

THAI PRISONS

List of Thai Prisons



เรือนจำ/ทัณฑสถาน

เขตอิสระ

- Klong Prem Central Prison – เรือนจำกลางคลองเปรม
- Prison Hospital Ratchatan – ทัณฑสถานโรงพยาบาลราชทัณฑ์
- Bang Kwang Central Prison – เรือนจำกลางบางขวาง
- Bangkok Remand Prison – เรือนจำพิเศษกรุงเทพ
- Thonburi Remand Prison – เรือนจำพิเศษธนบุรี
- Central Correctional Institution For Drug Addicts (Bumbad) – ทัณฑสถานบำบัดพิเศษกลาง
- Central Correctional Institution for Young Offenders – ทัณฑสถานวัยหนุ่มกลาง
- Klong Pai Central Prison – ทัณฑสถานหญิงกลาง
 - เรือนจำกลางคลองไผ่
 - เรือนจำชั่วคราวคลองไผ่
- Nakhon Si Thammarat Central Prison – เรือนจำกลางนครศรีธรรมราช
 - เรือนจำพิเศษนครศรีธรรมราช
 - เรือนจำชั่วคราวเขาหมาก
- Nakhon Sawan Central Prison – เรือนจำกลางนครสวรรค์
 - เรือนจำชั่วคราวนครสวรรค์
 - เรือนจำชั่วคราวคลองโพธิ์
- Rayong Central Prison – เรือนจำกลางระยอง

- เรือนจำพิเศษระยอง
- เรือนจำชั่วคราวเขาไม้แก้ว
- เรือนจำกลางราชบุรี
- เรือนจำพิเศษราชบุรี
- เรือนจำชั่วคราวเขามิน
- เรือนจำกลางเขามิน
- ทักษสถานบำบัดพิเศษหญิงชัยบุรี

AREA 1 – เขต1

- เรือนจำพิเศษมีนบุรี
- ทักษสถานหญิงธนบุรี
- เรือนจำจังหวัดชัยนาท
- เรือนจำชั่วคราวเขาพลอง
- เรือนจำจังหวัดนนทบุรี
- เรือนจำจังหวัดปทุมธานี
- เรือนจำอำเภอชัยบุรี
- ทักษสถานบำบัดพิเศษปทุมธานี
- เรือนจำกลางพระนครศรีอยุธยา
- เรือนจำจังหวัดพระนครศรีอยุธยา
- ทักษสถานบำบัดพิเศษพระนครศรีอยุธยา
- ทักษสถานวัยหนุ่มพระนครศรีอยุธยา
- เรือนจำกลางลพบุรี
- เรือนจำพิเศษลพบุรี
- เรือนจำกลางสมุทรปราการ
- เรือนจำพิเศษสมุทรปราการ
- เรือนจำจังหวัดสระบุรี
- เรือนจำจังหวัดสิงห์บุรี
- เรือนจำจังหวัดอ่างทอง
- เรือนจำอำเภอชัยบาดาล
- สถานกักขังกลาง จังหวัดปทุมธานี

AREA 2 – เขต2

- เรือนจำจังหวัดจันทบุรี
- ทักษสถานเปิดทุ่งเบญจา(จันทบุรี)
- เรือนจำกลางฉะเชิงเทรา
- เรือนจำพิเศษฉะเชิงเทรา
- เรือนจำกลางชลบุรี
- เรือนจำพิเศษชลบุรี

- เรือนจำชั่วคราวบ้านบึง(ชลบุรี)
- เรือนจำพิเศษพัทยา
- ทักษสถานหญิงชลบุรี
- เรือนจำจังหวัดตราด
- เรือนจำชั่วคราวเขาระกำ(ตราด)
- เรือนจำจังหวัดนครนายก
- เรือนจำจังหวัดปราจีนบุรี
- ทักษสถานเปิดบ้านเนินสูง(ปราจีนบุรี)
- ทักษสถานเปิดห้วยโป่ง(ระยอง)
- เรือนจำจังหวัดสระแก้ว
- เรือนจำอำเภอekinทร์บุรี
- สถานกักขังกลางจังหวัดตราด

เขต3

- เรือนจำจังหวัดชัยภูมิ
- เรือนจำอำเภอภูเขียว(ชัยภูมิ)
- เรือนจำกลางนครราชสีมา
- เรือนจำพิเศษนครราชสีมา
- เรือนจำชั่วคราวพิมาย(นครราชสีมา)
- ทักษสถานหญิงนครราชสีมา
- ทักษสถานเกษตรอุตสาหกรรมเขาพริก
- เรือนจำอำเภอสีคิ้ว(นครราชสีมา)
- เรือนจำจังหวัดบุรีรัมย์
- เรือนจำชั่วคราวโคมะตูม(บุรีรัมย์)
- เรือนจำอำเภอนางรอง
- เรือนจำจังหวัดยโสธร
- เรือนจำจังหวัดศรีสะเกษ
- เรือนจำกลางสุรินทร์
- เรือนจำพิเศษสุรินทร์
- เรือนจำชั่วคราวโคกตาบัน(สุรินทร์)
- เรือนจำจังหวัดอำนาจเจริญ
- เรือนจำกลางอุบลราชธานี
- เรือนจำอำเภอบัวใหญ่
- เรือนจำอำเภอรัตนบุรี
- เรือนจำอำเภอกันทรลักษ์

เขต4

- เรือจําจังหวัดกาฬสินธุ์
- เรือจําชั่วคราวโคกคําม่วง(กาฬสินธุ์)
- เรือจํากลางขอนแก่น
- เรือจําพิเศษขอนแก่น
- เรือจําอำเภอฟล
- ทํนทสถานบําบัดพิเศษขอนแก่น
- เรือจํากลางนครพนม
- เรือจําพิเศษนครพนม
- เรือจําจังหวัดมหาสารคาม
- เรือจําจังหวัดมุกดาหาร
- เรือจําจังหวัดร้อยเอ็ด
- เรือจําชั่วคราวรอบเมือง(ร้อยเอ็ด)
- เรือจําจังหวัดเลย
- เรือจําจังหวัดสกลนคร
- เรือจําชั่วคราวนาอ้อย(สกลนคร)
- เรือจําอำเภอสว่างแดนดิน(สกลนคร)
- เรือจําจังหวัดหนองคาย
- เรือจําอำเภอบึงกาฬ(หนองคาย)
- เรือจําจังหวัดหนองบัวลำภู
- เรือจํากลางอุดรธานี
- เรือจําพิเศษอุดรธานี

เขต5

- เรือจํากลางเชียงราย
- เรือจําพิเศษเชียงราย
- เรือจํากลางเชียงใหม่
- เรือจําพิเศษเชียงใหม่
- ทํนทสถานหญิงเชียงใหม่
- เรือจําอำเภอฟ้าง
- เรือจําจังหวัดน่าน
- เรือจําชั่วคราวเขาน้อย
- เรือจําจังหวัดพะเยา
- เรือจําจังหวัดแพร่
- เรือจําจังหวัดแม่ฮ่องสอน
- เรือจําอำเภอแม่สะเรียง
- เรือจํากลางลำปาง
- เรือจําพิเศษลำปาง
- ทํนทสถานบําบัดพิเศษลำปาง
- เรือจําจังหวัดลำพูน

- เรือนจำอำเภอเทิง
- สถานกักขังกลางจังหวัดลำปาง

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- เรือนจำกลางกำแพงเพชร
- เรือนจำพิเศษกำแพงเพชร
- เรือนจำกลางตาก
- เรือนจำพิเศษตาก
- เรือนจำอำเภอแม่สอด
- ทักษสถานเปิดหนองน้ำขุน
- เรือนจำจังหวัดพิจิตร
- เรือนจำกลางพิษณุโลก
- เรือนจำจังหวัดพิษณุโลก

Phetchabun Provincial Prison – เรือนจำจังหวัดเพชรบูรณ์

- เรือนจำชั่วคราวแก่งน้อย
- เรือนจำอำเภอหล่มสัก
- ทักษสถานหญิงพิษณุโลก
- เรือนจำจังหวัดสุโขทัย
- เรือนจำอำเภอสวรรคโลก
- เรือนจำชั่วคราวหนองเรียง
- เรือนจำจังหวัดอุตรดิตถ์
- เรือนจำจังหวัดอุทัยธานี

AREA 7 – เขต7

Kanchanaburi Prison – เรือนจำจังหวัดกาญจนบุรี

- เรือนจำอำเภอทองผาภูมิ

Nakhon Pathom Central Prison – เรือนจำกลางนครปฐม

Nakhon Pathom Special Prison – เรือนจำพิเศษนครปฐม

- เรือนจำชั่วคราววังตะกู
- เรือนจำจังหวัดประจวบคีรีขันธ์

Phetchaburi Central Prison – เรือนจำกลางเพชรบุรี

Phetchaburi Special Prison – เรือนจำพิเศษเพชรบุรี

- เรือนจำชั่วคราวเขากลิ้ง

Samut Songkhram Central Prison – เรือนจำกลางสมุทรสงคราม

Samut Songkhram Special Prison – เรือนจำพิเศษสมุทรสงคราม

Samut Sakhon Prison – เรือนจำจังหวัดสมุทรสาคร

- เรือนจำชั่วคราวบางหญ้าแพรก

Suphanburi Prison – เรือนจำจังหวัดสุพรรณบุรี (VIRUS)

AREA 8 – เขต8

Krabi Provincial Prison – เรือนจำจังหวัดกระบี่

- เรือนจำชั่วคราวกระบี่น้อย

Chumporn Provincial Prison – เรือนจำจังหวัดชุมพร

Lang Suan District (Chumporn) Prison – เรือนจำอำเภอหลังสวน(ชุมพร)

- เรือนจำชั่วคราวห้วยกลิ้ง
- เรือนจำอำเภอทุ่งสง(นครศรี)
- เรือนจำอำเภอปากพนัง(นครศรี)
- ทักษสถานวิทยุมนนครศรีธรรมราช

Phang Nga Provincial Prison – เรือนจำจังหวัดพังงา

- เรือนจำชั่วคราวเขาตอย
- เรือนจำอำเภอตะกั่วป่า(พังงา)

Phuket Provincial Prison – เรือนจำจังหวัดภูเก็ต

- เรือนจำชั่วคราวบ้านบางโจ

Ranong Provincial Prison – เรือนจำจังหวัดระนอง

- เรือนจำกลางสุราษฎร์ธานี

Surat Thani Special Prison – เรือนจำพิเศษสุราษฎร์ธานี

- เรือนจำชั่วคราวทุ่งเขน(สุราษฎร์ธานี)

Samui District Prison – เรือนจำอำเภอเกาะสมุย

- เรือนจำอำเภอไชยา(สุราษฎร์ธานี)

เขต9

- เรือนจำจังหวัดตรัง
- เรือนจำชั่วคราวเหรียญทอง
- เรือนจำจังหวัดนราธิวาส
- เรือนจำชั่วคราวโคกยามู
- เรือนจำกลางปัตตานี
- เรือนจำพิเศษปัตตานี
- เรือนจำกลางพัทลุง
- เรือนจำพิเศษพัทลุง
- ทักษสถานเปิดบ้านนาง(พัทลุง)
- เรือนจำกลางยะลา
- เรือนจำพิเศษยะลา
- เรือนจำอำเภอเบตง(ยะลา)
- เรือนจำกลางสงขลา
- เรือนจำจังหวัดสงขลา
- ทักษสถานหญิงสงขลา
- ทักษสถานบำบัดพิเศษสงขลา

- เรือนจำจังหวัดสตูล
- เรือนจำอำเภอหนองบัว

2. Samut Prakan Central Prison



Towards the end of the 20th Century, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Corrections developed a new project to build a new central prison for Samut Prakan to solve the problem of overcrowding. They were also aware that the opening of the new international airport would see an increase of foreign prisoners. The cabinet agreed to a budget of 647,952,182.48 baht. The land was purchased for 147,462,500 baht and 500,489,682.48 baht was left for construction. However, an extra 12,060,797 baht was needed for a building for women prisoners. The new total now being 660,020,979.48 baht.



