

BAYON



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Kamp-Art and More

Up on the first floor (second floor American) in a corner building facing old bridge road, in the heart of Kampot's late-night, streetside market for local treats like borbor – rice porridge with chicken – and other not-quite delicacies, is Light Box, a community art space put together by Kat, a young Aussie dynamo.

The entrance, down the side street and up an alley a ways, is up a narrow, steep wooden staircase and, typical for many community spaces in Cambodia, the stairwell looks like it hasn't been painted since the building was built many decades ago, so it has a dark and dank look to it. At first it was a bit confusing to find until she painted an arrow pointing up and installed a lighted box on top of the entrance. But once in the double-wide space; that is, equivalent to two shophouses, you're in a completely different world with a new black and white checkered tile floor and a soaring roofline made specially interesting by being a corner building with lots of different angles.

At first I thought, art space? In Kampot? Like a gallery? What can happen there? Didn't take long to find out, starting with lessons in traditional Khmer instruments and a Made in Cambodia event that packed the house which - though it included performances like breakdancing, not quite a traditional Cambo art - was all done by Cambodians. More recently the Cambodian Space Project also played for a packed venue with about 150 people participating over the night. It was a great time and the new smooth tile floor makes it perfect for dancing. There were lots of locals attending though with any event of that type, the majority were internationals. The Space Project's songs are mostly Khmer, classic Khmer rock-n-roll in fact, and it was a hoot thinking about all the locals in the neighborhood enjoying live music with their borbor.

Then on Halloween and November 1st Kat put together Hanuman Spaceman with the help of Australian and other arts grants. It was billed somewhat expansively as 'a psychedelic jungle cabaret' and was held on the grounds of Kampot Traditional Music School, which is specially dedicated to orphans and handicapped children. The weather gods were smiling on them on the 31st since it rained like hell at 6 pm, took a break at 8 just in time for the show to go on then went back into torrential mode about 11.

The event began with an introduction of traditional music, but when the Space Project came on the Khmer musicians remained and a fusion of the two sounds was created. There was original music, dancing, skits, light show, sound effects, a video complementing the action and all on a large stage. Almost all of the dialog was in Khmer, which in a sense is the coolest thing – performance art for the local masses – but since about half of the audience was expats, it would've been nice to have subtitles. They could've been projected along with the continuous video. In fact, it'd be good if CSP could figure out how to include subtitles in all their sets. We enjoy their music regardless, but it'd be a nice touch to know what they're singing about... is it love, a cheating husband, mango trees, cyclos?

After the cabaret was finished the chairs were removed and the Space Project played a set for dancing. I guessed about 250 people attended the Saturday night show. They plan to continue and expand the performance: it can only get better. It was great fun and a gift to the community.

Word is that CSP has rented a place in town and will set up their home base here, so I expect they'll be playing often. It sure was no problem filling up Light Box. CSP will complement the Kampot Playboys who also play Khmer rock music. They play their Thursday night sets at Chiet's place, Madi Bar, on the river. He's the lead singer and the force behind the band. It's always well attended and when the live music is finished the disco goes on till the last few revelers stagger out in the wee hours of the morning.

Bodhi Villa, on the river about a kilometer out of town, takes over the dancing scene on Friday nights starting (usually) with couple of rockabilly sets of live music and it too sometimes goes on all night. A recent pajama party there got pretty risqué, so I hear. It never ceases to amaze me how it can sometimes have only a smattering of people at 10, but then be packed at midnight. Where do all those people come from in little Kampot?

Finally, Naga House, not far from Bodhi completes the disco trifecta on Saturday with live music on some occasions and all night disco. Naga is beautifully set up with tables and chairs built on a platform with provision for previously existing mature trees



to grow through it and it's right on the river. ABC bar has back to having live music on Tuesdays and Saturdays and Bokor Mt. Lodge is back on Sunday live music.

There is a large local disco called Dragon Club that's interesting for a one time stop. It's excruciatingly loud, more so than any of the foreigner oriented places, which are also sometimes too loud for my battered and tired old geezer ears. Drinks are very expensive, much more than any western oriented place and 80% to 90% of the customers are young Khmer boys, though quite a few KTV hostess girls will stop by when their places close at 11 or 12.

Lots of new places to eat and drink are opening up. There's NOLA, which, for the uninitiated, stands for New Orleans, LA, with authentic Cajun food. Their bar is very comfortable. Honey-moon Creperie specializes in pates and cheeses as well as crepes. There's also Baraca, a Belgian/French restaurant with tapas and very tasty European food. A Spanish woman living here liked it a lot saying it was very European so it must be true.

The Garden, just opening up, is bound to be a success since it's such a cool spot. It's a triple-wide lot near the center of old town with lots of greenery under a mini mango plantation. There's also a mini banana forest. There're artsy murals on all the walls facing the garden and it's got to be the most relaxing place in town. They also have an excellent pool table and cue sticks that're actually

straight!!! It'll be great for big parties – with 100 people it wouldn't feel the least bit crowded.

O'Neil's Irish Bar has added a Texas BBQ since my last Kampot update, with its burgers reputed to be the best in town. There're other new bars and restaurants, but I can't get around enough to critique them all.

So there's lots of new people streaming in, casting a bit of concern over our once sleepy little burg. They come planning to stay a few days and a week later they're out looking for land. Prices are moving up fast and people are in property-values-can-only-go-up mode so I expect many will get burned, though maybe this time will be different (yeah, sure). My own experience is instructive. I purchased land 3 kilometers outside of Kampot in 2007 for \$4.60 per meter. Just a few months earlier it could've been had for \$3; in the two months between the time I made the deposit and the hard title came through the owners were offered \$6.60 per meter. The price didn't matter that much to me because I was figuring on setting up a little tropical cornucopia and staying there for the duration.



A year-and-a-half later when I realized owning land wasn't for me, the financial crash of 2008 had intervened to bring the value down to \$2 meter. It took five years for its value to return to my purchase price of \$4.60 and I sold a year later in March 2013 for \$5.5. Now it's over \$7. As long as lots of people have cash and some have money to burn, prices will go up causing pressure for higher rents and our cheap and easy lifestyle will be in danger.

Prices are also rising fast on commercial property. Here's a rough rule of thumb for determining commercial property value. You should be able to get an income of 1% of the purchase price in monthly rent. In other words a \$100,000 property should be able to bring in \$1000 per month. When maintenance is included it'd take 10 years just to get back your investment, let alone make a profit. Today with prices the way they are, rents don't even amount to 1/2% per month. The only justification then for today's sky-high prices is the belief that they, and rents, will continue to inflate. There's no place in town that can afford to pay a grand a month and yet some commercial properties are selling in excess of \$200,000.

All that said, the influx of new residents has so far shown no negative effects, it just keeps getting better. On the other hand, I have long-time Cambo friends who get a little nervous and uncomfortable with too many tourists or expats around so they hole up in places like Koh Kong, where I hear there's only one Western place in town. Kampot is definitely not for them.

