like. Indeed, this Vietnam odyssey finally plunged me into Neil's "A Bright Shining Lie," a tome of required reading on my nightstand before the incoming ex-

plosive dreams of the night.

I immediately noticed that many of the numerous street beggars about here attacked me with questions about my age. They wanted, I guessed, to place my possible involvement in the war. One told me that he had been a captain in the South Vietnamese Army working with the "Americans." And that he had been captured and spent 15 years in a prison near Hanoi. After two further years of rehabilitation on release, he now finds himself on the streets without proper identification papers and little in the way of food.

Hard to resist a pitch like that although a tug by a limbless man of war age ran a close second, followed by an anguished woman in tattered clothes with a sickly-looking child at her breast. It is a traumatic experience just to leave the hotel here.

The streets are alive with swiftly-moving, promenading motor scooters, some carrying four or more riders, including babies. My pedicab driver urged me to keep my arms inboard of his cyclo because of the motor scooters. I thought at first the caution was fear of an accident, but I later realized he was concerned about someone snatching my watch or identification bracelet.

Even the hotel reception people cautioned me to guard my camera closely while walking on the streets.

I had a vision of her in an earlier time speeding by a cafe on her motor scooter and rolling a grenade into a crowd.

But "Pa-Pa," as the street hustlers referred to me, was not to be spared. On Wednesday the 26th I was attacked by the new breed of streetwise VC. A young girl of about ten grabbed my wrist and when I spun and bent to say something my reading glasses case and about \$40 in dong stashed in my breast pocket was gone. It was broad daylight and she just vanished in a blink into the bamboozle of the city's concrete jungle.

The "army captain" who had spun the tale two days before about working for the "Americans" was suddenly at my side. He offered to escort me out of the "combat zone" for a fee. When I accepted my glasses miraculously appeared but not the dong. The young girl was probably his daughter. So much for trying to stay within my

per diem this day!

One attractive woman who upon my exiting a restaurant after dinner suddenly grabbed my hand and tickled my palm, urging/pulling me to come with her in to the shadows of the night, had the tenacity of perimeter barbed wire. I had to forcibly wrench myself free, whereupon she gave me a good whack in the back. I had a vision of her in an earlier time speeding by a cafe on her motor scooter and rolling a grenade into a crowd.

During one lunchtime stroll, an elderly gentleman stopped me and asked in French what my nationality was. When I responded in French that I was an American, he beamed his approval and quickly stated that the present communist government was "*tres mauvais*." He seemed extremely disenchanted with the authorities and stated that an uprising of the populous could ignite at any time. He confided that he was 75 years old, but would participate should any revolt occur.

Doesn't seem to be many American tourists about. Most are Japanese and European with a sprinkling of Australians.

I also visited the obligatory War Remnants Museum. Along with old U.S. tanks, aircraft, "tiger cages," and weaponry, there were damning photographs on display of American "crimes,"

including the My Lai and Binh Duong massacres, the torture and killing of prisoners, charred napalm victims, defoliation effects, and severe molestation of women and children. There were no photographs of any Vietnamese atrocities.

There was also a towering French guillotine of Marie Antoinette vintage, last used, according to a sign, in 1960 on Vietnamese peasants. I found it rather ironic that the museum is housed in a villa complex that once served the needs of the U.S. Information Service.

I felt much more at home in the Historical Museum which covered the first human signs of activity (circa 300,000 years ago) up to the birth of the Vietnamese Communist Party in the 1930s. I was particularly taken by the

displays highlighting the tools and dress of the some 57 different ethnic groups that make up the Vietnamese nation.

While at the latter museum, I attended a performance of the Traditional Water Puppetry Troupe. With a little variation, this form of artistry would go over well in seaside communities in the United States, such as Woods Hole on Cape Cod. Fun for both

adults and children.

I wound up my museum-going with a trip to the "Reunification Palace," which before November 1975 was known as the "Presidential Palace." Again, its role in the war was emphasized. The basement once served as the "war room" in Vietnam from which the joint South Vietnamese-U.S. command conducted the daily conduct of the

war. They left a lot of communication equipment behind when the palace fell to the communist forces on April 30, 1975.

Paul Ryan's Knight International Press Fellowship has been extended until May 1996. He recently trained visiting Indochinese journalists at Chulalongkorn University and will be going to Hanoi for his next assignment.

FCCT of Yesteryear

Unquestionably the classiest place the FCCT ever occupied was a clubhouse in a wing of the Oriental Hotel which was later demolished. It combined a tropical, Conradian atmosphere with a British clubby feel. And it was THE place to go for Saturday lunch. Hacks, spies and businessmen mingled in scenes out of Casablanca.

That was back in the mid-1970s when Communist forces chased all foreign reporters out of Indochina and Bangkok became a fall-back position for many of them. The FCCT began its growth then, with some 20 foreign correspondents and not that many more associate members circa 1975. In those days it was possible to know every FCCT member, and for that matter just about every farang in town. That kind of world, of course, is gone for good.

While our numbers were small, many of the FCCT's traditions were firmly established in the 1970s. Like

having all new prime ministers address the club, the Wednesday night programs, the emphasis on panel discussions and screening documentaries shot in this region. As the decade moved on, some of our programs proved outstanding and have never been surpassed, like the night more than 600 FCCT members and guests packed a ballroom to see M.R. Kukrit Pramoj brilliantly explain the Thai classical dance with his full troupe on stage serving as audio-visual aids.

My greatest personal regret was not being able to make the clubhouse at the Oriental Plaza work. In terms of atmosphere it rivaled our Oriental Hotel premise but by then Bangkok had grown too big and congested and a trip to the New Road area became a major expedition.

In that first decade, when the club wandered from premise to premise but sank its institutional roots, we had some fine folks as presidents (and I may

add some outstanding board members from the Japanese press which, sad to say, has faded into near obscurity in the FCCT). Before David Hyatt moved us successfully to the Dusit Thani hotel, my fellow presidents included Richard Nations, Enver Mulahusic, David Hatcher and Neil Davis.