The new prison covered an area of 58 acres or 235,200 square metres. The area inside the prison walls is 18 acres or 73,600 square metres. Work on the new prison started in 1997 and was finished in 2001. The first group of prisoners was transferred here on Sunday 27th May 2001. The new prison is in Klong Dan District about 35 kms from the city center and the old prison. Samut Prakan Central Prison is regarded as one of the most modern prisons in the country.

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Thai Prison Life – ชีวิตในคุกไทย



Prison inmate volunteers help during an annual riot drill practice.



Prison Population 2013:

1 Jan: 214,833 men & 36,986 women = 251,819
1 Feb: 219,466 men & 37,857 women = 257,323
1 Mar: 223,501 men & 38,576 women = 262,077



A former foreign inmate at Samut Prakan prison says that while sleeping head to foot with 60 other convicts and dealing with meal-time misery wasn't fun, his time incarcerated wasn't the nightmare he was expecting



PRISON CELLS: This is a rare photograph showing the overcrowding in Thai prisons. The middle row has 2-3 people lying side by side. In all there are about 50-60 people in this small cell. There isn't room for everyone to sleep on their backs like this. Many people can only sleep on their side. If they want to sleep on their back, or just to have that extra space, they then have to buy that right. There is an open toilet in the same room with a low wall around it. If someone wants to go to the toilet during the night, they then have to clamber over all these limbs. For this reason it is lucky the light is left on all night. However, the bright light makes it difficult to get any sleep



CORRECTIONS MUSEUM: Maha Chai Prison was built by King Rama V in 1889 after a visit to a prison in Singapore. By Thai standards, it was regarded as the first modern prison. By 1990, the prison was not only old but also overcrowded. The prisoners were moved mainly to Lad Yao Prison. Then Maha Chai Prison was knocked down to make way for a public park and museum. Today, the only evidence of the former prison is the wall along the east side, the main gate, cell block 9 and three of the administration buildings. The small door in the above picture was used to take dead bodies out of the prison. In the Corrections Museum you can learn about Thai prison life and the forms of punishment and torture used since the Ayutthaya period [



EXECUTION IN THAILAND: Up until 1934, the official method of execution in Thailand was by decapitating. This was then considered to be barbaric and the method

was changed. Over a period of 71 years, a total of 319 prisoners were then executed in Thailand by firing squad. Despite its name, this form of execution wasn't carried out by a line of men carrying rifles. In Thailand, a single sub-machine gun was used from a distance of about four metres. A total of 15 bullets were loaded though only about 8 or so were needed from a single burst. The last execution by this method was carried out as late as 11th December 2002. The last executioner to use this method in Thailand was Chavoret Jaruboon



INSIDE A THAI COURT: The Thai courtroom isn't very large. At the front is the raised platform where the judges sit. Above them is a portrait of H.M. The King. Below it is the symbol of the court, a downward pointing dagger with scales balancing on it. In front of the bench sits the court clerk. On the judges right is the table for the prosecution. On the left is the table for the defense. In the middle of the room, facing the judges bench, is the chair and table for the witness. The room is roughly split in half with a low railing. Behind this are the benches where members of the public and interested parties sat

Prisons chief vows crackdown after inmate has photo posted on Facebook



A Facebook account shows photos of an inmate in Phitsanulok prison.

my understanding is that the chains are only worn in the first month or two of ones sentence..

Can anyone confirm or deny this?



The can be put in chains for making problems or disobeying the guards or even if found with things like cellphones, drugs, etc. this thing with the cellphones will never stop, the guards make too much money with it.

For example, a simple Nokia phone will cost anything from 60,000 baht, a phone with a web browser costs around 200,000 baht, iPhone 4 is sold in the prisons for 350,000 - 400,000 baht + !! With these kind of figures, how could it stop? It's just impossible.

This is not the only thing that goes on that makes the guards money of course, there is the private rooms in bang Kwan, offered to the prisoners @ 10,000 baht a week and, believe it or not, you are allowed to have (buy) anything you want to go in there, sofa, chairs, plasma tv and DVD player, cooker, etc.

it sounds unbelievable but it is genuinely available if you are able to pay. I know someone in there (bang Kwan) who calls me occasionally from his private cell who tells me that, as everyone, he was scared of the thai prison system before he went in but now he's seen how it really is, he has I fear of it so will do anything he wants if/when he gets out.

Luckily (for him) he is from Sweden so, although he got life (commuted from death sentence) he will be sent back to Sweden, through the bi-lateral agreement after 8 years to serve the rest of his sentence there (he will serve only an extra 6 months in Sweden before being released).

As he says, as long as you have money, thai prisons are better than the European ones As everything is available (except your freedom of course!).

Thailand's Most Notorious Prison, Bang Kwang, Otherwise Known As "Big Tiger" Or "The Bangkok Hilton"



Bangkok's Bang Kwang Prison has a reputation as one of the hardest jails on the planet, known for poor living conditions, gross human rights violations and violent abuse inflicted on prisoners at the hands of the guards. All prisoners are required to wear leg irons, having chains fastened to their ankles and welded in place. In the book "The Damage Done", former prisoner Warren Fellows describes how if you fail to pay the standard bribe to the prison blacksmith, he intentionally fastens the shackles far too tight, causing serious wounds and infection to the lower leg and ankle area.

The prison has earned the nickname of "Big Tiger", as Thai prisoners liken the jail to a "man eater", a place where men are chewed up and spit out. Prisoners tell stories of being starved, deprived of any meat, and given nothing but white rice. In the past it had been that Thai prisoners would be given more nutritious red rice (similar to brown rice), while foreign prisoners would only be given white rice. When foreign governments questioned this policy, labeling it as discrimination, the Thai authorities responded by giving all prisoners the less nutritious white rice.

Due to the lack of meat available for consumption inside the prison, inmates have been known to hunt and kill rats inside the prison walls, butchering them and trading them as if they were livestock. Warren Fellows describes this as being much like a butcher shop, with a rat drawn and quartered hanging on display for all to see. He said that many of the inmates would trade cigarettes for a side of rat, or a rat stew.

In his book, Fellows offers countless detailed accounts of the horrifying events that go on behind the walls of Bangkok's most feared prison, perhaps the most disturbing story was a tale of conjugal visits for prisoners in the prison barnyard. According to Fellows, prisoners would pay bribes to the guards in order to afford them some quality alone time with the pigs of the prison's farm yard.

Life inside the prison is unbearable, especially if you are not one of the few that are fortunate enough to have the financial means to purchase what little food and comforts that are allowed. Those who

have no money to buy food and cigarettes, will end up working as virtual slaves for those prisoners who are slightly more fortunate. Due to the nature of corruption in Thailand, prison guards are easily bribed, and drug use is common among inmates.

Perhaps the most famous guest at the legendary Bangkok Hilton is the Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout, who was the subject of the Hollywood film "Lord Of War", starring Nicholas Cage. The film is based on the life of Viktor Bout, who was played in the movie by Cage.

Mr. Bout has since been extradited to America, where he says the conditions are even worse than they are in Bangkok. In a recent statement he said " It's like comparing a zoo and a mental hospital. In Thailand inmates are kept in cages in relatively fresh air and treated like animals. In the United States they are treated like highly dangerous lunatics. Total control of each movement. No sunlight, air or sky. Nothing of the kind."

The Real Bangkok Hilton - Permanent Shackles used in Thailand Prison

March 20 2006 at 4:34 AM



[asiancuffs](http://asiancuffs.com)

If anyone have seen the BBC documentary "The Real Bangkok Hilton", you may noticed that the inmates are bolted in permanent shackles while serving their time at the Bangkwang Prison. I travelled to Bangkok a few times after I watched that documentary and always ask about these shackles when I stroll the police gear street. My first attempt was a failure due to language barrier. During my second visit, I printed out captures from the documentary to show the people and they looked they understood what I mean. On my third visit, they handed me a wrapped box and I thought it was the shackles. After i opened it, it was a pair of Peerless style leg irons made in Taiwan. Then I used my body language doing the gesture of hammering, pounding... and finally they understood what I mean.

My recent visit to Bangkok last week was a fruitful one. The guy were able to get another Thai who speaks a little English to be our bridge of communication. To my understanding, the shop keeper is able to get those shackles (in many countries, with \$\$, eveeverything is possible). I also told them my request, I want unused shackles. It seems that we have mutual understanding now.

From the documentary, the shackles has an oval shape with 15-18 inches apart. It came in 2 versions (as seen from the documentary), one with smaller chain links like the AHC leg irons' chain and the other has 4 or 5 chain links each of about 3 inches long (similiar to the end link of the Martin Link). Judging form the image on TV, the weight shall not be as heavy as the Taiwan's shackles.

After I returned home, I called the "bridge" a few times and to my understanding, the store keeper can get them and send to me. He have not quote me the price yet, but I have told him to get as many as he can.

I will update you with more about this shackle and if anyone have pictures of this kind of Thai shackles, please send it to me (asiancuffs@hotmail.com) as I only have very limited information on this (only from the documentary, no close ups), so that I can compare to what he gets for me.

The truth about life behind bars from a recently released former drug-addict

Gor is a young Thai man recently released from a provincial prison after serving a three-year term. He was an amphetamine (ya ba) addict but was found with enough pills to classify him as a distributor. Gor might have had a lighter sentence had he confessed to the court, but he chose to fight the case and lost. He also lost an appeal for a reduction to his sentence. Prison has taken three years from this man's life and his continued addiction could have been even more costly.

Gor is unique in that he was gainfully employed before going to prison and was able to return to his old job on his release. More often released drug users return to criminal ways.

He was primarily a consumer of drugs, and during his lengthy time on bail he managed to cut down his dependency and was "clean" when he entered prison, but while there going "cold turkey" was his only option.

Q: You claim the police beat you to obtain a confession?