But it is bringing in a very interesting set of people, including a lot of single women of all ages. There will always be a surplus of men over women in a place like Cambodia since we travel much easier and gravitate more to 'exotic' places, but Kampot seems to have an especially large number of women, relatively speaking,

and it gives the town a different vibe. Maybe it's partly the effect of having no girlie bars.

One of the finer points of living as an expat in a developing country is the wide divergence in ages and outlooks you encounter. Back in the states nearly all my friends are in the fogey generation, it would be strange and unseemly to try to make friends there with young people. Here it makes no difference at all, in fact, sometimes, while amongst people of all ages I forget how old I am; that is, until I see a picture of me in a group or look in the mirror behind the bar. Wow! I really am an old fart!

Kampot's compost plant is so successful they can't get enough organic material to keep up with demand. It's all my fault: I put a post on the Kampot noticeboard and the expat community stormed the plant. I only knew of its existence because the top guy's pickup truck got stuck in the mud in front of my house. The compost is beautiful stuff, but it needs to be aged a bit more to be able to plant directly in it, so mostly it's good for a top dressing that eventually degrades into and improves the soil. They get dropboxes from the market and sort through the nasty stuff by hand. Actually there's lots more organic material around, especially from sugar-cane-juice vendors, but they have no way to pick it up. There's also a plant in Phnom Penh and there could be more around the country but the municipality that wants one has to offer the land and they take over and secure the funding for the plant.

Finally a Bokor National Park update. I've now been there six times in all seasons and I've yet to see the sea from the cliffside. It's always been raining or cloudy or even when the plateau is in sun there's always been a cloud rising up the cliffside which dissipates when it reaches the plateau. It is quite an experience seeing a cloud from above, but it's about time I could actually see the sea. Once again the casino was deserted with two or three minibuses and a couple of cars parked out front. Admittedly it was early afternoon on a weekday, but still.

It was early November and tail end of rainy season but plenty enough water to make the waterfall very dramatic. As many times as I've been up there it's the only thing I care to see. It was a bit of a challenge getting across the rushing creek from the entry point, but a must if you really want to see the falls from down below. Meanwhile the dining hall which sits practically on top of the falls which potentially seats about 500 people was empty... stark naked empty. At least the restaurant was open just in case anybody wanted to eat. So tons of money to build a restaurant suitable for grandiose plans, but not enough to build a small pedestrian bridge to safely get across the stream or a trail to view the very impressive lower falls. Now you can only get a narrow view of it from up above. Admittedly it's a lot easier getting across the stream in dry season, but still.

They're going ahead with plans to subdivide much of the plateau into 600 and 1300 square meter lots, priced at \$227,000 and \$454,000 respectively – those are the prices listed on their brochure. So \$400 per square meter to live in probably the nastiest climate in Cambodia. Yes, it is quite a bit cooler up there at 1000 meters in April when it's baking down below, but it gets four-and-a-half meters – 180 inches – of rain a year and when there are occasional flashes of lightning at sea level you can see almost continuous flashes up above; it can be 5 to 10 times a minute and go on for an hour or more. Some people say the development's real purpose is to launder money, so maybe it doesn't matter to the richest man in Cambodia, who owns the lease, if nobody goes there. Still he must've thought it was going to bring in the bucks, else why build a giant restaurant for a few stragglers a day?

Without wishing ill of anyone in particular, here's hoping it's a total bust since casino resorts really have no place in a beautiful natural national park.

Cambostan

Guns and Frivolity in Cambodia

I stood in the shadow of the bus and watched the spray of my urine rise off the parched, dirt road onto the tire, and slowly drip down in tears of salt and dust. I wondered if the bus driver would notice — or even care. Cambodia has the highest percentage of unexploded land mines and munitions of any country in the world. The seriousness of the danger is somewhat apparent when our bus infrequently pulls over to allow the passengers to relieve themselves. It is ill advised to step off the main roads, so we stick pretty close to the bus.

I ended up in SE Asia somewhat abruptly after getting laid off from my day job. I had known my job was in danger and expected to lose it. The writing was on the wall, so to speak, but I was still stunned when they told me to pack up my shit. Much like reading about a politician accused of fraud, I was shocked but not surprised. I obviously had some decisions to make. The job market couldn't get much worse. The economy was in shambles. And my savings account lacked "security" by about two zeroes. My sensible side said, "Suck it up and get a new job." My frivolous side said, "Buy a plane ticket to somewhere far from here."

At one point I relinquished some of my water to the driver for the bus's radiator. I'm no mechanic, but when it poured out of the bottom onto the ground, I figured we would be there for a while.

I soon decided that frivolity was much sexier than sensibility, and that I needed to take full advantage of my new found freedom. I'm single and irresponsible, and knew there may not be many more times in my life when I'm the only person depending on me. So I paid off my credit cards, gave away my plant, stuffed my backpack and jumped on a plane. I picked Cambodia because it's about as far out of my element as I could get. What I hoped to take away when I resurfaced is the kind of learning you can't get from books — and some kick-ass stories.

I had already spent about a week in northern Cambodia exploring the ancient temples of Angkor Wat before catching the bus heading south to the capital city, Phnom Penh. This bus (piece of crap van) was noisy, cramped and had rust spreading like cancer. It looked like something donated to a high-school auto body class. Plus, at over 100 degrees, it was rather disappointing that the AC appeared to have been ripped out of the dashboard. We were forced to keep the windows open to avoid heat stroke, despite the heavy clouds of dust streaming into our faces. Everyone wrapped t-shirts or bandannas around their faces "outlaw style" to keep from gagging, and wore sunglasses to prevent eyelids from caking up. We looked like reject terrorists. I thought the bus was hot and crowded when it left Siem Reap with seven or eight of us foreigners—but it soon became unbearable as the driver kept picking up locals to make a little extra money under the table. I wanted to call bullshit every time he pulled over but chose to bite my tongue. We gained another half dozen passengers before he was satisfied. The roads only exacerbated the situation, resembling nothing more than neglected hiking trails. The conditions kept the bus under 40 mph but more than once we hit potholes that sent us out of our seats, and into the ceiling. Occasionally, we would disappear into whale-sized craters before emerging again from the other side.

The only comforting part of the journey was that I still had water left when the bus broke down in the desolate mid-section of Cambodia. We sat without shade on the side of the road in pools of our own sweat, when we weren't pushing the bus up and down the road to try to jump-start it. We quietly read pirated, xeroxed copies of classic novels and travel books. We

played magnetic backgammon and tic-tac-toe in the dirt. And we watched the bus driver with his head buried under the hood, tinkering with the engine and swearing in his native Khmer. At one point I relinquished some of my water to the driver for the bus's radiator. I'm no mechanic, but when it poured out of the bottom onto the ground, I figured we would be there for a while.

I began weighing my options and tried to recall if there was an entry in my Lonely Planet Cambodia guidebook about taxi murders or kidnappings

Every ten minutes or so, a small procession of humble, inquisitive faces would slowly drive by in a plume of dust: peasant, migrant workers on make-shift tractors, a family of four packed onto a decrepit, Chinese-made moped, a rusty, diesel cattle truck loaded with farmers-turned-minesweepers. We traded gentle stares with equal curiosity. Most passersby would offer innocent waves as if to make us feel welcome. But the truth of the gesture was revealed when our return waves brought shy smiles and giggles at the goal of simply



communicating with such unusual visitors.