Richard was a British-educated American working for the Far Eastern Economic Review, and an articulate spokesman for the club. Enver came from the former Yugoslavia and in recent years I've often wondered how he has fared back in his tragic homeland. David, now reportedly a "born again" Christian, was a West Point graduate who decided to enter journalism after a short military career. Since then he's worked for the U.S. government and held other jobs in the United States. And of course we all remember Neil Davis, not the greatest administrator in the world but a good, brave man and journalist.

An Aussie "mate" Paul Lockyer (then with ABC), once described my own tenures as president as "the Pol Pot era." Being a generally mild-mannered type I'm still pondering that one. I certainly didn't orchestrate any mass atrocities. But in those earlier days, when both a great deal had to be done with few resources and coup fever was in the Thai air, forced labor was the order of the day on most FCCT boards. And I'm afraid we didn't always look up the Constitution.

Denis Gray
Honorary Life Member and
FCCT President 1976, 1977, 1980



1973 dedication of the FCCT clubhouse at the Oriental Hotel (Lt. to rt.) Conrad Lu of Central News Agency and FCCT co-president that year, former Thai leader Thanom Kittikachorn, and member Supang Povatong.

Farewell

★ ONE LAST ROUND AT THE OLD CLUBHOUSE ★



The FCCT faithful turned out in force for a last hurrah to bid the old clubhouse good-bye.



Photographer Philip Blenkinsop finds himself on the other side of the lens.



FCCT Board member André McNicoll welcomes the guests.



Associated Press Bureau Chief Denis Gray (left) and AP correspondent Robert Horn.

Davis/Latch Memorial Service



Friends of Neil Davis and Bill Latch at a Bangkok memorial service in honor of the two men who were killed in 1985 while covering a failed coup d'état. (Lt. to rt.) Acting Club Manager Panjavilai A-Song-Im and daughter Villaya, Neil Kelly, Alfred Eberhardt, Ray Eaton, Derek Williams, Mrs. Kelly, Bertil Lintner, Jacque Kinkade, Nick Cumming-Bruce and Rodney Tasker.



Neil Davis
(1934-1985)
1982 FCCT President.



Bill Latch
(1950-1985)



(Above) Rodney Tasker presents an offering to monks at Wat Thata Thong during the Sept. 9 memorial ceremony. (Right) Nick Cumming-Bruce offers a prayer.



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THE MAN IN WHITE

A BRIEF BACKSTAGE ENCOUNTER

By Tony Gillotte

BANGKOK - It was another blistering hot Sunday afternoon in Bangkok. The year 1983 was coming to a tumultuous end, what with the tri-partite military opposition grouping (Sihanoukists, Son Sann and Khmer Rouge troops) becoming increasingly raucous on the Thai-Cambodian border.

I was taking a breather from covering the huge Sa Keow and Kao-I-Dang Khmer refugee camps along the Thai-Cambodian border. I needed a real change of pace. This was only my second extended visit to Bangkok, my first being in late 1979 when the giant exodus of Khmers first made world headlines as they desperately trundled over the Thai border escaping the Pol Pot-led attempt to return the country to year zero.

So what better way to spend the day, I thought, than to go to the theatre — specifically, a premier version of the ancient Thai theatrical form, the "khon" drama (Royal Mask Dance). My companion, Dr. Mattani Rutnin, Chairman of the Thammasat University Department of Drama, led me backstage at the National Theatre and asked me to wait while she hurried off to present several *poomalai* (garlands of flowers) to her *ajahn* (teacher).

As I stood backstage marvelling at the swirl of activity and colorful costumes, the left stage door suddenly opened and an elegant, rotund figure dressed in a white Charlie Chan suit appeared. His cherubic, bespectacled countenance was crowned by a shock of longish, disobedient white hair.

Lingering for a moment to take in the scene, he slowly emerged from the portal pointing the way with his white cane. A handsome young assistant followed closely, helping him to move toward the wooden bench I was occupying just offstage. Lo and behold, the striking figure was about to sit right next to me.

Obviously this was someone of importance. Having been in Thailand for only a few weeks, I had no idea who this impressive personage might possibly be.

Whoever he was, he certainly evoked the most humble, courteous and respectful behavior from everyone within sight of his reticently sublime presence. In unison, all admirers ceased

their busy preparations and virtually prostrated themselves before him, performing exaggerated wai's (greetings) and presenting garlands of flowers.

Then with the same silent suddenness, almost everyone disappeared to complete their tasks or prepare to watch the new khon drama. Dr. Mattani, who had returned to present the man in the white suit with a garland of pink orchids, whispered to me that she would go to check on our seats and return to get me in a flash.

Well, there I sat, slightly adrift between shock and astonishment. This really seemed to harbor deep respect for their teachers, I mused to myself. Then, as I collected my thoughts, I began to consider whether or not to say anything to the man in the white suit and, if so, what would it be.

It certainly shouldn't be about the soggy weather, and Thai politics seemed a bit heavy-handed for the first verbal encounter. So I mulled over the obvious. The khon drama, that's it. That would be a safe subject, especially the new production about to unfold this afternoon.

As I glanced in his direction, I noticed he would occasionally nod approvingly at last-second adjustments being made to the onstage setting, taking immense interest in even the smallest costume details.

I decided to take the plunge. I respectfully introduced myself and enquired if he had anything to do with this particular production.

"Not much," claimed the man in white, his low-keyed response followed by a bemused grandfatherly smile and then a slow return to observing the final backstage preparations.

I acknowledged I certainly didn't know very much about the khon drama but if it was anything like the other parts of Bangkok I had seen, it was probably undergoing rapid change. So I enquired, "What changes has the khon drama undergone in recent years?"

The jowly smile suddenly sagged. The slightly rheumy eyes hardened. It was as if he had been stabbed in the back. The quizzical look on his face twisted into a scowl of growing and, finally, gargantuan proportions. His expression slowly transformed from a benign, avuncular grin to the frightening visage of "Hanuman" reincarnate,

the aggressive and acerbic khon drama character who exacts revenge on all who dare to challenge the forces of good.