A: Yes, I was beaten, but the confession was later revoked in court by my not-guilty plea.

Q: What did the police do to you?

A: They know how to beat people without leaving any marks. My hand was twisted; I was kicked in the armpit and was pushed face-down to the floor like in the movies. However, it was the karate chop to the Adam's apple that convinced me that they really meant business. I signed.

Q: Do you have any advice for amphetamine addicts?

A: Yes, kick the habit or you will end up in jail.

Q: It took three years of imprisonment to cure you of the addiction. Wasn't there an easier way of doing it?

A: No, not for me, I had to learn the hard way.

Q: Do you recommend this for others?

A: No, for others it might not work. Many just don't want to break the habit. For me, I don't want to go back to prison, so I stay away from drugs. Others go back because they feel more comfortable inside. Outside they have no job, no place to sleep and constant anxiety. Prison is a home, the only real home some know. They have few options.

Q: How much ya ba were you using?

A: I was smoking up to 10 tablets per day.

Q: How could you afford it? Why did you use so much?

A: Seven years ago, when I started, pills were only 50 baht each. I needed more as time went by. The higher dosages tasted good and helped me in my work. Pills are now 200-300 baht each.

Q: The internet details horrific symptoms of amphetamine addiction – black teeth, dilated pupils, lack of sleep, weight loss and bad temper. The addicts I've met don't show these symptoms and they don't appear dangerous. What do you think?

A: They won't acquire those symptoms unless they are at it for 10 years. They won't get dangerous unless they run out of money.

Q: Do ya ba addicts have withdrawal symptoms?

A: Not really, but when coming off the drug, they tend to sleep and eat too much.

Q: I have written about a women's prison and I understand it is pretty tame compared to the men's. What goes on in a men's prison?

A: Gambling and the fights it generates are the main problems. Inmates bet on anything, like the flip of a pack of cigarettes or who scores the next goal in a football game. Playing cards are often made from cardboard boxes.

Q: Do guards or trusties beat prisoners?

A: Beatings are infrequent, but when done they are for a good reason. If a guard is attacked a trusty [prisoner given special responsibilities because of good behaviour] usually comes to his defence. Trusties will engage in beatings if instructed by a guard.

Q: Do you have to get down on your knees when talking to prison guards?

A: We are supposed to but this is not always done, except for high ranking officials.

Q: Were there any drugs in there?

A: Very little. However, cough medicine was available. They do urine tests, but trusties get tipped off and inmates can cheat by drinking water.

Q: I understand convicts can brew their own moonshine.

A: Yes, you use fruit, sugar, water and a little bread for yeast. You seal the brew in a plastic bag for a few days. However, the resulting concoction is likely to contain fungus and make you sick.

Q: Did you undergo a drug therapy programme?

A: No, I was classified as a distributor, not as an addict, so there was no therapy.

Q: Did you undergo any vocational training?

A: No, I was a busy trusty and didn't apply for any of those programmes.

Q: Do they do thorough prison searches?

A: Yes, but a major search is done only once a year, and they don't find much of anything. It's conducted by guards from other facilities. They search cells, lockers and work areas, but seldom look for buried items.

The warden knows in advance and issues warnings. He does not want the Corrections Department to find anything that would cause him to lose his job.

Q: How is prison food?

A: The food is okay by Thai standards.

Foreigners can buy more suitable food or even cooled bottled water if they have the money. We usually drink tap water.

Q: Do they separate inmates by the nature and severity of crime?

A: No, not in my prison. They were all mixed – murders, rapists and drug pushers.

Q: Was there any homosexual activity?

A: This goes on anywhere you can hide.

Q: You have 55 people in your cell and they spend 14 hours in there. What goes on at night?

A: The cell boss trusty can arrange anything. Sleeping positions can be switched and guards rarely come by during the evening.

Q: Can one choose sex partners from other cells?

A: Yes, cell rosters can be changed. You can get a willing boy for seven packs of cigarettes and a ladyboy for 10. Ladyboys were about 3-4% of the inmates. They use real make-up and style their compulsory short haircuts. They are not pretenders. Our ladyboys were recently segregated at night but were available for daytime tricks for a single pack or two. [Cigarettes are used for currency, with one pack worth 58 baht.]

Q: Is there any rape in the prison?

A: There is, but not as much as before. This can get inmates into trouble so they use persuasion. On the other hand, illegal immigrants are easy targets because they speak a different language and are held for only 48 days.

Q: Is there a penalty for infringements?

A: Yes, fighting is the most common offence and combatants are sent to a special punishment cell called kung soi.

Q: What is kung soi like?

A: They are locked up for 24 hours with no lights and no TV. A cell designed for six could have as many as 15. If the fighting was between two gangs, they put them all together, because in kung soi everyone becomes friends.

Q: Are prisoners shackled?

A: Yes, they are put in leg irons for bad behaviour but this should not last for more than a month.

Q: Do they have special cells for VIP prisoners?

A: Not in our provincial prison. These special prisoners would probably serve their time in Bangkok.

Q: What is your main complaint about the place?

A: Boredom, but sport on Sundays and television in the evening helped.

Q: What is cell TV like?

A: Television consists mostly of pirated and repetitive video CDs.

There is no TV news or sport, probably because they might stimulate fights and gambling. Also, no newspapers so we must keep up-to-date from visitors or new prisoners.

On the other hand, there appears to be no censorship of video CDs. Sex and violence are okay.

For example, we saw the James Bond film Royal Casino. If one prefers reading to TV, the sound level is high and the lighting substandard.

Q: What is the suicide rate?

A: There were lots of attempted suicides, but few were successful. Prisoners look for sympathy to relieve themselves of gambling debts.

Q: How do foreign prisoners behave?

A: They are always complaining because they cannot accept they are in Thailand and must do things the Thai way. On the other hand, foreigners are seldom involved in fights. We had over 100 foreigners, but few Europeans. Staff from European and North American embassies insist on transfers to Bangkok to make their monthly visits more convenient. Foreigners from third-world countries get embassy visits only by request.

Q: How was the health situation?

A: TB and Aids are the main concerns.

I had sputum tests for TB but only one chest X-ray in three years. Aids patients are separated at night, but walk around during the day. They're not given any work and don't mix with the other prisoners. Illegal tattooing is rampant, but the needles are presumably cleaned.

Q: What is the safety situation

A: Cells are lit through the night, but are completely dark if there's a power failure. There are, however, only weak emergency lights outside. In my three years we had no fire drills and fortunately no fires.

Q: Was there any missionary activity at your prison?

A: There were mostly Muslim clerics inside. I didn't see many Christian missionaries and was unaware of any baptisms.

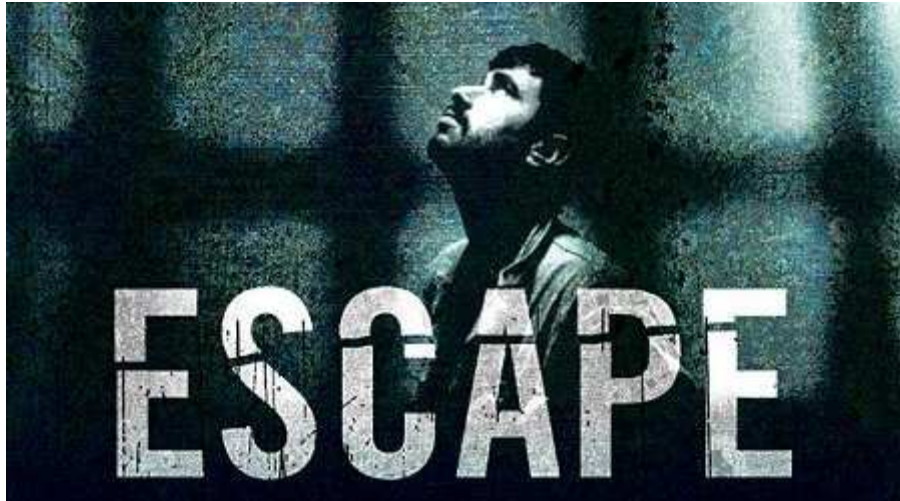
Q: After three years in jail, what do you have to say about prison reform, or to the Corrections Department?

A: Correction officials give too much authority to the trustees. The guards are the officers and the trustees are the sergeants. On the whole, I think the Corrections Department is doing just fine. There is nothing they can do about overcrowding other than building new prisons.

Q: What were your best and worst experiences?

A: The first few days were terrible. The best was the day of release

Escape



It has almost become fashionable these days to write books about life in Thai prisons. “The Damage Done” by Warren Fellows is probably the most well known of the prison books, though it has been criticized by some for exaggerating prison conditions. “Forget You Had a Daughter” is another popular firsthand account of life on the inside. This time a woman from the UK. Another new prison book is “Welcome to Hell”, which for a change, tells the story of someone who was not convicted of drug smuggling. This guy was convicted of murder. There are also books from the other side of the wall. For example, “The Angel of Bang Kwang” which tells the story of an Australian woman who frequently visited foreign prisoners in the notorious maximum security prison. “You’ll Never Walk Alone” is about the struggle of an Australian woman to get her brother transferred back to an Australian prison. And then there is “The Last Executioner” which tells the viewpoint from a Thai prison guard at Bang Kwang. I think that the only story missing here is that of a Thai prisoner. Though that will probably be written by Panrit “Gor” Daoruang who is presently serving in Samut Prakan Central Prison.

At first I didn’t think that it was possible to have another prison book that would explore life in Thai prisons. I thought that just about every angle and story had been told. But then this month came the publication of “Escape” by David McMillan and published by Monsoon Books. This tells the true story of the only Westerner ever to break out of Thailand’s Bangkok Hilton, aka.Klong Prem Prison. This event took place about ten years ago. I have never heard of anyone escaping from a prison in Thailand before. I must admit I was sceptical. I googled some keywords but couldn’t dig up anything. Then finally I discovered a small article released by the newswires about the escape. It told of the escape of “Daniel Westlake” which was the name on the forged passport that David was carrying at the time of his arrest. In the article, the Deputy Director General of the

Ministry of Corrections said “I am quite confident we will get him soon”. Unknown to him at the time, David was already long gone. David’s very readable book, “Escape” tells the story of his arrest and the three years that he spent in Klong Prem. Despite having just published a book, David is, for obvious reasons, hard to track down. He won’t be doing any book signing and he won’t be doing a press conference. However, he did agree to do an exclusive interview for thai-blogs.com.

ESCAPE FROM KLONG PREM PRISON – PART 1

As the account of your escape reads just like a novel, was any of the prison life and actual escape dramatized in order to make a better story?

No, all the events written of in “Escape” really happened. Some readers might think the escape seemed too easy rather than too dramatic. I suppose many stories of successful escapes read that way. Yet think of this: those who fail never get to tell their stories – their silence comes from death or their consequent chained entombment in black dungeons. The ‘novelish’ style of the book is intended to put the reader as much as possible in my shoes and not reveal things more quickly than they were revealed to me.