About two hours had gone by when we noticed a car racing towards us from the direction we had come. It was traveling much faster than any other vehicle we had seen, swerving viciously, and appeared to be catching air over some of the larger mounds in the road. It reached us quickly and rocketed past in an enormous whirlwind of dust like the cartoon Tasmanian Devil. About twenty yards down the road it slammed on its breaks and skidded dangerously to a stop. The car's wheels then spun in reverse, it backed fiercely through its own trail of smoke, and locked its breaks violently across from where we were sitting.

The old car was badly dented and rusty, and so covered in dirt you couldn't see through the windows or even discern its original color. I strained to look through the haze as the dust slowly dissipated and noticed the window nearest to us slowly winding down. Then suddenly, a young, grinning Khmer face popped out through the window and said, "Taxi?" The other bus passengers and I exchanged looks of disbelief. No one said a word. The taxi driver glanced back and forth along the line of stranded foreigners and gestured towards his car with amused bewilderment, "Taxi!" No one moved. I began weighing my options and tried to recall if there was an entry in my Lonely Planet Cambodia guidebook about taxi murders or kidnappings. I was tired, hot and restless and wondered how long it would be before another bus showed up. "Taxi!" beckoned the driver as he thumped the outside of the door with his palm. I wavered for another moment and then slowly clambered to my feet, hefting my backpack onto my shoulders. My fellow bus passengers stared up at me with wide eyes. I contemplated my ac-

tions hesitantly as the taxi driver waved me over with encouragement. I turned to the bus driver who simply shrugged as if to say, "It's your call buddy." I shrugged back, and climbed into the cab.

We sped along the grueling, prehistoric road at teeth-rattling speed. I was amazed the car held up under such conditions. The driver worked the steering wheel with a frenzied mastery, constantly correcting our path as we bounded over rocks and around potholes. The shoelaces on my hiking boots would have come untied if I hadn't doubled the knots. I was both impressed and horrified. About twenty minutes passed before I offered "Phnom Penh" as my destination. The driver nodded vigorously in the rear view mirror as if there was no other plausible option. I sat silently, gripping the door handle and gazing intently out the window. About thirty minutes later, the driver abruptly turned to me and said, "Guns. You like?" I was dumbfounded. "You like guns? I take you shoot guns. You shoot guns. Many guns." I responded tentatively, "I aah, don't really need to be shooting any guns. I really just want to get to..." He interrupted, "You American, yes?" I answered hesitantly, "Yes, but I..." He cut in, "All American like guns. You like. No problem." I replied, "Yeah, that's cool but I really don't..." He suddenly jammed on the breaks and sent the car sliding to a stop in the middle of the road. He turned to me with a look of persistent sincerity and said, "It's ok. I good friend. You shoot guns. Very good guns. No problem. You like." He then turned around and jerked the car back into motion, our Tasmanian cloud of dust trailing behind.

I wanted to blow shit up. I was a dangerous man. There was certainly still a degree of fear when I put down the smoking gun but it was overcome by exhilaration and adrenalin.

About 45 minutes later we pulled off the main road onto an unfathomably worse side road. We had to slow down significantly in order to navigate around the holes and gaps in our path. We passed through villages dotted with primitive huts and small patchwork houses, all stained brown with dirt kicked up by passing vehicles. We drove by gaunt, tireless men in conical hats digging in rice paddies. We passed women shouldering wooden buckets of water and families hiding from the sun under shelters made from palm fronds. Cambodia is the poorest country in SE Asia and the roadside images brought to life the descriptions of poverty we gloss over in the New York Times. Village streets are lined with litter, stray dogs, and naked children playing in the dirt. You also can't help noticing the extraordinary number of amputees – one out of every 250 people in Cambodia. Some bound along masterfully with makeshift crutches. Other less fortunate victims drag legless midsections along the road using their bare hands.

We left the villages behind and drove for another 30 minutes or so before entering an endless web of back roads bordered with rusted barbed-wire fences. I was beginning to wonder if I would ever be heard from again. Eventually, we came upon a tall, narrow, white-washed shack that resembled an outhouse. The shack stood next to a small side road blocked by an old-school, manual barricade like something you might imagine at a rural Russian border crossing. We pulled up to find a middle-aged Khmer man sitting on a stool wearing a grubby t-shirt, camouflaged pants and a side-arm. He got up slowly, fanning himself with a tattered newspaper, and walked out to the cab. The driver muttered a few words in Khmer and motioned towards me in the back. The guard glanced at me indifferently, nodded slowly to the driver and walked casually over to the barricade. He leaned down on the weighted end, raising the opposite side of the pole just high enough to clear the top of the cab, and waved us through. We followed the road for about a mile and a half to an uninviting building pieced together with cinderblocks, corrugated steel and bamboo. We pulled up next to a couple of rickety pick-up trucks

parked in front and climbed out of the taxi. The driver put his hand on my shoulder, smiled enthusiastically, and said, "Time to shoot guns."

It was a little unsettling when we were greeted by a toothless, ex-Khmer soldier holding an M-16 assault rifle. He was wearing an American t-shirt with a skull and cross bones that said, "Mess with the best, die like the rest." I said hello the politest way I knew how. The soldier sized me up for a moment and then pointed to an impressive selection of guns hanging from small wooden dowels hammered into a bamboo wall. There were small caliber handguns, hunting rifles, shotguns and intimidating, automatic machine guns. I have a rudimentary knowledge of guns but identified a German Luger, a Colt .45, an Uzi, several M-16's, and even what looked like an old Tommy gun straight out of a mobster movie. As I examined the weapons, I did my best to appear composed and knowledgeable as if choosing an album at a hip record store. But in actuality, I was intimidated as shit and wishing I was back on the side of the road next to the broken down bus.

My demeanor changed pretty quickly after firing off 30 rounds with an AK-47 assault rifle. It was kick-ass and I was having trouble holding back the drool. I was a kid again, the star of my own war movie. It was a twisted childhood dream come true. I wanted to pull the trigger on everything he had. I wanted to blow shit up. I was a dangerous man. There was certainly still a degree of fear when I put down the smoking gun but it was overcome by exhilaration



and adrenalin. The soldier had dealt with people like me before. He could sense my pathetic, juvenile fascination and complete lack of will power. He walked over and handed me a laminated menu with a grocery list of handguns, shotguns and machine guns, and asked me what was next. A gun menu!?! I couldn't fucking believe it. I scanned the list greedily like a fat chick at a buffet. I didn't want to have to choose. Then, with a burst of courage, I peered up at the soldier and asked if he had anything with a little more kick. He smiled sadistically, flipped the menu over, and revealed some seriously heavy artillery.