"Changes, — what changes?" he exploded in a low growl, turning the full force of his withering gaze on the awkward interloper and his inept question. "Why do you think it's changed?" he fixed me with his penetrating gaze. "It hasn't chaaanged..., it never changes! Unlike your culture, Thai culture never changes. It doesn't need to. Chaaaanges, you say? What do you mean by chaaanges?" It was as though with the very sound of the word he could signal the end of the air supply on earth.

I sat back in stunned silence, still disbelieving the amount of rancor that my innocent question had triggered. I could see he was preparing to unleash



Photo courtesy of AP
Former Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj, who passed away Oct. 10 at the age of 84.

another fusillade of pent-up venom in my direction. I gripped the arm of the bench preparing for the next onslaught, my knuckles beginning to turn white.

"Our country is over 4,000 years old. Why should our culture change? What contributions to world culture has your juvenile country produced besides Coca-Cola and rock and roll? We don't need to change. We are happy being what we are. We don't make change into a national industry like in your country."

I glanced quickly around to see if the walls were still standing. Then I slowly looked in his direction and noticed that his breathing was returning to normal. I waited a respectful amount of time, considering just where I had gone wrong. I managed to regain my composure also. Perhaps, a more consiliatory approach was needed. "What I meant," I began, in a soft apologetic tone, "is that all dramatic forms seem to evolve over time."

His large head whirled on me and struck again, like a cobra. "What are you, some kind of trrrrouble makerrrr?" he bellowed, stopping all backstage activity within sight. "How dare you come here and accuse us of changing our culture. It's lasted this long without change and it will certainly outlast your country's superficial attempts at creating culture."

His head withdrew just as suddenly. An eerie silence followed. The assistant appeared from nowhere and swiftly ushered the grand gentleman in white through the side door. I looked down and felt the wake of his departure sweep over me like a receding tropical storm.

The show began. Dr. Mattani and I enjoyed the boisterous spectacle of Hanuman, Sida, Tosakan, and the other stock characters of the khon drama. The stage was set awheel in dance,



AP Photo by Lance Woodruff
Bangkok movie poster of "The Ugly American," in which Kukrit Pramoj starred with Marlon Brando.

movement, and outrageous high-jinx for nearly four hours, all accompanied by an onstage Thai orchestra. The performance was rewarded with thunderous applause.

The khon drama had worked its magic even on me and I hadn't understood a spoken word. As I waited in front of the theater while my friend went to congratulate the cast and au-

thor of the new drama, someone suddenly grabbed my arm. It was Dr. Mattani, and she was clearly annoyed about something.

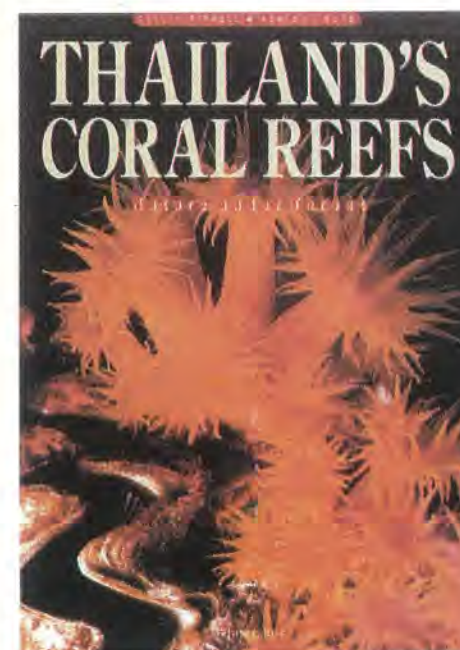
"What did you say to my *ajahn*?" she demanded. "he's livid with me for bringing a stupid American to see our national drama and said I must never do this again. Did you insult him?"

I quickly replayed the highlights of my encounter with the man in white. "Is that it?" she demanded. "I don't understand. You must have said something else that offended him."

So now the time has come to say goodbye to this legendary man. With his passing, Thai writers have reached for a variety of titles to describe his many skills: well-known Thai literary figure, journalist, occasional Hollywood actor, philosopher, patron of the arts and former prime minister.

But for this foreigner, perhaps, the simplest explanation for his deserved reverence is that he was a fighter. Like Hanuman, he fought tirelessly for what he thought was right. Not for Kukrit, but for Thailand. A rare skill to be sure.

.....
Tony Gillotte covers Southeast Asia for *The Christian Science Monitor*. He moved to Thailand six years ago partly to escape the endless winters of his native Minnesota.
.....



An exceptional collaboration between Collin Piprell and Ashley Boyd, *Thailand's Coral Reefs* brings the wonder and mystery of the coral reef alive for the general reader. At the same time it provides enough information to make the book useful to anyone interested in environmental studies, marine biology, or sport diving. Indeed, armchair readers may be surprised to find themselves suddenly interested in learning to dive. The book includes:

- * Natural history (with a basic field guide to life on the coral reef)
- * Environmental pressures
- * Conservationist responses (Thailand as a case history)
- * Prognosis from a global perspective

The coral reef is one of nature's richest field laboratories, a great genetic archive matched only by that of the tropical rain forest. It is also one of Asia's finest recreational assets. But this precious resource is everywhere under threat. Earth's rain forests are shrinking at a rate of tens of thousands of square miles annually. It is estimated that tens of thousands of animal species, including insects, are every year disappearing with them. Beneath the seas, where the devastation is out of sight and therefore largely out of mind, a similar tragedy is unfolding.

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Club Highlights



Former Prime Minister General Prem Tinsulanonda, Member of the Privy Council (left), presided over the gala grand opening of the new FCCT clubhouse. (Below) Gen. Prem took a special interest in an issue of Dateline covering the 1992 pro-democracy protests in Bangkok.



Lee Santipongchai (above, left), Chairman of Sing Sian Yit Pao Daily News and a FCCT life member, enjoys a laugh with Margo Towie (above, right) of Business Review Weekly. During the grand opening, Lee presented FCCT President Panadda Lertlum-Ampai (above, center) with a Baht 50,000 check for the club's 40th Anniversary Appeal.



(Left) Henry Ho of the Jewelry Trade Center.