Although ten years have now passed, are you still in danger of being extradited back to Thailand?

It’s worth saying that I was never convicted of the charge made; had not been caught with any drugs and strongly defended myself in court. Yet, from what I saw of the courts, I had no confidence in any acquittal. I’m sure my sentence would have been death – later reduced to life, I suppose, as Thailand hasn’t executed anyone for drugs alone for many years.

As I was unconvicted, the Interpol warrant issued was for the escape alone. Extradition laws are complex. Those agreements only allow whoever is extradited to be tried for the particular thing on the warrant. No old or new charges added. Some years ago the Danish police questioned and detained me on another matter. The Thai authorities were informed that I was held, yet made no request. Possibly because EU law does not allow extradition on capital charges.

Despite all that, I live carefully. My email address is London, but I reside in a jurisdiction whose judges are unlikely to send me to Asia.

I presume then that you have never been back to Thailand. Even under an assumed name would be dangerous for you. If the charges against you were ever dropped, would you go back?

I would like to visit Thailand but I can’t imagine forgiveness coming easily. Perhaps when I am ninety and toothless someone might recommend me for a pardon. It’s a pity, for I have always felt very close to Thailand.

I was going to ask you about that. I had the impression in the book that you were already fairly fluent in Thai before you were arrested. Is this true and what kind of relationship did you have with Thailand before this event?

My first trip to Thailand was in 1976 when I was 21 years old. Bangkok was almost a quiet town then. One could set up ten-pin bowling along New Petchburi Road on a Sunday. Serene and beautiful in many ways. That's perhaps an advantage I had compared to other farangs in Klong Prem. I had enough knowledge and affection for the Thai people not to resent and become twisted with bitterness about my fate.

I tried to sound neutral in *Escape*, although some people – I read Bernard Trink in the *Post* – misunderstood my observations of my fellow Westerners. To call all the Thai prison officers simply corrupt is, I think, a narrow Eurocentric view. Most of the guards felt that the favours they gave some prisoners were not a form of accepting bribes. They saw themselves as being considerate to those who were deserving. Those so kindly treated would return that spirit in gifts. So, is it a naive coincidence that those who were deserving happened to be the ones with money? Not in their view. A rather old-fashioned interpretation of karma: that the lucky, those with money, must be good people somehow.

Do you have any idea what the prison authorities might think of your book?

Escape is certainly critical of Klong Prem, and no one in authority welcomes that. However, jail authorities know that jails are secure only because the inmates agree to remain imprisoned. Inmate trusties are the real guards, and security is not made by adding shackles.



Klong Prem Prison – The infamous ‘Bangkok Hilton’

Ten years have passed since your escape and I would expect that they would have made it more difficult for people to escape. Do you think that you could escape again today using the same method?

If I ever find myself locked up again, I’ll let you know! There are only three truly important things in successful escaping: the will to leave; the ability to keep secrets; and most importantly, having close friends. Can you imagine where I’d be now if I’d arrived at that flat in Lat Phrao, groped behind that bathroom mirror only to find that no passport had been left?

I would imagine that everything hinged on having a new passport. But, these days it is not a simple matter of just forging a passport and visa stamps. Immigration now has computerized records of you entering and leaving the country. You cannot leave the country if their computer has no record of you arriving. If you didn’t have help on the outside to hack into their computer, what would you have done without a passport?

You’re correct there. I had grave doubts at first that the necessary entries would be added to the immigration computer. So, an early plan was this: to fly immediately to Hat Yai on the earliest domestic flight. Then to drive – probably by taxi – to Satun on the southern coast. There is a ferry that operates between Satun and Langkawi Island, a territory of Malaysia. The Satun border post was then little more than a shack and certainly had no computer.

However, you can imagine the dangers in that. Just a few examples: if the Hat Yai flight was cancelled or delayed; the clear memory that any taxi driver would have had of the farang that asked to be driven 100 kilometres to Satun; possibly arriving late for the ferry; then having to hide out in Malaysia or switch to the spare passport I carried. All risky, to say the least.

As a foreigner in Thailand, it is almost like you have to break out twice. First from the prison and then the country. In your book you talked about two Israelis who escaped from Chiang Mai Central Prison. Although their prison break was successful they were eventually caught hiding in a local guesthouse. What was their biggest mistake and if you were in their shoes, with the same resources, what would you have done differently?

The Israelis had no real plans beyond the wall. If they’d had friends, at least someone could have driven them separately to some previously rented accommodation. They had time to fly south, and they should have split up and done so. I don’t think they even had proper street clothes. Quite probably they lost their nerve and stayed together to reassure each other. Not many people are confident alone. The history of escapes is stained with those who could not function alone.

Which part of this so-called double escape is the easiest? Escaping your captors or evading capture in order to flee the country?

That depends on the country. In Thailand at that time, getting out of Klong Prem was difficult. Making those preparations as a farang demanded utter secrecy. Every element of good fortune became essential: the existence of an army-boot factory for the rope; the paper factory for the long bamboo poles – even the umbrella factory, as I'm sure I would have been spotted by the tower guards without that umbrella shielding my pale face.

You know, that black umbrella sat on a special stand for years afterward in the study of an influential tribal lord in Baluchistan. He said it would bring him luck.

Was there much publicity about your escape or was the government trying to hush things up? I saw a story from the newswires three days after the event. In it, a government official was saying how you would soon be caught and that he was sure that you were still in the country. Was this all too little too late?

As with the Chiang Mai escape, there was a delay in making the breakout public. At Bangkok, prison officials sent guards to Don Muang airport around 10:00am (just as I was taking off) that day hoping, it seems, to keep the escape and a hopeful re-capture 'in-house'. A full 24 hours passed before my escape was made public. Not a cover up but a hope by the authorities of Klong Prem that they could find me without official police help.

How confident were you that the escape would work? Would you have tried again if the first attempt failed?

There would have been no second chance. Assuming I survived after being caught (you might recall the four from Klong Prem who were shot following an attempt in 2000), I would have been chained to a wall in a Bangkwang dungeon. Now that would be something!

You have certainly had plenty of experience of prisons around the world. In your late twenties, you served ten years in an Australian prison. There were also reports of a dramatic escape attempt by helicopter. Straight after that you were in Thailand and in prison there for three years before escaping. Then you were detained in Asian and European prisons over the last few years. How does Thai prisons compare to others around the world?

I've been in worse prisons. By that I mean terrifying. There was two months in solitary in Pakistan when I was fed only watery beans poured through the bars with a piece of roof guttering, for the solitary door was never opened. Still, I managed to get out. Not using money as many like to assume, but by absorbing everyone there.

I worry about people who get stuck. Simon Mann's friend Nick du Toit in Black Beach prison, Equatorial Guinea, for example. What were they playing at? Such delusions of a

lost – and rightly damned – age! Even so, I can't help wondering what might be possible. If they could get out.

Your account differs from other Thai prison books as you seem to take everything in your stride. Whilst others painted a grisly picture, saying that their prison experience was the worst ever, you seemed to take a calm and almost detached look at life in Thai prisons. I presume money helped you to a certain extent. But, what part of your character helped you survive those three years? What advice would you give to people trying to survive in a foreign prison?

It is essential to recover quickly from any culture shock. To crawl out of denial and transform oneself in some kind of Zen manner. To say to yourself: 'I am at one with these people; I will build here, I will help those around me.' By such means, fear is replaced by understanding. With that knowledge, choices can be made.

I hope "Escape" reveals that key to survival. I was not particularly rich; couldn't buy my way out. Yet I embraced the very ground and created a little family. Of course that, like all things there, was actually a false construct for survival, and I know that my leaving was in part a betrayal.

So, what do you think of books like "Damage Done"? Do they paint an accurate picture?

I'm not a big fan of "My Time in Hell" books about prison experiences. Exaggerated or not, many of those accounts seem totally self-absorbed. Blind to the insights to be gained from the extreme conditions that reveal so much of others.

I was determined that "Escape" would contain no wailing about my enduring the unendurable – that kind of thing. We are all the result of those layers of evolution that create the human disguise, and I hope readers will more easily find themselves reflected and sensing the freedom by standing as though with me on that one still night in Klong Prem.

You certainly don't seek our sympathy which is to your credit. In some ways you are a kind of anti-hero as you are a self confessed drug smuggler but at the same time you were the voice of the underdog. I was certainly cheering for you by the end.



Klong Prem Prison in Bangkok, Thailand

Most escape books have been written about Prisoners of War (POWs) from the Second World War. For example, *The Great Escape*, *The Wooden Horse* and *Colditz*. I actually have all these books and more as I had a bit of an unhealthy interest in prisons and escaping as a youngster. I say unhealthy as I had something like 300 books on escaping. As I grew up I changed my interest to travel books, which I guess is another form of escape, though a little bit more healthy. Now it would seem that in the last year I have gone full circle and have gone back to an interest in prisons and how to escape from them. So, it was inevitable that I purchased a copy of “*Escape*” by David McMillan as soon as it hit the bookstands here.

But of course, this guy isn't a POW. He is a self-confessed drug smuggler. A professional in fact who has been in the business since his twenties. I know some people will not want to touch this book because of the background of the author. Nor will these same people go to visit convicted foreigners in Thai prisons. They say that they deserved to be locked up for a long time and that we shouldn't give them any sympathy or support. On the other hand, there are people like Susan Aldous, who has been dubbed “The Angel of Bang Kwang” for her work with foreign prisoners in that maximum security prison. To her it doesn't matter what crime they committed. To find out exactly why she does that, we will be interviewing Susan later this month. At the same time, we will be interviewing an inmate of Bang Kwang who is presently serving 33 years.

The following is the conclusion of my interview with David McMillan.

ESCAPE FROM KLONG PREM PRISON – PART 2

A recent book reviewer criticized you because you didn't “warn people against becoming mules”. Do you think that was an unfair comment?

Well, do you think that books should carry health warnings? Let me briefly tell the story of three Pakistani guys I met by chance in a bar five or six years ago. We got talking as we found we had mutual friends. Some years before, these three and another countryman had been caught running dope into Saudi Arabia. That had been in the early '90s. Prices are very high in Saudi Arabia as you might guess.

One thing about the Saudi judicial process: it is quick. They had been sentenced to death within a couple of months. And I think their appeal process was over before they'd returned to the prison. The knives were being sharpened to hack off their heads, and they were apparently resigned to their fates – they were four days away from execution. Then, an unusual thing happened.

My companions at the bar took another brandy apiece before explaining what happened next.

Not long before they were arrested, Iraq had invaded Kuwait. Saudi Arabia felt under threat and half the world's armies joined in the UN-mandated rout of Saddam's troops. As thanks for all this support, the Saudis made some gestures of gratitude. Among those gestures was a royal decree to free, immediately and unconditionally, all foreigners from their prisons.

Three days before a certain and grisly death all four Pakistanis (and quite a few more) were freed and repatriated. One was so happy he died of heart failure two weeks after returning to Multan.