It was a tough decision, but I had to go with the fully automatic, Russian K-57, armor piercing machine gun. It's the kind of weapon that's mounted to the side of a helicopter, and similar in size to the American M-60 that Stallone shouldered in Rambo. The Khmer soldier didn't have much trouble talking me into buying 150 rounds of ammo, which took two guys to feed into the gun from the side. Three-inch bullet shells spat out of the gun in bursts of flame as it recoiled, showering around me like a copper hailstorm. It was like holding a jackhammer, only louder. But I could still hear the perverse laughing of the taxi driver who stood behind me, thumping me on the back as I fired and hollering with approval. I was sweating by the time I ran out of ammo and had a few shell burns on my forearms. I was hoping they'd scar.

Before the gun even stopped smoking, the soldier held the evil

COCKROACH CORNER

That's handy

The Khmer Rouge tribunal announced the other week it will suspend trial sessions until January, bowing to pressure from lawyers of one of the two defendants charged with genocide.

A tribunal statement said hearings would resume Jan. 9, deferring to threats of a boycott by lawyers of Khieu Samphan, who said it was unfair to proceed while they are still working on appealing the verdict in his first trial.

So all those overpaid lawyers and judges can have a nice long holiday break. Not that the judges need it when some spend under half their time in country.

And so the useless gravy train rolls on.

I am drunken idiot

Having a quiet beer late at night you watch a drunken local stagger onto his moto on the pavement. Once stabilized its takeoff.

He clips the rear of your bike parked at the side of the road hurtles across the road and smashes into the back of a parked tuk tuk.

A crowd quickly gathers. On inspection it becomes apparent he has broken your rear indicator.

With the aid of the bars security guard the drunk is brought over to your bike and you point out the damage.

He smiles in that inane way only locals can say, "sorry I am drunk," and proceeds to walk off.

Whoa there pal I have to fix this tomorrow so why does it cost me money because you are a drunken idiot.

It takes a few back and forth's before the logic of the argument sinks in. Finally he agrees to pay under pressure from a girl who has arrived and is presumed to be a sister.

Over to the tuk tuk where haggling over compensation for a two dollar Chinese rear light starts at twenty dollars.

Ten minutes later he wobbles aboard his motorbike and weaves his way down the road!

menu in front of me again and pointed to the bottom of the list: "B-40, Rocket Propelled Grenade Launcher". I was at a loss for words. I had already spent \$30 bucks on the AK-47 and \$150 on the K-57 (a buck a bullet). The B-40 would set me back another \$250 and the soldier said I would have to take a 45 minute drive in his truck to get to a safe place in the mountains to fire it. My week's travel budget was already blown and I really didn't want to get into a truck with this guy. But we were talking bazooka. I would be the envy of all my sick friends. As I wrestled with a decision, the soldier, with a heartless grin, informed me that for an extra \$100 he would throw in a water buffalo for a target. It was clearly time to exit the shooting range.

I was headed for the cab when another ex-Khmer soldier strolled up with a hand grenade dangling by the pin from his index finger (probably not the safest way to carry it). I stood, somewhat in shock, staring at the live grenade. The cab driver patted me on the back, smiled, and nodded slowly with approval. A little over the top, but I figured, what's another \$20 bucks. I followed the two soldiers, with cab driver in tow, through a barbed wire fence behind the shooting range. We walked about 1/4 mile through a barren, dirt field until we got to a small, muddy pond. The grenade-throwing lesson took about 15 seconds. One of the soldiers picked up a rock, put it in my hand, and made an underhand throwing motion towards the water. I managed to land the rock near the center of the pond and he gave me a thumbs-up with approval. He then put on a kevlar helmet, handed me the grenade and took a step back. It was understandably a little shocking to be standing in the middle of Cambodia holding a live hand grenade with zero military training. I hesitated for a moment and then pointed to the helmet the soldier was wearing and the baseball hat on my head. He reassured me in broken English that the kevlar helmet was far too hot and that I was much better off with my baseball hat. So I posed for a quick picture to the taxi driver who was serving as my



Information from the local authorities!

No not Phnom Penh.

In a surprising development Sihanoukville has hit the fore with postings on two facebook pages.

Expats and locals living in Sihanoukville has a police officer regularly posting info and photos of crime and captured thieves.

The Sihanoukville Immigration

police page has the same as above plus lost passports recovered and even information on applying for a work permit!

Time Phnom Penh authorities caught up with the information age!

**HAPPY XMAS AND
NEW YEAR TO ALL
OUR READERS**

official photographer, pulled out the pin and tossed the grenade into the pond. We were only standing about 20 yards from where the grenade landed. The cab driver ducked behind the second soldier but my friend with the helmet stood firm. He calmly indicated with hand signals that there was no need to run. I still wished I were wearing Adidas instead of Tevas when the thing exploded and emptied half the pond into a mushroom cloud of water. It was pretty cool, to say the least.

I sat quietly in the cab gazing through the window as we slowly made our way out of the compound, past the meager villages, and back to the main road. I was physically exhausted but my mind was racing. Sadly, my thoughts weren't occupied with the thrill or gravity of what I just experienced. Instead, I was sweating my unemployment and the job I had lost in San Francisco. I guess I was suffering from the backlash of indulgence. It was like the anxiety or guilt felt after spending money on something extravagant, sleeping with someone you shouldn't, or even just devouring a half bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken. After all, I should be walking out of an interview, not off a shooting range in Cambodia. It's the worst job market in decades and I didn't have a lead. My money was literally going up in smoke and I had no income. I sat thinking about the phone call when my boss laid me off. I thought about the strained silence when I told my father the news. I thought about my ex-coworkers and friends and the client relationships I tried so hard to build. I thought about my paltry 401-K plan. I thought about my career. I thought about my future. "Tomorrow in morning, 10 o'clock," mumbled the cab driver from the front seat. "Excuse me," I asked. The driver twisted around to face me, "I pick you up hotel 10 o'clock. We go back gun range." I was perplexed. "Go back? What for?" I asked. He smiled widely, "B-40 shoulder grenade launcher." It took me a moment to comprehend his reply. I stared at him feebly. I took a few long, contemplative breaths. "Make it eleven."

Phnom Penh Pub Page

I wanted to start off this month's pub page with another string of excuses- bad weather – too drunk – no new bars – no old bars – broken laptop – Hunchback hit me too many times in the head with a cricket bat and I now permanently concussed... Etc., but I was just too lazy to think of anything new, original or even remotely realistic. So I took the easy way out and went drinking.

More waiting is in order as Templar is still not ready to serve me alcohol – I was very disappointed as I was having a lot of trouble thinking of anywhere else that could possibly provide me a refreshing alcoholic beverage but there it is – not open – but the sign was up last time I walked by – clearly moving ahead.

I found a new bar that was perfectly named – Cute & Cozy Bar is on, crap – I was so drunk I forgot to write what street this bar is on – give me a minute – ok – it is on 118 st in the space that used to be Nice Smile Bar I think – beside the convenience store across the corner from Dream. They have done a serious upgrade and the current bar is much nicer looking inside – in fact it is quite cute & cozy – I think it was named for the décor as opposed to the staff but opinions on this subject may vary J. Actually the staff were very friendly but I was too drunk to focus on them as I was trying my best to focus on the beer in front of me so they may be very cute & cozy for all I know. I was very pleased with the low key vibe in the place. I got quick service and was able to maintain a conversation without being drowned out by either the music or miscellaneous screeches. Did not hang out there too long because I was really not coping too well with sitting in one place but I will certainly try again once my liver has recovered.