H.E. Mr. Leopoldo Giacomo, the Italian ambassador to Thailand.



Kurt Wachtveitl, general manager of the Oriental Hotel



Ronald Corben, correspondent for the Australian Associated Press

Grand Opening



(Foreground, lt. to rt) Paisal Chuensuksawadi of Siam Post, General Prem, W. K. Ho of the Jewelry Trade Center, Sri Rahayu Purnono of the Indonesian Embassy, and FCCT consultant Nancy Robinson.



Mohammed Said Khoja, Chargé d'Affaires of the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia.



Presko Chairman Esko Pajasalmi (above) enjoys the buffet. Wednesday night regulars Sam and Sumon Cohen (below) smile for the camera.



And there were also a few eye-catching guests: Little girl. Big Girl. Plus disco dancer.

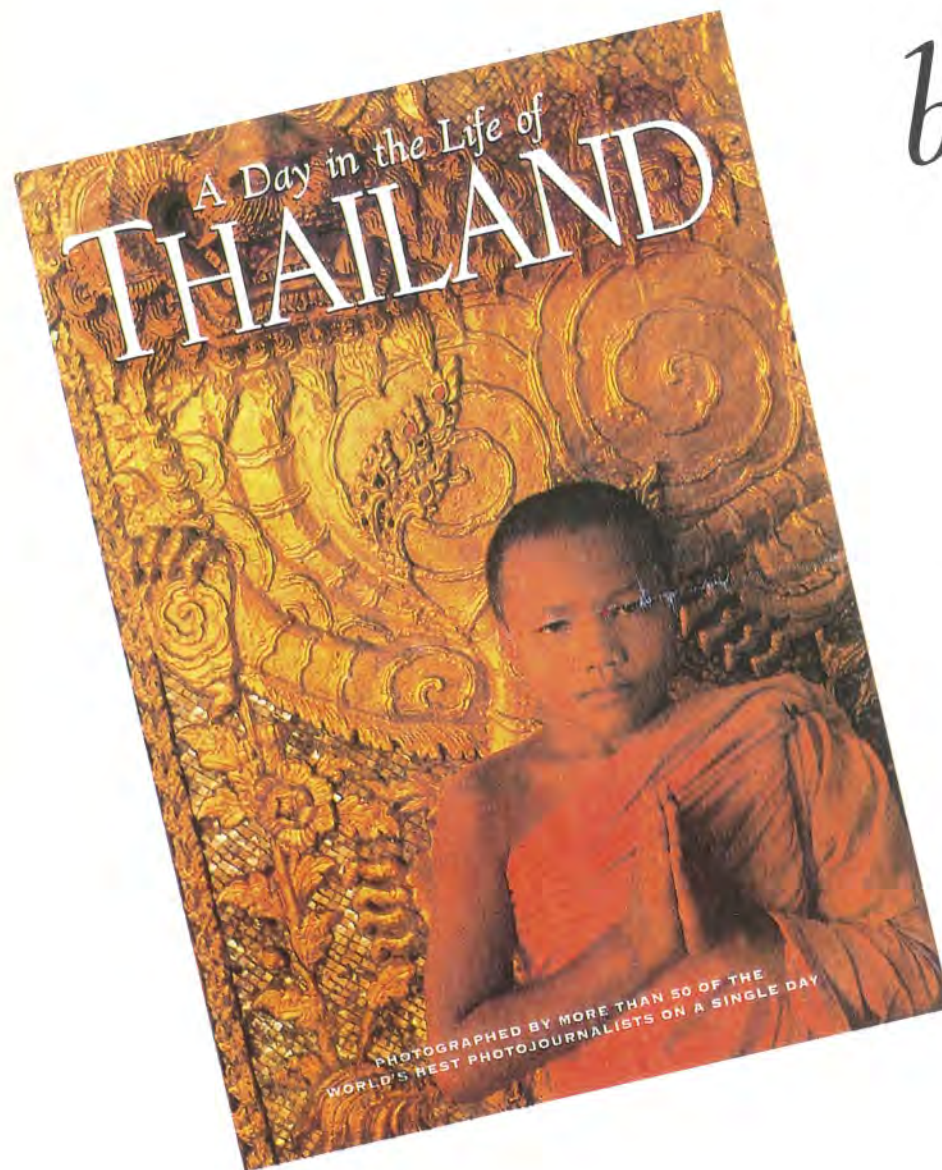


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Club Highlights

NEWS BRIEFS

FCCT TO HOST WORLD PRESS DURING ASEAN MEET: During the ASEAN summit (Dec. 14-15) in Bangkok, the FCCT will be hosting a reception for visiting international journalists covering the event. Please stop by at the club Thursday night Dec. 14 to meet members of the international press. Watch the Weekly Bulletin for more details.

CAMBODIAN AMBASSADOR DONATES PHOTOS: H.E. Mr. Roland Eng, Cambodian Ambassador to Thailand, has donated 100 photo postcards he took during the Indochina war to the Indochina Media Memorial Foundation (IMMF) for the group's photo archive. The IMMF, whose co-presidents are FCCT members Denis Gray and Dominic Faulder, has been active in helping to preserve historical photographs of an estimated 14,000 Cambodians taken by their Khmer Rouge executioners at Tuol Sleng. The former torture and interrogation center is now the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide, and IMMF recently donated \$5,000 to the museum.

RECIPROCAL PRIVILEGES WITH MIAMI CLUB: The Miami International Press Club recently became the tenth press club to set up a reciprocal arrangement with the FCCT. When in Miami, FCCT members can enjoy free access to the Miami club's press center and free use of equipment and services. Just show your FCCT membership card. Other clubs with reciprocal arrangements with the FCCT include clubs in Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan, Cambodia, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Australia, London and Montreal. For the addresses and telephone numbers of these clubs, please see page six of this issue of *Dateline*.

E-MAIL IT! Electronic mail addresses for members who sent in their cyberspace locations are listed in the 1995-96 directory. If you would like your e-mail address listed in the next directory, please call, fax, or e-mail it to the FCCT.