I presume they had now learned their lesson.

Well, after hearing that happy ending to the story, we finished our drinks and went our separate ways, as we were all in the transit lounge bar of Dubai international airport. The three Pakistanis I'd met boarded their various flights – Frankfurt and Chicago – and I went my own way. Each one of them was carrying a kilo of heroin strapped to his waist.

I can't imagine that there are many people today who need any warning about the dangers of carrying drugs.

That is the thing. I have lived in Thailand for a long time, and it always surprises me when I read a newspaper report of yet another foreign mule that has been caught with drugs at the airport. Don't they read newspapers? Surely they must know that there is a death penalty in Thailand for drug smuggling. What do you think of these amateur runners and why aren't they deterred by the possible consequences?

As I see it, deterrence from crime is very rarely balanced on the appalling consequences. Sentences have reached their maximum since the 1950s but that has not stopped the traffic. Dependence depends on the perception of risk, the odds of being caught. Those who choose to act as couriers already think of themselves as lucky, that if caught the bad luck in being grabbed will be balanced by good luck in soon being freed.

I guess that is true. We always hear about the people that are caught. Am I right in saying that far more are successful?

The statistical probability favours the courier, yet I think the perceived safety is in those crowds of people at airports. Those sheer numbers in which couriers feel safe doing something as routine as air travel. That, plus the fact that as a courier he takes no action that feels criminal: he is passive, just walks forward like a foot soldier on a battlefield supported by the ranks of his fellow travellers. If couriers were active rather than passive – had to do something out of the ordinary in the way a bank robber does; something confrontational – then I'm sure many would think twice. Yet they just put one foot in front of another before an unseen enemy, and daydream of fine times.

One of the Thai guards on the execution team at Bang Kwang was himself later convicted of selling drugs. He is now on death row with no idea of which day will be his last. Obviously he knew full well the consequence of his actions if caught. As the death penalty doesn't seem to be a deterrent and as there is always the risk that an innocent man could be executed, would you agree that capital punishment should be abolished?

You won't be surprised to hear that I am against the death penalty anywhere in any circumstances. Imposing death is the state surrendering its duty to be creative in devising sanctions and finding solutions. In a sense, they've given up and are throwing people to the mob.

Have you now retired from drug smuggling?

As you know, retirement can be the busiest time of a person's life. Each day I plan to do no more than go to the beach, eat well and read the papers. Yet always other things happen.

Some of the recent prison books were written with the help of ghost writers. Did you have any assistance?

I wrote *Escape* without help. In fact, I wrote it initially to provide my friends with details too lengthy to recount over even a very long lunch. Repeating fragments of the story became exhausting; also, I had doubts that anyone might be interested – I guess that's why it took so long to reach print. *Escape* is as much about the fifty other inmates I wrote of as about my adventure.

In countries like Australia, there are laws against people making money by writing books about their crimes. What do you say to people who might criticize you for writing this kind of book? Personally I have no qualms about buying your book. In fact I will be buying a couple more to send to foreign prisoners here that have requested a copy.

Those laws you speak of are peculiar devices. An indirect censorship and a barrier to rehabilitation. And arbitrarily applied. No one would suggest that, say, Fidel Castro not tell history, or that Salman Rushdie returns his payments in Australia for Satanic Verses, yet both were deemed criminals in particular jurisdictions. Sure, people may say, 'How can you compare yourself with people like Castro or Rushdie who act on their

beliefs rather than greed' but I am not. The law is written wide but applied to a class of people. These laws have not been passed to silence or tax those who have been accused of criminality, but to prevent undesirables – outcasts from society – from ever rejoining it.

In my case I hope the information and presentation of *Escape* has some value to readers – and I'm sure I will never make much money from a few sales. I suppose whatever I write – even if some day I begin to write fiction – would be drawn from my life's experiences, including crime. I suspect those laws are the old Puritanism revived to ensure that ordinary criminals must remain humble, quiet and repentant for life.

In your book you didn't really say what happened to the prisoners in your cell. From my own research I discovered that all foreigners were immediately chained and the ones in your room were sent to the punishment cell. Apparently your Thai friend was severely beaten. However, despite all of that, everyone regarded you as a kind of hero for years to come. Were all the characters that you wrote about real and if so what happened to them?

Everyone portrayed in *Escape* is real. There was no need at Klong Prem to invent characters! I did what I could (which was not much) to ensure that they would not be too severely punished. I've kept in touch with most friends I made then. 'Sten' was transferred to Sweden, then released and now lives happily with his wife and new baby daughter. 'Jet' has been released, too. He keeps out of trouble; still draws pictures. Unfortunately, English 'Marty' remains at Bangkwang – a barely surviving testament to the UK's cruel application of the transfer system.

I have heard that you have been sending food parcels to Bang Kwang. Is that true?

For some years I would have a Saturday morning routine of shopping and packing parcels to send to Klong Prem and Bangkwang. Money, too. Of course it would have been insufferably vain to have mentioned such things in the book.

What are your future plans?

I'm writing a book now about some Russian guys I met while locked up in Pakistan. (I stayed for the end of the trial there and was acquitted) Ten very hardened Russian prisoners had broken out of their Soviet jail and then hijacked a plane at the local airport. They didn't fly out straight away. Incredibly, they flew to another Russian city and freed the rest of their gang before flying on to General Zia's Pakistan. Landed at Hyderabad and endured (and made the Pakistanis endure) a decade of prison warfare. I followed up their story while on business some years later in St Petersburg with the aid of a young Russian girl who'd served time in Karachi for smuggling. The book is a challenge as Andreas and his gang are nearly beyond the understanding of his countrymen, let alone soft Europeans and polite Asians.

Prisoner escapes from Pattaya Courthouse

Posted on April 15, 2013 at 11:53 pm

A 23 year old man charged with possession of Methamphetamine briefly escaped custody on Monday as he arrived at the Pattaya Provincial Courthouse to face an initial hearing in relation to the drugs charges.

Khun Suwan was arrested by Pattaya Police over the weekend and on Monday Morning was transported in a secure Prison Van to the Court which is located off the Thappraya Road in Jomtien.

The Truck contained nine prisoners, who were all lead off the vehicle one-by-one. When Khun Suwan came off the truck, the escorting officers were unaware that he had been able to slip his hands out of handcuffs.

He ran out of the Court compound and towards a motorbike taxi rank at the corner of Soi 15, approximately 300 meters away and told the driver to take him to Soi Baukao. As the bike travelled to the intended destination, the driver was contacted by Police who told him to slow down and pretend he needed to stop for some water in Soi Bongkai in South Pattaya. He followed the instructions and Police were able to re-capture the prisoner in front of a convenience store where the motorbike taxi had stopped.

Khun Suwan claimed he could not bear to be away from his family, especially his child, and was determined to escape. He will face an extra charge in relation to the attempt at escaping from custody.

Search of Phetchabun Provincial Prison



Every now and then, provincial police together with volunteer guards do a search of prisons. These are different to the scheduled ones undertaken by prison officials. In order to stop certain wardens tipping off inmates, these searches are never announced in advance. This one took place at 6 a.m. while the prisoners were still locked in their cells.









Prisoner Attempts Escape in Lampang
September 6, 2012

Richard Barrow



On Monday this week, a prisoner from Lampang Prison, attempted an escape but was quickly captured and beaten unconscious in front of a large crowd of onlookers. The inmate, who is in prison for a drug case, had just been to the provincial court and was returning with other inmates in the prison bus. Getting out of the bus he made a dash for it but only made it 100 meters before he was captured. These pictures appeared on

the website Manager Online. Judging by the large crowd, there might also be some videos on Youtube and Facebook.





Overcrowding in Thai Prisons

March 11, 2008

Richard Barrow



This is a rare photograph that gives you a good idea of how overcrowded prisons are in Thailand. Unlike their American or European counterparts, Thai prisoners live in open rooms with no beds or furniture of any kind. They aren't even given any bedding. Sheets can be bought and some people stuff these with old clothes in order to make pillows. Each cell is about four metres by seven metres. On each side, people are lying side by side with their feet facing the middle. Then, down the center of the cell, there are two rows of other prisoners. There are on average at least 50 prisoners in this one cell. There

isn't enough room for all of them to lie on their back. New prisoners are only allocated another room to lie on their side. They are packed in so tightly that they cannot turn over. If they have any money, they can bribe the cell boss to let them lie on their backs. But, there isn't enough room for them to all do that.

The prisoners have already eaten and showered by 3.30 p.m. and then they are taken up to their cells. There are only two fans so you can imagine with so many people in the cell that it heats up quickly and the smell from sweaty bodies becomes overpowering. The squat toilet is at the far end of the cell. This has a low wall about two feet high. Imagine what it would be like if you needed to answer the call of nature during the night and had to clamber over all these bodies. At least the lights are kept on all the time. But then, that is also a curse because it makes it difficult to sleep. The prisoners are locked in here for 14 hours per day. They are not allowed to bring any food up to the cells. If you have enough money, you can bribe the cell boss and prison guards to allow you to be transferred to another cell. But, they are all much the same as each other.

It wasn't always like this. Since the government declared an anti drug policy in 1998, the prison population increased greatly. In fact, 60% of the prison population today are there due to narcotic offences. In the past, property crime was the biggest offence. But now, that is only 19%. As a result, Thailand has one of the highest ratio of prisoners to population in the world. The following is a chart of prison population over the last ten years. At present, there are 139 prisons around the Thailand with 245,033 sq.m. of sleeping space. The Department of Corrections stipulates that each prisoner should have 2.25 sq.m. each. That would mean a maximum prison population of 108,904 prisoners. The statistics show how badly the prisons are overcrowded.

1997 – 125,870 prisoners
1998 – 164,323 prisoners
1999 – 199,542 prisoners
2000 – 217,393 prisoners
2001 – 244,240 prisoners
2002 – 245,801 prisoners
2003 – 210,234 prisoners
2004 – 166,418 prisoners
2005 – 161,879 prisoners
2006 – 151,586 prisoners

Recognizing this problem, the Thai government undertook a number of measures to help reduce overcrowding. In 1999 and 2003 there were collective royal pardons. Then, in late 2003, the Narcotic Rehabilitation Act stipulated that drug offenders, especially those who were drug users, should be sent to Drug Rehabilitation Centers. Although there is a slow downward trend, it is not solving the main problem. The increase of drug offenders was only one reason for the increase in prisoners. There is also the problem of unsentenced offenders who make up a staggering 30% of the prison population. Normally these people should be sent to special remand prisons. But, due to the overcrowding, potentially innocent people are mixed in with hardened criminals. The courts are also crowded, so prisoners who cannot afford the bail may have to wait up to

a year in prison awaiting trial. Then they might have to wait another year for their appeal to be heard.