I somehow found another new bar on 172 St – Black Pearl is actually one of the nicer looking hostess bars I have been in lately. It is roomy and comfortable with, what I thought were cool, metallic tables. Really looked pretty nice. There was a pool table and a couple of dart boards and best of all, they seemed to offer food – always a nice distraction – although I wonder if they will soon offer lady plates in addition to lady drinks – after having seen staff consume far more lady drinks than they should, will the next iteration of this be consuming too many fried rice and chicken plates that customers buy for poor hungry staff? I can hear the canny mercenary minds at Skirts thinking how this could be implemented with food from the Pub. Perhaps there could be a prize for the girl who eats the most Sunday roasts plates....

Back to the Pearl (in my best Captain Jack Sparrow voice – admittedly that imitation would have sounded better to me if I was still drunk) – the staff was friendly and service was good. Best of all, the staff did not make a pain of themselves which was much

appreciated. Did I say the bar looked really nice?? Most drinks seemed to be \$3.5, tiger draft was \$1.5 and beer prices seemed reasonable for a hostess bar.

Stumbling out of the Pearl (I still want to do a pirate voice), I saw Nice Start bar which had a prominent "For Sale" sign. This seemed to suggest that it was not a nice start after all or that perhaps there was no staying power... despite having already gone to a few bars on the street already, I decided to have a fresh start to my evening here. I should say that I have worked in and essentially lived in bars for a good portion of my life – many an evening have I been around at closing time and watched the staff shuffle around while they waited patiently for the last customers to move on. Despite this bar being fairly busy, there was a bit of bar closing vibe to it. Staff were friendly – in some cases too friendly – but there was a bar is closing vibe to the place (I know

I know – the sign did give it away but I have to play up my bar expertise once in a while or the Evil Publisher will realize he could hire any old monkey to write this article). Anyway – will probably not rush back.

For the great and powerful Possum, I decided I had to try Lovely Jubbly bar on St 19 just north of St 172. Not my usual hangout, this is clearly a backpacker dive (clearly identified if there was any doubt by the giant blackboard with bus schedules at the entrance) but actually a very nice one. A grey streamlined décor – brightly lit – good tunes – very friendly staff – towers of beer were \$7, jugs were \$3.5 and the food looked good. There was a pool table in the back and a public computer to use at the bar. On the night I came by the place was not very busy but there were a few small groups of what seemed to be backpackers lounging about – sorry Possum – no jubblys on the menu.

I walked by Alice's Pub did not go in but the sign saying that the staff were super friendly seemed born out as a

kid sitting outside started screaming hello and waving as I walked by. The woman, who I guess was her mom, could not stop laughing as the kid got more energetic in her greetings. I was too drunk to be around friendly kids (who can be a bit annoying if you are not in the mood) but I will try the place for a future pub page. By the way I was too drunk to know what street I was on but I will do a better report when I actually drink there.

That is about it for this month – from the Golden Sorya Mall – it seems that big changes are in the works – most of the businesses seem to have closed including the reasonably popular Mao in the courtyard. They seem to be consolidating a number of the units into larger spaces and there are rumors that nightclubs or bars will be taking these spaces over. If new bars open – the pub page will be there.



A Phnom Penh Prison Diary 8

7th October

Its coming up to a holiday, so the guards have upped the frequency of room searches.

The rules are simple, if the guards can re-sell what you have, it will be taken. The official rules allow only the following property; an aluminium plate, a spoon, a cup, a blanket, pillow and a mosquito net.

The easy way is to discretely pay 5,000r for an easy check, or have the whole room, and 20 prisoners property, trashed.

Today's guard is one of my personal favourites, as he is also a little huugh-haa.

His bling is a finely turned, illegal hardwood baton. But its not only the craftsmanship that is so impressive, it is his name or perhaps his exam results, "Mong", Carved in neat letters and carefully painted in gold.

Reluctantly, I pay the money.

18th October

Today we are expecting one of the few NGOs who are actually allowed inside the prison. These are the likes of MSF and the Red Cross, with access to areas closed, even to our embassy.

We are informed that today, they will be filming conditions around the hospital, perhaps an indication that things may one day improve.

However, now I realize this was another scam. This time by a corrupt, British, senior police officer and a trashy tabloid reporter from CNN, the only way they could get inside the prison is by bribing authorities.

The problem is that I am still pre-trial, and now I have to fight not only a corrupt judiciary, but now the most powerful TV network in the world.

The presumption of innocence, that fundamental right, is totally out the window when the chief executive of a British police force makes your case political and a matter of funding, at a time when they are facing budget cuts. I am furious.

The TV show was subsequently broadcast worldwide, six days before my hearing. It seems that everyone is willing to buy their way into the Cambodian justice system to further their own agenda.

This is my first indication of a conspiracy which involves NGOs, the British government and the easily corrupted Cambodian authorities.

Unfortunately, this is just the beginning.

December

Seven months into my detention,

I have seen, heard and experienced much of what there is to keep busy in Prey Sar, I have been exposed to all ten Khmer pop classics, so many times that I have considered removing my eardrums with a chopstick.

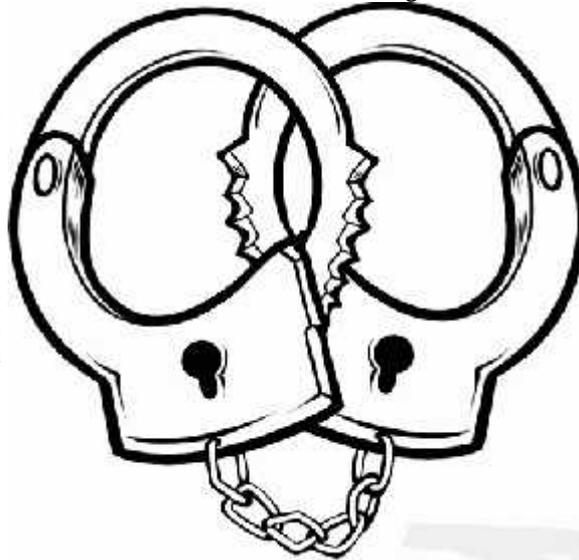
I have been trafficked into prostitution at an off site "brothpital", earning the Don \$20 a bang, while I see others indulge in the black market trade of hardcore pornography.

And I have stayed at the prison hospital, where major medical procedures include removing mobile phones from prisoners digestive systems and the treatment of shrapnel injuries from our explosive gas stoves.

I am learning every day that Prey Sar is a concentrated microcosm of everything that is corrupt and rotten in Cambodia, a bit like Hunts Concentrated Tomato Paste - we call it "essence of Kampuchea".

I figure that the problem with waiting for the person or people who are here to help me, is that they are no doubt stuck behind a very long queue of people waiting to fuck me over, in a system with a 100% conviction rate. Some of these people include;

Lawyers - they pop-up everywhere, like cockroaches. And rather than listen to your instructions, they claim "I know, I know", in exactly the same way as that motodop who drove you around in large circles, before returning you to the point where you started and asking for \$5.