PEOPLE

Plenty of Eric Brighton fans turned up for his Aug. 25 farewell party at the Dusit Thani. In recognition of Eric's many years of loyal service to the club, the Board presented him with the trusty Olivetti typewriter on which he had churned out countless letters and memos that helped keep things running smoothly at the club. The Board also announced plans to present Eric with an honorary life membership. That recommendation will be presented at the Annual General Meeting in January for final approval by FCCT members. Eric, who celebrated his 66th birthday shortly before leaving the FCCT, headed for London in early September to visit daughter Amanda. He also attended the annual reunion of his Gurkha regiment and did some traveling on the continent. Although he has a flat in London, Eric plans to spend most of his time in Thailand.



After spending some 30 odd years in Asia, he said, "I'm more Thai than British."



With Eric's departure, Office Manager Panjavilai A-Song-Im (left) has been promoted to Acting Club Manager. She supervises a staff of eight that



includes new secretary Sumalee Suthiwangcharoen (right), a graduate of Assumption University.

Monique Hou has just arrived from Taipei and will be busy in Bangkok as a correspondent for *Commercial Times*, a daily business newspaper affiliated with "Zhong Guo Shi Bao," one of the two largest newspaper groups in Taiwan. Monique recently completed a reporting tour of Southeast Asia for the newspaper.

Another newcomer is **Joe Rebello** of AP-Dow Jones, who is taking the place of **Al Scott**. Al and his wife Kathy have moved to London, where Al is working for the AP-Dow Jones office there while Kathy, soon to be a new mom, begins graduate studies at the London School of Economics. **Ben Dummett** of AP-Dow Jones has left Bangkok to accept a promotion in the agency's Toronto office. He and wife **Nora Grant** are expecting their first child soon. Joe Rebello please take note: With regard to family size, there seems to be a pattern here for folks posted in Bangkok with AP-Dow Jones.

Sheila McNulty, who put in a three-year stint with the Associated Press in Bangkok and Phnom Penh, has landed a job with AP-Dow Jones in New York. She will be undergoing language and business training in the Big Apple while she works her way up to an overseas assignment.



Paul Sherer of the *Asian Wall Street Journal* wins the FCCT's October award for journalistic persistence above and beyond the call of duty. During the Thaksin Shinawatra program at

the club, Paul (right, in glasses) was spotted waiting patiently outside the men's room with notebook in hand, ready to pounce on the Deputy Prime Minister and pepper him with questions as he exited. Paul also wins the FCCT's monthly award for good taste; at least he allowed the famed "Traffic Buster" a few moments of privacy.

Philip McClellan has joined Agence France Presse's Bangkok's office as correspondent and news editor. Previously based in AFP's Hong Kong office, Philip moved to Thailand in June after AFP colleague **Patrick Lescot** left on a one-year sabbatical to write a book.

Thomas Fox is also a newcomer at AFP, having joined the agency as a correspondent in late June. He used to be an editor for *The Nation*.



Club Highlights

AFX-ASIA Financial News is the new kid on the block, joining a bevy of other financial news services that have set up shop in Bangkok in recent years. On business cards for its staff members, AFX-ASIA is described as "A joint venture between AAP, AFP-Extel News Ltd., Agence France Presse, Financial Times Group and Nihon Keizai Shimbun. The bureau chief of AFX-ASIA is Alexander Pithie, a new FCCT member.

Patricia Widener, formerly an editor for *Jewelsiam* magazine here in Bangkok, is now a reporter for *Travel Trade Gazette Asia*, which is affiliated with Miller Freeman, a United News and Media company.



Nancy Robinson is the club's marketing and promotional consultant who organized activities and coordinated publicity for the opening of the new clubhouse. Among some of the well-attended programs she introduced was a Neighborhood Party for people living or working in the Silom Road area.

Along with partner **Chris Khoo**, FCCT Board member **Hasan Basar** has started a new public relations company called Bangkok Public Relations. Hasan, a former partner of the public relations firm Presko, said he already has landed several major accounts.

And now we bring you this exclusive eyewitness report by the *Daily Telegraph's* **Phil Sherwell**, who flew half way around the world to attend the wedding of beer buddy and 1994 FCCT board member **Victor Mallett**:



The Three Musketeers: (Lt. to rt.) Philip "One-L" Sherwell, groom Victor Mallett, and best man Gideon Rachman.

One of Bangkok's better-known Bachelor Boys until his departure last Christmas, dashing former *Financial Times* correspondent **Victor Mallett** tied the knot this summer on a sun-kissed Martha's Vineyard off Cape Cod in a grand ceremony which matched American and Asian elements.

The lady who landed our ex-Lothario is **Michele Weldon**, also well-known in Bangkok from her NGO (non-governmental organization) days here. She is the former house-mate of another FCCT member who recently moved

on to new pastures, National Public Radio's **Mary Kay Magistad** (now based in Hong Kong).

Michele, part-American, part-Spanish-Filipina, and Victor, 100% English Home Counties, attracted a cosmopolitan crowd, including a big turn-out of old and new Bangkok faces (best man **Gideon Rachman** of *The Economist*, Mary Kay, Reuter's **Sonya Hepinstall** and hubbie Steve, plus yours truly) who ate, drank and partied their way through the two-day extravaganza. The wedding dress was satin from the Philippines, Balinese prayer flags fluttered in the wind, the church service was Roman Catholic and the enormous lobsters and corn on the cob were all American. The highlight of the weekend? Soccer-crazy Rachman scoring a hat-trick in a kickabout on a cow patch in his loafers before dislocating his toe and being carried off to hospital by Michele's brother John (who made sure the victim was armed with his credit card before they saw the doc). A few hundred bucks the poorer, Rachman hobbled back into the Sunday afternoon clam-bake a few hours later and stole the show from the newly-weds!



Newly-weds Michele and Victor.

The big day was on May 27, the location Martha's Vineyard, the island where the East Coast's great and good (plus of late Bill and Hillary Clinton as well) take their hols. Conveniently, Michele's grandfather has a Weldon pad there too! The newly-weds are both in London now where Victor is the *Financial Times'* deputy features editor and Michele is beginning post-grad studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). Victor's successor in Bangkok for the *FT* is **Ted Bardacke**, an American fresh from peasant uprisings in Mexico and tumult in Haiti.