The third reason for overcrowding in Thai prisons is the liberal use of imprisonment as a punishment. Even for petty crimes such as stealing, gambling and offences against traffic laws. In other countries, offenders are often given probation or suspended sentences. In my own province of Samut Prakan, I have been told that nearly twenty foreigners are arrested every month at the airport for stealing and are then sentenced by the courts to a minimum of 6 months. One person I know from America only stole some face wash and he got this sentence. Another was an elderly gentleman from Australia who stole a watch. He said he tried to pay for it straight away and any fine they wanted with his credit cards, but they insisted on arresting him and sending him to court. Then there are people in prison who just didn't have enough money to pay the fine.

Apart from overcrowding, general prison conditions have improved over the years. Beatings by sadistic guards are less common. Even the food can be quite good. One foreign prisoner that I visited a few times at the notorious Bang Kwang Prison said that the best thing was the Thai food that he paid a Thai prisoner to cook for him. Basically if you have money then you can make your life a bit easier. From paying for extra space in the cell and for bedding, to having better food and even clean water to bathe in. But, the majority of the Thai prison population do not have anyone on the outside to support them and many of them are barely surviving.

Chumporn Provincial Prison



เรือนจำจังหวัดชุมพร

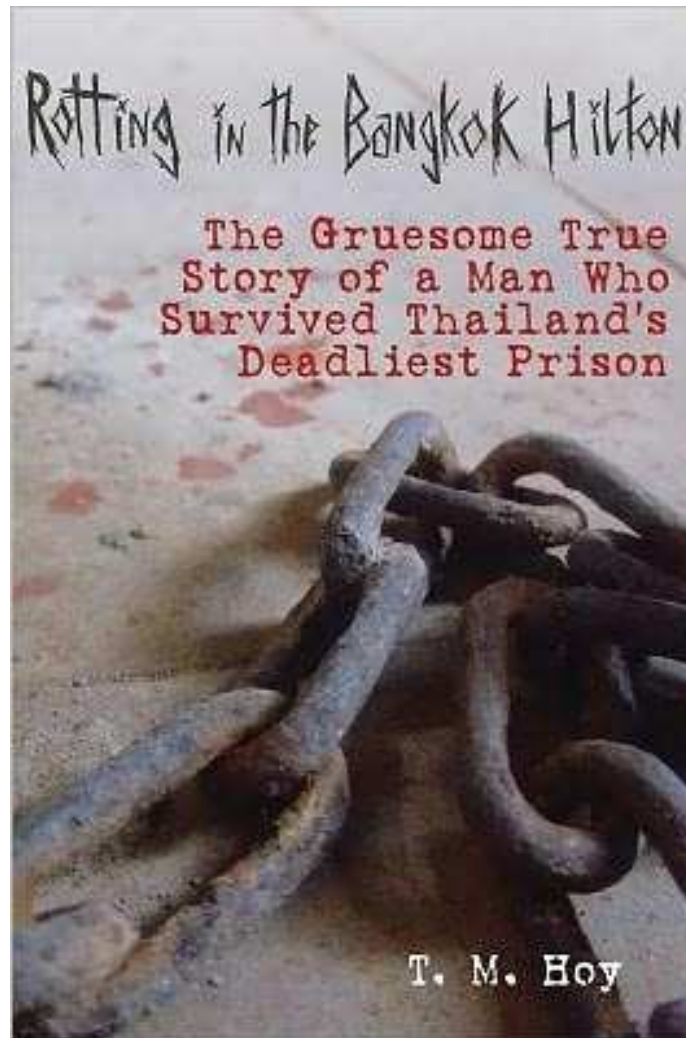
Address: 110 moo 1, Paramintaramunka Road, Tambol Banghmak, Amphoe Muang, Chumporn Province, 86000

Telephone: 0 7751 1211 ,0 7750 1167
Website: correct.go.th

What It's Like In Thailand's Deadliest Prison

June 12, 2012

T.M. Hoy



Thai prison, like all prisons, reveals the dark side of a person's soul. It is how people behave when there are no constraints and outside limits are nonexistent. All the fury of the Thai people against the neo-colonial economic imperialism of the West is directed fully at Western prisoners; in the provincial prisons, at least, where little or no oversight

exists. The prisons in Bangkok are somewhat less deadly, as the personnel from the foreign embassies visit regularly, making sure that the worst of abuses are curbed.

But still...heroin addiction is rampant, madness is a regular side-effect, and no one emerges from the experience unscathed. A U.S. State Department study found that every year spent in a Thai prison is equivalent (in damage done to body and mind) to five years in a standard U.S. prison. The five-plus years I did are therefore roughly equivalent to doing twenty-five years in the U.S. prison system. (I was then given a treaty transfer and served an additional eleven years in U.S. federal prison).

Thai prison is a surreal place. Like Thai society itself, it's a strange mixture of casual brutality and indifference to human suffering, while being placed side-by-side with stoicism, introspection, and humor in the face of death.

In retrospect, that cauldron of viciousness and cruelty brings forth the whole spectrum of human behavior—from great evil to transcendent kindness, and mimics what I would assume those who survive a war must experience.

I have witnessed hundreds of deaths up close and personal. In the vast majority of cases (mostly of Thai peasants and Hill Tribesman from the jungles of the Golden Triangle), their death was a dignified one; an amazing testament to the strength of the human spirit (of South East Asian people, anyway) under the worst sort of conditions. It so greatly affected me that I transformed from being an uncaring and rather self-centered American into someone deeply connected with social justice, global inequality, and working to make the world a kinder and more compassionate place.

The violence and malice I have witnessed are sadly the same as the violence and malice everywhere else; as human evil is, indeed, banal in its repetitiveness. I've watched guards and trustees beat prisoners senseless, and on occasion, to death. I've seen inmates attack and attempt to murder each other (sometimes successfully) on a daily basis, with the causes ranging from the laughably petty—a slight perceived as an unforgivable personal insult—to drug and gambling debts—or just the simple rage at fate in a system that results in random acts of senseless violence.

The varieties that human cruelty takes are endless...but in the end, are all the same. They amount to denying a person their mandatory needs, so as to make them suffer; or inflicting the greatest amount of pain humanly possible. Decent food is denied, medical care is made unavailable; as are the thousands of other ways that people have found to hurt each other. Torturing the body and mind to the limits of endurance is a perverse art form that's often refined to its highest degree by authorities in prison.

But Thai prison is far less violent than the U.S. prison system, as Western societies are far more obsessed with domination and control; which thus makes our prisons more coercive and subject to destructive outbursts.

As for any sense of transcendence, it still makes its presence known. A starving man sharing his last morsel of food with someone even closer to death than himself; a person

providing a stamp and writing a letter home for an illiterate, penniless prisoner on the edge of death, having that stamp represent a priceless resource; giving comfort to a man dying alone and in agony on a cold, damp floor; and the simple decencies of things shared between friends and comrades in extremis. In respect to more profound kinds of transformation, you have people discovering their own humanity and electing to follow a path of integrity. They care for and share with others out of a sense of rightness, without any thought of personal reward. All that is present, but it is of course the exception and not the rule.

Is there a lesson in this? Some meaning that emerges from surviving the most hideous kinds of punishment?

There is, but it is of the simplest, almost clichéd sort. It is that cruelty, violence, and coercion only breed more of the same, and if what we seek is a world without crime, then we need to teach people how to build healthy relationships and learn to satisfy their most basic of needs (and not to inflict a greater level of brutality on those being brutalized). With the addendum that we are all the same when stripped of life and liberty—no one is better than anyone else. The only request anyone makes is for food, shelter, a modicum of comfort, and a little respect—something most people of our planet usually go without.

Rare Pictures from Inside a Thai Prison Cell

October 16, 2012

Richard Barrow



These pictures give you a rare glimpse into the life of a Thai prison inmate. The photos of inside a Thai prison cell were secretly taken by an inmate and then smuggled out of the prison. They were originally posted on a popular Thai forum by the inmate who is now apparently free. According to the caption, they were shot earlier this year in a prison in northern Thailand.

Sizes of prison cells vary from prison to prison. This one has about 50 inmates. The prisoners sleep on the floor. As you can see, they only sleep on a thin blanket. They are not allowed pillows but can use clothes for this. Many cells are overcrowded and new inmates can only sleep on their side. The inmates are locked in the cells for about 14 hours a day. Lights are kept on all the time. During the night, guards do not usually come into the cells.

There is a television at one end of the cell. They don't have live TV but can watch VCDs which is controlled by the guards. In one corner of the cell are the toilets. There is a low wall to give them some privacy. They can also take a shower here by pouring bowls of water over themselves. It is hot in the cells. The ceiling fans only help circulate the warmth and smell from 50 or so prisoners. Most prisoners just wear shorts. However, walking to and from the toilets they are usually naked.

There isn't much for them to do. They can watch TV or chat with their friends. The prisoners with illegal mobile phones can use these to chat with girlfriends or download porno clips. The blankets up in the toilets are there to give privacy to anyone who wants to masturbate. Consensual sex does take place in the cells at night. Usually with one of the lady boys who sells their services for cigarettes. They do this under blankets. No-one takes any notice. Rape is rare.

Life in a Bangkok Prison

April 25, 2009

Harry Nicolaidis



On the night of 31 August 2008 my life took an unexpected turn. I had spent months preparing for an interview in Melbourne with the InterContinental group. I was looking forward to working in the luxurious surrounds of the city's newest five-star hotel.

“Do you have a case, sir?” asked the official at Bangkok Airport's passport control, minutes before I was to walk into the departure lounge for the midnight flight to Melbourne. Within hours I was questioned, photographed and arrested by uniformed immigration officers, and taken to the Crime Suppression Division.

In a dark, damp cell I stripped off my clothes and laid them on the floor, fashioning a bed with my shoes as a pillow. Sleep was impossible: I was thirsty and hungry, confused and alone. In the morning I made a short court appearance, before being handcuffed and shuffled onto an overcrowded prison bus bound for the Bangkok Remand Prison.

Compound One. For weeks I lay on my back, delirious with influenza. When I was able to stand, I shuffled around like a zombie, pushed here and there by the heaving population of sweaty, half-naked inmates, most of them Thai, Burmese or Cambodian.

One night I was so overcome with anxiety that I started to hyperventilate. I begged the cell captain to open the cell door and allow me to walk the corridor. When I started to cough phlegm, I begged again. I shouted in vain for help, then fell to the ground. Someone pushed an old blanket under my head. It was the Thai boy to whom I had been handcuffed on the trip to prison. Everything else was unfamiliar: no guard or cellmate spoke English, and there was no way to reach anyone on the outside.

Each day we would wake at six o'clock, roll up our blankets and wait to be counted by the prison officers, the commodores. Once the officers were satisfied, we would walk the narrow stairs to the passages of the compound yard. More than 500 prisoners would scramble to the long troughs where, using small plastic tubs dipped in stagnant water, we would wash ourselves.

A line would form soon after in front of a tub of water heated over a portable gas stove. Most prisoners used containers stolen from the hospital as cups. The line always grew longer at the front, because prisoners would constantly push in, often using up the entire water allowance before most even got close to the tub.