Despite the distinctive appearance of total in-competency, every one of these lawyers has a fancy business card, which proudly announces that he (or she) is royalty, a close relative of the judge and a personal adviser to Hun Sen. In fact, I have now met so many of Hun Sen's personal advisers, that I wonder how he finds time to manage the country so well.

The great thing about lawyers, is there is always another one waiting to take over, and take another fee, and then another fee...

The classic example of this double hit, is provided by Terry, who paid his, (clears throat), lawyer Peng-e-Leng-y \$5,000, who then contacts his family in the UK, and claims his fee

of \$2,000. Of course, he walked into that one, but that was before he arrived here, when we all told him a similar story.

I will add that I have received notes and limited support from a couple of well respected lawyers, their general advice, "find another lawyer".

The sad thing is that once you eventually reach the court, your superstar lawyer and influential socialite, turns into a timid servant of the system and decides that it would be most impolite to argue your case, especially before a judge. Later he will mumble the words, "I did my best" - that is IF you see him again.

Or the other optional, last dash for cash scam, is to re-approach the accused during the period between the hearing, and the verdict announcement. Normally, this is

because there is some small problem like, "no have paper"(which translates to "Lexus needs new tyres"), or the other variation - you will get a reduced sentence if you pay make another small payment of only \$5,000.

Amnesty - like an honest lawyer, this sits in that strange realm between myth, folk law, rumour and the writings of the Cambodia Daily.



There seems to be at least two variations of a similar theme, the first is that you pay \$1,000 which nobody seems to know who to; and then you join a long list of people seeking said amnesty.

Amnesty is apparently awarded during the Cambodian New Year, Water Festival and the King's birthday holidays.

But to date, I have never personally known any person who has been granted amnesty.

The second variation on the theme is a similar cash payment, to a mystery beneficiary, for the remote chance of a six month reduction, which can be awarded one a year, before the same holidays. The maximum reduction is six months in any year - after you have served two thirds of your sentence.

Representatives of - occasionally, we receive a mystery visitor, claiming to be a representative of the court or perhaps the plaintiff.

These people normally arrive with a small bag of mangos and the message that they know you are innocent, but we need a small payment to be sure.

For big fish, negotiations can continue for weeks or months before the case goes to trial, such is the return on the investment (a dodgy business card and a bag of fruit).

Middle men - this is a general "catch all" term for everyone else who volunteers to speak to you while in prison. They always want something.

The classic scam is selling water, yes, not only are there people at Prey Sar prepared to make huge amounts of cash from selling this most basic commodity, there are also middle men who like to add their 25% to the cost of a shower, drink or your laundry.

Water is now my biggest cost (not counting the five lawyers), at around \$30 per month, hundreds of times more expensive than Phnom Penh Water Authority - who supply the middle men.

So lucrative is this trade in H2O, that there are frequent challenges to dominate the trade, with the interested parties strutting around like clucking cocks, marking their territory, putting padlocks on water tanks and working out the next way to fuck over fellow inmates.

The next scam (for locals) is by the casino manager, who runs a dice game, 24/7, where players gamble on the roll of a dice and get a 2-1 return on a 1 in 6 chance.



Most locals don't notice the dodgy odds (or the huge pile of cash in the casino's hands) and believe in luck rather than probability anyway. Other low-ranking prisoners are forced to play, through peer pressure or bullying.

A classic best brother, cellmate scam is, "I can certainly get you out of prison, but first I need

just \$3,000 more to get myself out."

Other scams include recommending yet another lawyer or court negotiator, but few foreigners fall for these scams, even fewer can afford to.

Consular support - as a general warning to tourists and expats alike, it is important to understand how your embassy service will deteriorate remarkably, if you find yourself accused of a crime.



While they may not be a direct middle man, they do represent interests that are more profitable than supporting your minimum human rights - such as that of a trial. So it is not the action that harms your position, it is the total lack of action. The embassy will provide you with a list of good lawyers, who's general advice is to contact a criminal lawyer.

They will bring you mail, but they may or may not help you with outgoing mail - depending on this week's policy, or who in particular you wish to write to.

They will bring you cash from your family, but barely enough to cover water or food - let alone the countless bribes.

They will not discuss the fairness of court process, or attempts of extortion by authorities and they will not help you report such issues.

In short, your rights and status as a citizen, will cease to exist, as will the policies, laws and statutes that support them.

December 25th

Today is much the same as any other day, except for two things; First, the prison guards have thought of another reason to ask foreigners for money - Christmas.

Second, a good friend sent a care package, which included two large M&S Christmas puddings and plenty of Birds custard - enough to brighten up the day of 9 friends in various cells.

Merry Christmas.

Bits from the Beach

Lots of talk down on the coast about WP (work permits) recently. A load of PP cops have been taking in the pleasures of Otres beach.

So picture 12 cops walk into your tranquil picturesque bar asking the western owner do you have a work permit "no, do you need one"? According to the cops the answer is yes and if you cant provide one the fine is an instant \$130 and we will be back in a month to check that you have one.

Other business s on the beach were fined for also not having correct business licenses and any other flaw in their paperwork that they could think off. Total fines ran into 4 figures for some. Some owners had there receipts for fines of not having a WP translated and they translate into no business license fine no mention of a WP. We tried to go to the Department of Labour who issue WPs and they were closed until next week.

If you try and apply for a WP it is possible that they can back date the Permit for every E visa in your passport at \$100 a year. That puts you off especially if you have been here for a few years. The STA (Sihanoukville Tourist Authority) have lobbied for an amnesty on the back date fines but there has been no definite agreement from the right authority. Confusion all around and rumours the cops will be back down from PP next week to target other areas of Sihanoukville.

There is a newish company in Sihanoukville who offer a dog kennels service. They also can train your dog, sell you a dog and everything that goes with the dog. One of their Western staff

who was formerly in the military as a dog trainer was actually AWOL , MIA, etc. his wife was also accusing him of interfering with their kids. They tracked him down to Cambodia and this uncompromising town on the coast. He managed to somehow get wind of the cops tail and high tailed to PP then onto Kampong Cham & eventually was caught in Kratie still riding his

distinctive black Honda.

The number of crazy people on the streets is increasing, at least two hangings one schizophrenic Brit and an Eastern Euro ice whore.

The traffic police now have so many staff they can work thru the lunch hour. If you are going to drive or ride in Sihanoukville you must have a helmet on a motorbike wear a seat belt in a car and have a current Khmer or International driving license....you have been



warned .

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"We accept anybody's ravings—we often print them!"

Father Is Shocked When He Discovers This Horrifying Letter From His Son.

A father passing by his son's bedroom, was astonished to see the bed was nicely made, and everything was picked up. Then, he saw an envelope, propped up prominently on the pillow. It was addressed, "Dad." With the worst premonition, he opened the envelope and read the letter, with trembling hands...