—All members are invited to submit announcements to *Dateline Bangkok's* "People." Please fax announcements to 260-2643.

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Guess Who Came to Dinner?



Deputy Prime Minister and Traffic Buster Thaksin Shinawatra (right) directs traffic in the clubhouse one Wednesday night. ("You, over there, to the bar.") Thaksin's solution to the city's traffic problem? The "3 Es": Engineering, Education and Enforcement. Moderator and FCCT VP Michael Vatikiotis (left) dutifully took copious notes.



(Left) Some of the more than 180 people who braved Bangkok traffic to hear Thaksin speak. (Below) Thaksin and FCCT member Mom Sumala Chakrabandhu Graham.



The guest of honor shares a story with correspondents and other guests. (Lt. to rt.) Joe Rebello of AP-Dow Jones; Ted Bardacke of Financial Times; Phongthep Thepkanjana, Deputy Spokesman for the Office of the Prime Minister; Lee Miller of Bloomberg Business News, and Thaksin.

Club Highlights

H.E. Prime Minister Banharn Silpa-archa



The PM's daughter Kanjana (left) and wife, Khunying Jamsai (right).



Pongpol Adireksarn, Minister to the Prime Minister's Office.



Former FCCT Board Member Annabel Anderson, a counsellor with the Australian Embassy.



Knight Ridder Financial News correspondent Mark Timm (left), winner of the evening's "Longest Question" award. (Right) Fujiwara Yoshirharu of the Yomiuri Shimbun.



Guangming Daily's Li Zhan Jun, who asked about Thailand's role in the Spratly islands dispute.



More than 280 members and guests attended the Oct. 14 FCCT banquet for H.E. Prime Minister Banharn Silpa-archa (left). The prime minister's speech, delivered in Thai and simultaneously translated into English by a team of three translators, touched on a wide range of domestic and international issues. The program marked the FCCT's tradition of having nearly every prime minister address the club.



At a VIP reception before the banquet, guests pose for a group photo: (Lt. to rt.) Michele Cooper, Agence France Presse Bureau Chief; FCCT President Panadda Lertlum-Ampai; Finance Minister Surakiart Sathirathai; the Prime Minister; Foreign Minister Kasemsri; FCCT VP Michael Vatikiotis of the Far Eastern Economic Review; Lee Miller of Bloomberg Business News; and Hasan Basar of Bangkok Public Relations.



Foreign correspondents welcoming the prime minister to the reception. (Rt. to lt.) Peter Janssen of Asian Business/Deutsche Presse-Agentur, Grant Peck of the Associated Press, John Hail of United Press International, and Mr. Banharn.

Club Highlights

at the FCCT Banquet, Oriental Hotel



Evan Williams, Indochina Correspondent for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, poses a question.



As FCCT Treasurer Domenica Piantedosi (sitting on left, in suit) and Singapore's Business Times' Correspondent Lo Hui Yin (sitting on right, in black dress) adjust their earphones, journalists line up to ask questions. First in line was Nopporn Wong-Anan of the Asian Wall Street Journal, followed by Anchalee Koetsawang of Knight Ridder Financial News, and Noi Utumpon of AFX-Asia.



FCCT waiter Anirut Pukrabetch (standing) serves up a drink during the cocktail reception.



H.E. Mr. Roland Eng, Cambodian Ambassador to Thailand.



Siam Post Managing Director and 1984-85 FCCT President Paisal Srucharatchanya.



FCCT Board Member Christine Cuff of Burson-Marsteller greeting the Prime Minister Thai style.



Bangkok Post Editor and FCCT life member Pichai Chuensuksawadi.



Chargé d'Affairs Ralph Boyce of the U.S. Embassy and Mrs. Boyce.

KLONG WARRIORS RIDE AGAIN

IN-TOWN ADVENTURE WITH A ★★ DANGER RATING

By Michele Zack

Once known as the "Venice of the East" for its network of lovely canals, Bangkok forfeited its water transportation system when klongs were filled in and paved over in the 1960s. Progressive types argued that since the future belonged to the automobile, the city might as well 'get with it.'

Yet vestiges of the system still exist, and thousands of commuters coming from points east along Klong Tan and Klong Saen Saeb (see map) depend on Bangkok's most untamed mode of cross-town transportation to get to offices in the Sukhumvit, Ploenchit and Democracy Monument areas.

It's a pity there aren't more such routes but before attempting this in-town adventure, be warned that the boats are run by a band of klong warriors whose self image is more "urban commando" than "public servant." Stopping is the enemy. Speed is the creed.

Once you get the hang of it, there's a lot to be said for shooting along the black waters in a giant missile instead of slowly stewing in traffic. Rush hours you're in for a rough ride, but there's no faster (I hesitate to say better) way to get from the Grand Palace/Banglamphu side of town to Siam Square, Hilton Hotel, and all Petchburi/Sukhumvit destinations or vice versa.

The klongs are hidden highways across Bangkok. Granted, they're noisy, smell bad, and most people on board look miserable about their chosen mode of transportation. Minor details. The environmental impact on your body of a ten or fifteen minute klong hop has got to be preferable to an hour or two in traffic.

A further advantage is the keen sense of achievement gained from overcoming the number-one hitch—getting on and off the boats. The confidence you gain can cross over into other parts of your life. When someone asks an impossible task of me nowadays, my first thought is, "Why not?" After all, I did ride the klong this morning.

Seeing high-heeled, well-dressed ladies alighting sure-footed and graceful as mountain goats onto wet slippery piers, or leaping into a boat as it skims past the pier without properly stopping, are quintessential Bangkok sights. There could be few other places on

earth where urban people have adapted to such a harrowing public transportation system.

In plotting your boarding strategy, it's a mistake to count on the boatmen for help; klong training is an exercise in self reliance. It is normal to stand on the pier, monitoring a boat's final approach while preparing to jump on, and then as you await the right moment it pulls away again from the pier...your moment never came. The entire episode has taken five seconds. The zombie-like faces of those already on board stream past as a foul burst of diesel exhaust blows into your face and the trenchant words of the conductor, "Pai Laew!" (We're leaving!) echo in the filthy wake.