By seven o'clock a bell would ring and prisoners would line up outside the mess hall, where plates of steamed rice husks had been sitting on the benches for half an hour. Though hungry I resisted the temptation to try the murky soups, having seen cats vomit after being fed the scraps. In those early days, after swallowing a few clumps of rice I would cup my hands together to fill them with tap water, knowing I was risking contamination. But I only had to eat the prison food a few times before I realised that visitors could send in food parcels. My girlfriend came once a week, making the 11-hour bus trip from the northern township of Chiang Rai, and two Australians, embassy officials, took turns visiting with special provisions.

After breakfast the prisoners would be seated in the concrete yard facing the office of the building chief. At eight o'clock the Thai national anthem was broadcast from a small radio, followed by the invocations of a Buddhist monk. Each assembly began and ended in the same way, with the counting and recounting of prisoners. From there we were sent to work.

The prison workshops were ramshackle structures held together with bundles of barbed wire, crumbling concrete and rotting shingles, each dedicated to a single task – making paper cups, stitching sandals, bundling plastic straws, assembling paper bags – and prisoners worked all day, earning \$3 a month. Most foreign nationals, those from Africa and Asia, were sent to the workshops. Whites (a handful mainly from Belgium, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic, Canada and the US) were assigned duties such as cleaning cells or washing troughs, which gave me the chance to talk to some English speakers.

On one of my regular visits to the prison hospital I encountered Christopher Neil, the convicted Canadian sex offender known as Swirly Face. We had a long conversation about legal strategies – we shared the same Thai lawyer – and handling the media, which was showing an interest in my case. On my subsequent visits to the hospital we met again, and I understood he was convalescing there. It was not until some weeks later, when another prisoner chided me for talking to Neil, that I realised who he was. After his discharge from the hospital, I ran into him a few more times between compounds.

In Compound One I also met Thaksin Shinawatra's lawyer – the one allegedly involved in bribing the Thai judges hearing the corruption charges against the former prime minister. We met in the small library, where we discussed the law of *lèse-majesté* – offending the monarchy – and prison life. He brought some legal texts with him and explained that if intent is absent in a crime, Thai law deems the defendant innocent. He recommended I plead guilty and use diplomatic channels to convey an apology to the palace while waiting for a royal pardon. Fighting would be futile, he said, as no Thai lawyer could dispute the charge without impugning the King and the institution of the

monarchy. “Make yourself comfortable and wait,” he concluded, before resuming his daily exercise routine in glowing white running shorts and sneakers. He was released a few weeks later.

In those first few weeks I began to receive regular visits from friends and consular staff. I also managed to scribble my first, desperate letters to my family in Melbourne. While my Thai lawyer had informed me that the charge of *lèse-majesté* against me stemmed from a paragraph in my novel *Verisimilitude*, the details of the charge were unclear and I did not know how long I could expect to be held. What was clear was that the crime carried a maximum sentence of 15 years.

*

Compound Five. Three weeks after arriving at the prison I was transferred to another compound. Every 12 days I would be dressed in the standard-issue orange uniform and taken outside the compound to a part of the larger complex. I would wait with about 30 other prisoners to be taken, in groups of ten, into a small room where we would stand before a camera with a feed to a Bangkok court. Each time, a panel of judges on a TV screen would tell us that the police were continuing their investigations, and ask if we had any objection to being held for a further 12 days. I said nothing – other prisoners had told me that objecting made no difference.

During the first weeks, I had believed my release on bail was imminent. The charge, the situation, seemed preposterous: perhaps I would be summoned to a hearing where the matter would be resolved summarily. Yet each of my four bail applications failed and I began to see that nothing would happen until 12 weeks – the maximum remand period under Thai law – had elapsed.

I agonised over my plea, discussing the ramifications with my Thai lawyer, family and fellow prisoners. A guilty plea would allow the case to be heard and resolved quickly after the 84-day investigation period, but I risked accepting responsibility for a crime I did not understand. A not-guilty plea would keep me in prison for a minimum of six months after the first hearing, at 84 days, until a trial began – with no guarantee that the matter could be finalised in one trial.

Over the next month I met prisoners who had chosen to defend themselves and had spent up to three years in detention, making periodic court appearances. I came to see that the Thai legal system is designed to discourage people from contesting charges, and offers the inducement of a commuted sentence – half the declared sentence – if the defendant pleads guilty. Those who do choose to fight have to deal with errant witnesses, missing or incomplete evidence, translation difficulties, court-assigned interpreters and submissive Thai lawyers unwilling to challenge judicial authority. Some prisoners have even had the same judge for both their sentencing and subsequent appeal.

To learn more about *lèse-majesté* I did not need to go further than the compound library. Among the handful of English-language books, between *Treasure Island* and

Great Expectations, was a copy of William Stevenson's The Revolutionary King – a work officially banned in Thailand. Ironically, it was written with the generous co-operation of King Bhumibol Adulyadej. It contains many details of the nation's political intrigues, its crises and coups, and a history of abuses of the lèse-majesté law. It also mentions the personal life of the Crown Prince, quoting a public statement he made about his former partner and her lover. Reading this, in a book published with the permission of the King, I was flabbergasted. Here were explicit details of an episode I had believed to be no more than a rumour among the Thai people – which is how I referred to it in my novel.

*

The cell I had been placed in was filled with heavy smokers. At night I wore a facemask, sleeping only fitfully, waking each morning with eyes and throat burning. I was staggered to learn that all prison cells are non-smoking and that to complain was to suggest the prison officers were not doing their job properly.

I was transferred, and for almost four months shared a cell with an international drug lord described by Australian newspapers as a very big fish and the kingpin of the largest drug cartel in the northern hemisphere. I was characterised as a very small fish caught in the crossfire of Thailand's domestic politics. When we weren't discussing legal strategies he would have me spellbound with his anecdotes about his career as an armed robber, drug trafficker and money launderer. His experiences – from Britain to Portugal, Amsterdam to Sydney – would be grist to the mill for the likes of Quentin Tarantino, whom he said he had met. He spent hours describing his trade secrets, from making and using false passports to techniques for avoiding electronic surveillance by the many law-enforcement agencies pursuing him, including the Australian Federal Police.

Such banter was a welcome diversion from the uncertainty of my own case, and it was not until later that I discovered I was part of his effort to thwart an attempt to extradite him to Australia. When he learnt that the Australian ambassador in Bangkok had visited me at the prison for a clandestine meeting in the director's office, he saw an opportunity to drive a wedge between the judge in his case and the Australian authorities. He instructed his Thai lawyer to subpoena the ambassador to appear in a Thai court and force him to acknowledge that the Australian government was making special visits to a man accused of denouncing the King.

The months passed, the visits continued and, just when I thought time was standing still, one of the other extradition cases in Compound Five – a British national charged by the FBI for trafficking steroids – was released into the custody of US marshals, who came to transport him to Washington. It was cathartic to see him leave after his eight months on remand, for I had come to like him, and his new situation gave me hope.

*

One morning we woke to learn that an escape attempt had been foiled. Several prisoners had planned to kidnap the compound chief and force guards to open the doors, and to

that end had fashioned bolt cutters and knives from a workshop's scrap metal. The building chief made a speech, telling us that it would be a waste of time kidnapping a prison officer to aid an escape – the armed guards in the towers that overlook the compound were under instruction to shoot to kill, no matter what.

Prison discipline was tough and very few inmates took risks. Those who transgressed were stripped and taken to a small room behind the building chief's office, where several guards struck them repeatedly with heavy wooden clubs. The thumping and groans could be heard some distance away. Sometimes these beatings were the result of guards' anger towards prisoners; other times, they were simply sadism. Many of the victims were hospitalised with broken and fractured bones, cuts and bruising. Those uninjured were shackled with heavy leg irons for months.

The relationship between prisoners and commodores was curiously symbiotic. The latter behaved like feudal lords, seldom doing any work and delegating most responsibilities to their trustees, the privileged prisoners. It was a common sight to see prisoners prostrating themselves, or on their hands and knees massaging the legs of reclining officers. The officers showed little interest in serious fights or the constant flouting of prison regulations.

News of a prisoner's death would spread quickly through the prison. Once, I saw the emaciated body of a man carried through the compound and left on the steps of the building chief's office. The commodores eventually stepped outside to leer indifferently at the body, before motioning to Thai prisoners to remove the body. On another occasion a man was stabbed to death in a dispute over a carton of cigarettes. On yet another, the body of a young man who had hanged himself in the hospital dangled from the rafters for hours before it was removed.

The cycle of hope turning to despair became shorter and more intense as the months dragged on. When my food parcels were stolen, leaving me without anything but the prison rice to eat for days, I felt more alone than ever. Turning to my rickety footlocker for old food, I found only an infestation of cockroaches.

*

When the 84-day investigation period was over I began to experience delusions of reprieve. My first formal court hearing was set for 21 November. How to plead? My Australian lawyer, Mark Dean, SC, had written to me explaining the difficulty of contesting a charge of lèse-majesté in a Thai court, before a Thai judge. He recommended I plead guilty and allow diplomatic negotiations – always my best hope – to begin. However, my Thai lawyer informed me that I should plead not guilty at the first hearing, to ensure the matter went to a higher court where the presiding judges could consider a statement of mitigation.

On the morning of the hearing I woke feeling nauseated. I was given ten minutes to prepare myself to leave the compound. I started to retch and hyperventilate; I could not eat anything and was not permitted to take any food or drink with me. I joined a dozen

prisoners in orange uniform and stood barefoot before the building chief's office. I had concealed some biscuits and a small carton of milk, but these were found and confiscated. We were searched and then marched to an area known as Central Control, where they fingerprinted us and restrained us for transportation.

Nothing can prepare a person for the experience of being shackled. In front of us was a giant iron pincer bolted onto a slab of wood the size of a sleeper. Each of us selected a pair of heavy, rusted leg chains. Two brackets of curled iron were fitted around each ankle; each leg was then placed on an anvil beneath the giant clamp, before the long handle was pressed down like a guillotine to squeeze the iron brackets around the ankles. While skin scrapes were common, my real fear was that with a slip of the wrist my ankles could be crushed like walnuts in a nutcracker. The chains remained on all day – from 6.30, when we were crowded onto a prison bus, until our return from court, at eight in the evening.

Inside the courtroom I stood alone, facing a glass panel that separated me from the judge and several legal clerks. The clerk presented me with a charge sheet written in Thai and asked me how I intended to plead. She explained that if I pleaded guilty immediately I would have my sentence halved, but if I pleaded not guilty the hearing would be adjourned to 19 January, with no reduction in sentence if I was found guilty.

I had no access to a phone or an English-speaking official, but managed to persuade the clerk that I was expecting my Thai lawyer, embassy staff and friends, and would enter a plea after seeing them. I was sent to the courtroom holding cell with some 30 other prisoners. By mid morning my friends and lawyer arrived and persuaded me to plead not guilty, despite my misgivings about serving a further two months in limbo.