"Dear, Dad. It is with great regret and sorrow that I'm writing you. I had to elope with my new girlfriend, because I wanted to avoid a scene with Mom and you. I've been finding real passion with Stacy, and she is so nice, but I knew you would not approve of her because of her piercings, tattoos, tight motorcycle clothes, and because she is so much older than I am. But it's not only the passion, Dad. She's pregnant. Stacy said that we will be very happy. She owns a trailer in the woods, and has a stack of firewood for the whole winter. We share a dream of having many more children. Stacy has opened my eyes to the fact that marijuana doesn't really hurt anyone. We'll be growing it for ourselves, and trading it with the other people in the commune, for all the cocaine and ecstasy we want. In the meantime, we'll pray that science will find a cure for AIDS, so Stacy can get better. She sure deserves it! Don't worry, Dad. I'm 15, and I know how to take care of myself. Someday, I'm sure we'll be back to visit, so you can get to know your many grandchildren. Love, your son, Joshua. P.S. Dad, none of the above is true. I'm over at Jason's house. I just wanted to remind you that there are worse things in life than the school report that's on the kitchen table. Call when it is safe for me to come home!

AROUND AND OUT

The Foodie

The Chat 'n' Chew on st.172 has been an expat recommendation floating around for some time now. The Foodie heads there to see if it gets the Foodie seal of approval.

The place was so packed on arrival, there was a birthday party going on, that we couldn't get a seat to start with. After a quick beer over the street we returned to grab the one small table that was available. Like many of the places on the street old school rattan furniture is scattered around to be arranged as necessary, today a huge long table ran through the bar. We were seated just to the side next to a wall covered in photographs of rural Cambodian scenes, available for purchase if you'd like a souvenir of your meal, or your trip. There are two tables by the entrance doors for street side dining they are the choice seats in the house and usually full.

The menu features budget Asian dishes, and mid-range international fare. The most expensive dish being the Beef Wellington which I'll have to return for as my appetite wasn't up to it after a large lunchtime BBQ. I opted for the Pad Thai, and my partner the Spaghetti Carbonara. The drinks list has a decent amount of cocktails, a few wine choices by the glass, and reasonably cheap beers. Draught is \$1, we ordered one of those and a mixed fruit shake.

The fruit shake was white and nicely aerated with the sweet flavor of mango most pronounced, and a nice background provided by the other fruits. The beer was that same old amber nectar that still manages to taste good every time. The food arrived just after my second beer, good portions served in large deep pasta plates were a promising start. The Pad Thai featured large chunks of chicken in sauce topping the pasta with a sprinkling of peanuts and some assorted salad items. It was tasty to eat, but not completely authentic with the sweet flavor of the sauce failing to be balanced by the salty fish sauce or sour lime, and a complete lack of spice. The dish was tasty, but I can't say I've ever had the need to add Tabasco to a Thai dish before.

The Carbonara was closer to the traditional dish, but as the menu had stated the sauce was creamy, and a little heavy, which isn't authentic, but the flavors were good, and that made it one of the better versions of this dish that I've tried at this price point. With the price taken into account they get Foodie's approval, for the budget dishes. Would the environment hold up for a more expensive meal with wine, we'll have to check that out another day.

On the Town

Slur bar boasts one of the better stage set ups in town, and the Mekong Messengers are one of the smoother bands here, put those together and you can expect a slick show.

Kristen is a classically trained singer with a love for good ol' blues and soul. Her voice warm and rich as she belts out soulful



CHICKEN PASTA WITH KAMPOT PEPPER

Asian Food		
68. Pad Thai	Fried yellow noodle with fresh prawn, bean curd, chive, bean sprout	3.30
69. Nasi Goreng	Indonesian fried rice	3.50
70. Grilled sliced beef	topped with Asian greens	3.25
71. Khmer curry	Vegetables and tofu served with rice	3.00
72. Khmer curry	Chicken, beef, or pork	3.50
73. Amok	Mekong River fish or chicken served with rice	3.50
74. Tom yam	Chicken, beef or seafood served with rice	3.50
75. Beef luktak	Cambodian beef cooked in oyster sauce with rice and a fried egg on top	3.50
76. Vietnamese sour fish soup		3.25
77. Asian fried rice	Vegetables, beef, pork, chicken or seafood	3.25
78. Wok fried noodles	Vegetable, beef, chicken, pork, or seafood	3.25
79. Mekong River fish	with sweet and sour sauce served with steamed rice	3.25
80. Kai Neuang Cielaw	Wok fried chicken with green peppercorn	3.50

vocals.

Accompanied by a fine selection of Phnom Penh's resident musicians she gets the crowd dancing with rock, soul and blues classics by artists such as Dusty Springfield, Dolly Parton, Etta James and Aretha Franklin. Catch up with the Mekong Messengers mid-December at Equinox in Phnom Penh, or up in Siem Reap for a special New Year's Eve performance.



KAMPOT SUBTERFUGE 1

Confucius was now content with Hookah on one side and a fresh flask of warmed Sake he continued his, almost, unbelievable tale of Kampot's capture of a German, long-distance, specifically passenger modified IXD U-Boat. The German navy, he stated, were fastidious with records and this individual vessel had been designated U-700 but all documents reveal she had, apparently, been destroyed by allied bombing whilst still under construction. Far from the truth, not only was she completed and commissioned in 1942, she was secreted in a pen near Marseilles; already an unmarked ghost ship, Muller and his crew, all carrying false papers identifying them as Free Dutch Nationals who had volunteered for wartime service with the British further added to the mystery.

For Muller a frustrating ten weeks were to follow waiting for his crew to join and ensuring the boat was operational and fuelled and provisioned to his exacting standards. Unknowingly they finally sailed with the same tide that carried Operation Overlord to the Normandy beaches and under cover of darkness made a fast run almost due west to the, supposedly, neutral waters of Spain. Caution was an understatement as the Mediterranean had earned the reputation of being a U-boat graveyard and it was to be a further two full days and nights before they reached their first destination. This was to be the ancient city port of Denia or more specifically just to the north a guarded, secure, compound complex complete with jetties known as Bremner Bungalows. In effect it was an operational SS base allowed to openly but quietly operate by a sympathetic Franco regime. Here, Muller knew, he would have to play a waiting game and the boat was made secure and camouflaged. It was several weeks before his human cargo slowly trickled in to the compound; as the number of passengers grew along with recognition that he and his men would be responsible for a large proportion of senior Nazi hierarchy. For his crew used to the privations of war the abundance of good food, limitless libations, sunshine with sports and swimming was utopia. Eventually though the arrival of a heavily guarded convoy completed their complement; the small party was composed of a very nondescript, white haired, clean-shaven, middle aged man with a gammy leg accompanied by an attractive woman and the most senior of the SS; a very officious, self-important, odious, individual. Muller said nothing but blanched at the responsibility whilst cursing Donitz.