During morning and evening rush hours, boats come and go every couple minutes, so another chance comes soon. Better not ponder the humiliation overlong; simply vow to be quicker next time. Many boats pass without stopping. Most klong captains frown on unnecessary delays caused by passenger pick-ups. If no one on board is pressing him to stop, he will charge by, raising an arm in a princely gesture and flicking a wrist behind his head to indicate the next boat will stop. Yeah.

Another tactic is to travel with a small adorable child. Several sets of arms will extend toward the little darling to make sure she gets on safely. Thais have a notoriously weak spot for children. If in the meantime you have

not also managed to board, your angel will begin screaming like a banshee when the boat begins to pull away. The conductor who yesterday felt no compunction about leaving you behind on the dock will now join in with the passenger chorus of "Dio, dio, dio!!" (Wait, wait, wait!!) and the pilot will actually back up the 150-seater vessel to allow you to hop on. Terror forgotten, the child views the adventure with glee, and has also learned a valuable life lesson about not missing the boat.

Once on board, the tension doesn't let up. If you're fortunate you have a seat up front, where it's marginally more quiet, less fummy, and you're less apt to get the BIG SPLASH. The next challenge is knowing where to get off. If it's the terminus at Wat Saket, or Pratunam (where everyone has to change because of a low bridge) you are in luck — these are the two places the boat actually stops.

Along the way it's trickier because from the klong places look different. Just to make spotting your destination even more challenging, blue polyethylene splash guards cleverly rigged with ropes and pulleys obscure the view so visual reference points are limited. The splash guards are lowered only at the last moment to let people embark or disembark.

Psychological skills are also honed by klong training. A complication of disembarking is that the boat driver really doesn't want to stop, and

will avoid it if he can without shaming himself. He's on a roll, he's on amphetamines, he's paid by the number of trips he makes, it's too much trouble (especially for only one person). Klong hoppers will never know the full truth.

So subtle pressure to make him stop must be applied. It's done by climbing out onto the gunwale as the boat speeds toward the pier, and waving to the conductor and driver that you want to get off. He can't pretend not to notice this public display of death defiance and usually obliges by slowing down as he approaches, giving you a split second to calculate your best "jump spot" on the slippery, rickety pier. In rainy season, this might be under a few inches of water.

Now where else can you get this kind of workout for as little as five baht, and beat the traffic, too? The only way anyone back home in Peoria would believe it, is to somehow capture the experience on video. Hopefully, this wouldn't be the one time you didn't make it. Yes, the worst has happened, more than once actually. It's the thought of that possibility that gets the adrena-

line flowing every morning as klong commuters approach their piers.

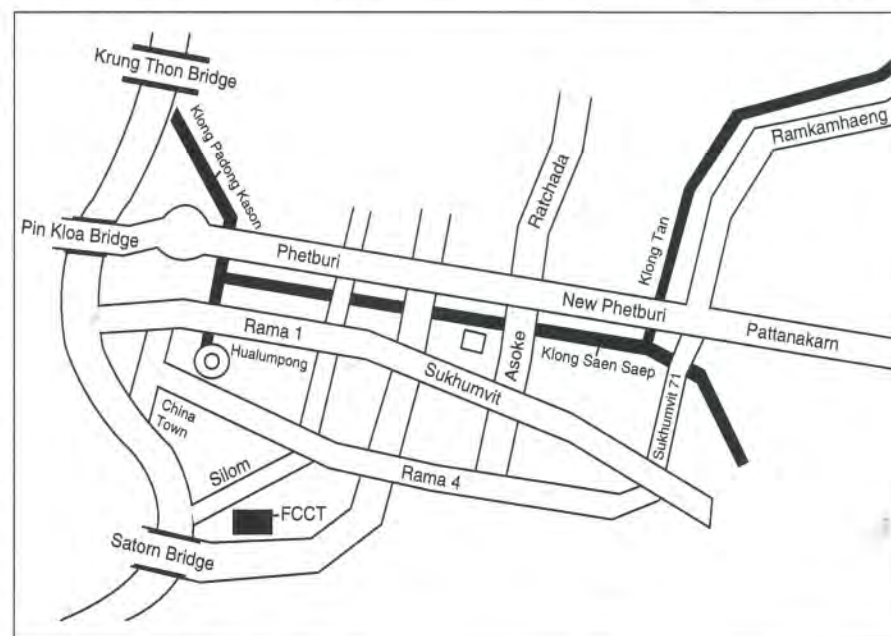
In one incident, when a woman made the fatal slip, Captain Klong hesitated a moment longer than usual, noting that when her head reappeared after the initial dunking, the klong was only up to her shoulders and some passers-by were coming to her aid. He then sped away, nothing he could do, and no use crying over one spilt passenger when there's a war going on.

Freelance writer Michele Zack, a Southern Californian who moved to Thailand five years ago, wrote this article when she was still a greenhorn on the klong circuit. She reports significant improvement in her embarkation techniques. The klong boat is also her preferred form of transportation for getting her 6-year-old daughter from Soi 49 to school at Soi 15, a mere five-minute boat ride.

GET KLONGED ON YOUR WAY TO THE FCCT

For quick runs up and down the river and to some in-town destinations, travel by boat provides an antidote to Bangkok's brutal traffic. However, travel on the klongs (as opposed to the Chao Phraya) is not recommended to the old, the infirm, or the faint-hearted.

Regular public boat service is available along the Chao Phraya and Klong Saen Saeb, Klong Tan and Klong Padung Krung Kasem. To get to the FCCT, there is no quick klong cure; however, you can get to within a shortish taxi ride by disembarking at the Oriental Hotel Pier, or else by taking the Padung Kasem line to its terminus at Hualampong Railway Station. Coming from Sukhumvit Road, take Klong Saen Saeb west to the point it crosses Padung Kasem, get out, and then cross the road to pick up the southbound boat on Padung Kasem. Using this route, a recent trip door-to-door from Sukhumvit 49 to the new FCCT clubhouse took 50 minutes during rush hour (not bad considering it often takes an hour and a half to make the same trip by car).