Finally they were ready to leave and one balmy August night they quietly slipped their moorings; fully laden, the crew were outnumbered by their passengers. The delay though allowed Muller to formulate a plan to escape the incredibly dangerous bottleneck of the Straits of Gibraltar. The tuna were running and war or no war the Spanish were starving following years of civil unrest and unprecedented drought; this annual fish massacre may have been manna to Franco but for our captain the key for their safe passage to the Atlantic Ocean. Thus, a few days later, found the submarine submerged and stationary at a depth of 30 metres awaiting the dawn sailing of the Spanish fleet from Algiceros. As it passed over, the submarine, solely relying on the skills of her hydrophone operator became its underwater shadow and the fishing fleet, unwittingly, led her to freedom.

Muller was in no hurry and cautiously took the boat well out into the Atlantic before bearing almost due south down the length of the Dark Continent and within sight of the Skeleton Coast made the first transfer of passengers to a waiting trawler. These included a complete family of eight and two other well known party offi-

cial; even as he turned his boat for Montevideo the captain reflected the adults were returning to the land of their birth.

The voyage to South America passed without incident although it was long, tedious and rough. It was with no little relief to make safe port and to lose a further 20 passengers and the crew were allowed to let off steam whilst the boat was reprovisioned and refuelled. After two weeks, now with just 13 remaining "guests" Muller once again coned again due south and surface running in violent conditions rounded the Horn and entered the Pacific Ocean and set a heading for South Australia and Port Lincoln. Two days short of their destination, one quiet midsummer night, the crew set about changing the identity of the boat for Muller to pull off one of the greatest ruses of the war. He simply surfaced in the bay of the remote bunkering installation; the boat now named HMS Spectre, broke out the Red Ensign and the Jolly Roger and using Aldis and a falsified day code requested permission to take on fuel and water. The geriatric retired servicemen manning the base were totally bamboozled. Muller armed with



perfect vernacular English, a full keg of Jamaican rum, numerous tins of Player's Navy Cut and Capstan Full Strength, sold the hapless, half pissed and toothless Harbour Master an intricate yet totally believable web of lies. They had, he stated, come via Cape Town and Colombo and were destined to join the American Navy for an unspecified mission against the Japanese. Two days out of Ceylon they happened upon a drifting lifeboat containing 10 survivors of a mined passenger vessel which was en route from Durban to Adelaide. They were Dutch Afrikaners seeking a new life and as they all carried Australian immigrant papers Muller would be obliged if he could drop them here. Somehow he got away with the whole charade and departed into the antipodean twilight with several cases of local wine, full tanks minus 10 persons. Only later, much much later, was it learnt this penultimate group not only successfully settled but their offspring are now amongst the most prominent landowners and wine producing families of the Barossa and Hunter Valleys.

At this point Confucius broke his narrative to seek sustenance and the studied silence was only broken by an implored hiss from Tuk urging him to continue. With a mighty swig he obliged and in a quiet voice said the submarine sailed west and then north and leaving Jakarta to starboard skirted her way cautiously along what is now the seaboard of South Vietnam and the entrance to the Gulf of Thailand when disaster struck. Sailing submerged at minimal speed she hit an unmarked coral reef which holed the bow and

damaged the prop housing. With the pressurised inner hull also ruptured the boat took on water triggering the automated safety systems which sealed the vessel into five separate compartments. Muller commanded an emergency surface amid the clamour of gas, water and electrical failure alarms; he already knew that his 21 off-duty crew in the forward section were doomed either gassed or drowned. What was to follow was even worse as they managed to seal the gash and pump the compartment dry and in a nightmare scene retrieve the bodies and roll them into the sea. Observed, but not assisted, by the three remaining passengers the white-haired man was heard to remark they died gloriously in the name of the Fatherland. Something snapped inside the Captain; from nowhere he produced his Mauser service pistol and without a single word head-shot the trio and ordered his shocked men to dispose of the corpses and make the boat ready for surface travel. Even as the main engine was engaged the fresh blood had already attracted the first sharks.

Unable to dive and with no electrical propulsion they managed to coax the mighty marine diesel through that night and the following day but on the second night the inevitable happened and the damaged main shaft bearings seized. Drifting with an incoming tide she was fortunate to merely ground on the sandbar at the northern entrance to our estuary which is where Kampot's claim to a slice of history started though didn't end continued Confucius. My father, he stated, once sure the vessel was secure emptied it of the cargo and half a dozen stout wooden crates originally the property of the last passengers; it came as no surprise to find they contained a King's Ransom in gold and cut gems. He then took his launch to Thailand from where for security reasons not wishing to have his own radio security compromised sent three very detailed encrypted signals – two to India and one to Peking and awaited several weeks before receiving all the replies before returning to Kampot. It was to be a further two months before the fruits of his labours became apparent firstly in the form of a very large 20,000 tonner merchantman named the Aberdeen Star which flew the Union Jack and the Golden Dragon Pennant of McVie the largest of Hongkong's trading houses. The ship also brought with her Cameron McVie, the current Tai Pan, his Comprador Aristotle Wong and a beautiful Chinese/Eurasian lady called Francesca Wong, the chairwoman of Union Kam the world's largest private merchant bank. For my father it was a joyful reunion, after so many years, to be with his brother and cousin and Cameron his childhood friend. For a little boy it was all rather confusing. The ship was laden to the gunnels



with all the staples a near-starving and maltreated population required including a fully equipped and staffed mobile hospital, generators, pumps, marine engines and fuel. Sufficient to kick-start the local economy all funded through the Union Kam and McVie's on the back of the industrial diamonds. It was to be the saving of Kampot and many local communities.

The Aberdeen Star stayed ten days before her extensive cargo was completely lightered ashore. She had hardly left when a monster sized ocean going Chinese whale factory ship anchored in the roads. Complete with a team of marine engineers, scientists and senior officials they were to stay much longer as they scoured, with incredulity, the submarine and with my father translating subjected Muller and his surviving crew to polite yet thorough interrogation on the capabilities of the boat. It was obvious that German technology was way in advance of anything they had ever encountered and they nearly wet themselves with excitement when they realised their prize also included an intact Enigma machine. After several weeks they towed the boat out to their vessel which dwarfed the submarine and simply made her fast against the superstructure and camouflaged with netting sailed her to an undisclosed, mainland, Chinese port. For Cambodia the

quid pro pro has been an astonishing close relationship yet never having to be subjugated by its all powerful near neighbour whilst China gained, literally, years of advanced marine technology.

Confucius paused at this point not only to take a much needed draft but as much to allow the enormity of his tale to reached two bemused brains. Reaching for more wine I broke the silence by enquiring what finally became of Muller and his eight remaining crew. The response was as extraordinary as the rest of the story in that they all were to live long and full lives. With some of the remaining spoils each man was given enough to ensure financial independence for the rest of his days and were relocated to the Thai island of Phuket where with only the exception of the Captain all married local women, had families, developed businesses and became significant land owners. Muller was to outlive all his crew and reached the extraordinary age of 95 and they all took the secret of their incredible voyage to their graves though even today Phuket has very Germanic feel and is a Mecca for its tourists and resident nationals and in that respect parallels Denia. At that point Confucius concluded his narrative and raised his glass to us both with the chilling information that as far as he was aware, apart from him and now ourselves, we were the only living people who knew the truth of U-700. The End. *Lee Charles.*