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PRINTING SOLUTIONS



Wandering Eye

A motley assortment of hacks headed off for Siem Reap recently to view the total solar eclipse at Angkor Wat. They endeared themselves little to the government official whose bus they piled aboard and hijacked into town. He and his group of friends were left to find fresh wheels. The unfortunate guide assigned to the bus was meanwhile under the misapprehension that he was looking after a group of tourists, albeit odd looking ones. He was soon to discover that this tour group had arrived direct from hell. It took 15 minutes for him to give his name—family name, given name, honorific, spelling, nickname, marital status, age, etc. Somehow the dreadful smirking newshounds couldn't make any sense at all of this complex information. Eager to change the subject, the guide offered to answer any other questions there might be. Big mistake. How many of you know the annual average June rainfall in Siem Reap (in inches, that is)?

It is by no means a national secret that the present Thai prime minister is not the tallest person to have occupied this high office. At the PM's recent FCCT address, Presidentissima Panadda Lertlum-Ampai found herself making the opening remarks from a remarkably lofty position. In fact, she was almost bent double over her notes at the lectern. Someone had thoughtfully placed a substantial plinth behind to ensure our guest of honour had an uninterrupted view out over the usual splendid spray of orchids. When a similar problem involving a vertically challenged guest arose some years ago, the distinguished speaker, an Indochina ambassador, found himself balancing on a small beer crate for over two hours as he fielded a barrage of questions from the floor. Even the Vietcong would have been hard pressed to come up with an ordeal that bad.

A keen surfer on the Internet, our Whitney Small recently sent a message off to a certain Nicholas Negroponte. No ordinary personage, he is the author of *Being Digital* and is normally to be found radiating revolutionary electrical

pulses around the world from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. To even glide in the same cyberspace as this gilded visionary is beyond the dreams of most ordinary mortals. Whitney, a nascent digital groupie, was therefore in need of serious sedation when Negroponte actually answered a message she had sent him. "It's like e-mail from God," she gasped.

As everyone has been told, the new clubhouse has been equipped with sound equipment fit for the next century. This includes concert-standard cordless microphones that can be set up for questions from the floor. The signals are transmitted to special antennae and relayed back to the audience with crystal clarity. Well at least that's the theory. It was only appropriate that Thailand's Mr Technology, Deputy Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, should hear the cutting edge of audio perfection in action. Everything had of course been fully tested—but unfortunately without the benefit of 200 inebriated people carrying, two-way radios, cellular phones, pagers, metal detectors, flak jackets and so forth. On the great night, the signals all went AWOL and nobody could hear a single question. Not one. Instead there were electrical squeals, whines, squawks and what sounded like dustbin loads of gravel being dragged around by a seriously stoned Jamaican steel band. Needless to say, a sonic boom was reported at the next Executive Committee meeting.

Simon Long recently arrived from Hong Kong to replace Gideon Rachman as the Economist's Southeast Asia Correspondent. Gideon, erstwhile FCCT soccer stalwart, has now risen to even giddier heights as The Economist's Asia Editor. There's nothing like a rainy season introduction to life in the city of soggy angels, as Simon was soon to discover. Unfortunately, the FCCT was unwittingly responsible for his watery exploits. He decided to take up an invitation to a New Members' Night at the Dusit Thani one Friday. On his way home he was caught in a downpour and there was, surprise,

surprise, not a taxi in sight. So he began to walk—and walk and walk. Drenched, he stepped on something squidgy as he waded through thigh-deep floods. When he investigated, a drowned rat floated to the surface. On he plodded in an odyssey punctuated only by regular stops for shelter, which curiously enough offered alcoholic solace as well.

Phnom Penh Post publisher Michael Hayes has had more than his fair share of headaches lately, but at least he can count on the loyalty of his staff. When a visitor called by at his office early one morning, he was told that Mr Hayes was "unavailable". "You mean he's still asleep," the visitor pried. "Mr Hayes worked 28 hours yesterday to make deadline," replied the faithful Khmer offside. Anyone would be entitled to a rest after that.

Prisoners are getting a bit fussy these days. The FCCT office recently received a letter from a British inmate at Klong Prem asking for the address of any foreign correspondent in town—apart from Andrew Drummond. What could our man on the gallows' watch possibly have done to earn such a snub? It seems that Bloodbath (a sobriquet bestowed on Drummond for his valiant coverage of the bloody 1992 pro-democracy disturbances in Bangkok from his living room), had already checked out the story in question and didn't see many column inches waiting to be filled.

Discretion prevents identification of the Bangkok-based Western correspondent who twice engaged a member of the Malaysian delegation at the recent Chiang Mai Asia-Pacific AIDS conference in cosy corridor chats. He had no idea the charming lady was the daughter of Dr Mahathir Mohamad, scourge par excellence of the Western press. Alerted to the dangerous ground underfoot, he apologized when next their paths crossed. "Sorry, I didn't realise you were the prime minister's daughter," he blurted. "No problem," she replied "Would you like to bow or curtsy?"

PROPERTY UPDATE



Single House (Sukhumvit 40)
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Rent: 55,500 baht per month



House Sukhumvit 27
Spacious single detached 3 bedrooms, enjoy barbecue party in your own private garden, magnificent master suite, cozy and charming living room adjoining to kitchen, separate maid's quarter, 3-4 parking spaces.

Rent: 80,000 baht per month

Lake Side Villa I & II (Bangna-Trad)

Exclusive compound, a remarkable 3-5 bedrooms with gorgeous garden comprising nearly 300 square wah, 2-storeys house with good kitchen, family room, living room and dining room. Full facilities.

RENT: 80,000 - 120,000 baht per month



Ambassador Palace (Sukhumvit 11)

Four bedrooms and four bathrooms unit, 450 sqm. located in prime Sukhumvit area, this beautiful living room adjoined to family room with extended large balcony to enjoy panoramic view, formal kitchen with lots of storage.

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Moo Ban Laddawan (Srinakarin Road)

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