Following the hearing I was sick for days with a fever. Requests for hospital visits had to be made at least 24 hours prior to admission and on weekends there were no admissions at all. When finally I got to the hospital I asked for antibiotics, to be paid for by a visitor. It took two weeks before I was called back to be given the drugs. By then the worst of the illness was over.

*

In the weeks leading up to the King's 5 December birthday celebrations speculation circulated about a general amnesty. Many prisoners wrote letters home with news of their imminent release; others packed belongings into bags; some sold prized possessions such as handmade chess sets. Through the bars of our cells we could see the fireworks over Bangkok. Thai men love their King as the father of their nation; it is a genuine affection for a leader I have not found anywhere else in the world. We waited eagerly, Thai and foreigner alike, but – perhaps because of the political upheaval – no amnesty was announced.

There was very little to indicate that Christmas was approaching in Bangkok Remand Prison. The night itself passed like any other, unobserved but for a few foreign nationals

shedding a tear. I received cards and parcels from friends and family, but this was still the most difficult period of my incarceration.

In my many comings and goings from my compound to the visitor's area at the front of the prison I had encountered Victor Bout, according to the CIA – though vigorously disputed by Victor – the world's leading arms dealer. Victor often passed on books he had finished with, including Henri Charriere's Papillon. He also counselled me when he saw I was in despair. He would observe wryly that in Russia he would be given more space in which to die than Thailand gave him to live. Victor, described in the media as the Merchant of Death, became a regular visitor to our compound, where he discussed how he was entrapped in Bangkok, arrested without a warrant, and held without trial or hearing. Thailand is a legal mousetrap, he would say.

There are eight compounds in Bangkok Remand Prison, with 500 prisoners in each. Next to us was a larger prison housing those sentenced to seven or more years. The remand prison is, in principle, for un-sentenced prisoners, extradition and appeal cases, and those serving fewer than seven years. It is the Casablanca of prisons, albeit without the heroes or romantic intrigue of the film – unless you count the lady-boys. There is a thriving black market; there are corrupt officials, government loyalists and dissidents; and twice a day an old navy propeller airplane flies overhead.

The population is made up mostly of Thais, but there are small numbers of people from all over the world. Stories of false travel documents, multiple identities and fake credit cards are ubiquitous. I encountered political refugees from Sri Lanka with official UN travel papers requesting the host nation extend asylum to the bearer of the documents. There was a widespread tale of a man from Lichtenstein who was sent to the remand prison while his papers were authenticated. Thai officials had never heard of the tiny European principality.

Another man carried a genuine African passport but, because a large number of African nationals had been found with false travel documents, was nevertheless arrested and detained. He was travelling with his wife, whose travel papers bore identical stamps and dates to her husband's, and were accepted. The two were separated for a month before the Thai authorities realised their mistake. The man was released without apology or compensation.

Every month, 50 to 100 Burmese workers would arrive at the prison. These workers had been lured to Thailand by unscrupulous businessmen to work in the construction industry. When they had completed a month's work the employer, rather than pay up, would do them in as illegal immigrants; they would be arrested and marched into the prison, often still wearing tops bearing the name of the Thai construction company.

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Compound Six. Rumours had been circulating for a few weeks: the administration wanted to separate sentenced from non-sentenced prisoners – something it should always have done, in accordance with the United Nations' Standard Minimum Rules for

the Treatment of Prisoners. When 12- and 13-year-old Cambodian and Burmese refugees are forced to share a cell with sex offenders, it is clear there is little regard for international human rights.

Compound Six differed from Five in one important way: the guards were more enterprising, accepting weekly payments from wealthy foreign nationals awaiting extradition to the US, India and Australia. One British national controlled the library, refurbishing it with a private bookshelf lined with bestsellers, several large cupboards, exercise equipment and a small galley. In an echo of *The Italian Job*, he and his mates were called the Self-Preservation Society.

In the mornings I would often see cream spread, breakfast sausages, honey, butter, muesli, croissants and cheese laid out for certain prisoners on one of the tables. Payments were being made to the commodore's bank account by third parties outside the prison. The commodore's wife would do the shopping at a local supermarket and the commodore would smuggle in the contraband after hours. Meanwhile, other prisoners lined up endlessly to get hot water from a rusted pot, and could not get basic medicines.

Begging for food scraps was the only way some prisoners survived, and I became accustomed to seeing open hands and mouths about the compound. I liked to share my small half chickens but they were nevertheless the object of lustful stares, and often stolen. The office staff would call, "Come to the office and meet your chicken!" I could feel the covetous eyes of prisoners when I collected it. I ate chicken every day for six months.

Rivalries over food and possessions often led to violent fights. One squabble over an old T-shirt resulted in the exchange of a few punches between two similarly sized prisoners. Just when it looked like they would settle down, a trustee – privileged prisoner – intervened, triggering a brawl. The two Thai prisoners were taken to the library, where they were kicked and punched before being dragged to one of the workshops and beaten with heavy wooden truncheons. These reprisals were brutal, cowardly and entirely unnecessary.

In my cell was an artist doing time for murder. He was very skilful, rendering exquisitely detailed ink sketches of prison life that he would give me in exchange for cigarettes. His work was stunning, but I grew increasingly concerned about the translator I was using to communicate with the artist. The go-between was a well-known police informant and one of Thailand's largest false-passport merchants. From him the authorities had seized up to 26,000 fake passports, visas and other travel papers for use around the world – documents which, he claimed, Thai immigration officials are now selling on Bangkok's black market.

He kept insisting that I give him the drawings to smuggle out through a guard, but I had misgivings about being set up. I knew that if I was caught it might jeopardise my case, so I concealed them as best I could, hiding them in new envelopes.

*

By the time my trial came around, on 19 January, I had learnt to be detached and I was ready to face my fate. Once again, I was shackled and transported to court. This time a large media contingent was present, despite my expectation that it would be a closed hearing. The Thai authorities made no attempt to conceal the shackles. It seemed those who had set in train the case against me were not only aware of the likely condemnation of the use of chains, but anticipated international antipathy towards Thailand and its monarchy. The case was heard in the morning and the judgement delivered in the afternoon: six years reduced to three for pleading guilty. Now I had a sentence, which was preferable to the abyss of uncertainty.

I returned to the compound a celebrity. The inmates had viewed my case on television and were happy I had received only a small sentence compared with the 50-year terms some had been given for credit-card fraud. There were prisoners who suggested I would be out by the end of the year, as Australia has a prisoner-exchange treaty with Thailand whereby its citizens must serve only part of their sentences in a Thai prison before being repatriated to an Australian one. There was also some speculation that I would be released on the occasion of the Queen's or King's birthday, when it was expected a general amnesty would be declared. I learnt later that some prisoners resented my seeming good fortune.

Following the trial my family lodged an application for a royal pardon with a supporting letter from the Australian government. My Thai lawyer estimated this process would take three years to complete: the application had to pass through the prison, the Department of Corrections, the Ministry of Justice, the Office of the Prime Minister, the Privy Council, the Principal Private Secretary of the King, before eventually reaching the King. There were, however, secret negotiations and representations to see the pardon expedited, though no one knew when these might take place. Revered Thai monks with connections to the palace made clandestine visits to ensure I was keeping well. All the intrigue left me sceptical and suspicious; I didn't know what to believe or whom to trust. I had unwavering faith in the King, but would my pardon application reach him?

*

Compound Three. A few weeks after my trial, I was transferred to Compound Three, ostensibly because I had been sentenced. However, not long after my arrival there I was shown a document revealing that the chief of Compound Six believed my life was in danger and had requested my transfer. The document was accompanied by a letter written in English and signed by the three foreign nationals in Compound Six known as the Self-Preservation Society. It was a complaint about what they perceived to be my special treatment by the prison director in co-operation with the Australian embassy. They threatened to exploit a relationship with a high-ranking military official in the palace to expose this, in so doing jeopardising my pardon application.

The leaking of the documents resulted in a bizarre investigation, during which I was told by the building chief that if I did not divulge the name of the staffer who had shown me the letters all staff would be sent away to be tortured, and warned that the pardon application process was to begin in the prison and must have the prison's

recommendation before going on to higher authorities. The investigation was quickly dropped.

I settled into Compound Three, falling in with three Iranians. We breakfasted together each morning under the shade of a large Bo tree. During the day I was kept busy in the library, responding to correspondence that was arriving from all over the world: New Zealand, South Africa, the Netherlands, Germany, Cyprus, Greece, the UK, the US and, of course, Australia. I received poetry, prayers and proposals; I was the subject of a sermon, a candlelight vigil and a tribal ritual. People I had never met wrote to say they had sent appeals to the Queen of England, the King of Thailand and even Bono, while Jeff Fenech came to the prison especially to see me. I remain grateful for the support of friends and strangers alike.

The media visited regularly but I was under strict instruction to remain tight-lipped about the pardon process, as the Thai government was monitoring news reports in Australia. When journalists visited and asked if I had any news I said that the Siamese cat living in the cardboard box in the corner of the library had given birth to only one kitten. Unsurprisingly, the reporters were not amused. I had heard that a 60 Minutes team wanted to smuggle a video camera into the prison where, with my co-operation, footage could be shot and then broadcast to the world. The plan was thought too risky and quickly abandoned.

I could have told the international press about the mystery of the small white plastic balls in the compound yard. At first I thought they were pieces of a board game, and it was not until I saw men around the water trough with large, misshapen penises that I was told the gruesome truth. Many heterosexual inmates were mutilating their penises by making an incision with a shaving razor along the base. This allowed small plastic balls and brushes, ground down from toothbrush handles, to be inserted under the skin. The wounds were sealed, with varying degrees of success, with tobacco; most became infected and the prisoners required hospitalisation. For the few that were successful, the new, rugged contour was believed to enhance the sexual stimulation of their partners. The Thai prisoner who specialised in the operations was known as The Doctor.

Compound Three had the largest population of lady-boys in the prison complex. Most – as many as 70 – were in one cell. They spent their days preening, applying make-up and staring into brightly coloured budgie mirrors. Their androgynous features elicited both lust and disgust from fellow prisoners; many lady-boys cruised indiscriminately for sexual encounters. I had noticed the attentions of one, who seemed to turn up wherever I was. While I was in my cell one evening, an envelope was passed to me. It was a colourful illustrated letter from the lady-boy Run, describing intimate desires.

*

The next morning I stepped on a rickety manhole cover and plunged into a massive underground sewage tank, landing waist-deep in excrement. It was an inauspicious start to the day. I cleaned up as best I could and, a short time later, was summoned to the

building chief's office. There I had my palm read and was told I would soon receive good news.

At four o'clock we were marched to the cells, counted as usual and locked up. I rolled out my floor mat and started to leaf through a book on Harry Houdini that the Australian embassy had sent me. Soon after, a group of officers returned with the building chief, who asked me to show my palm again. He nodded with some satisfaction and ordered that the door be opened.

I was taken downstairs into the compound, where I was informed I was to be freed at the request of the King of Thailand. The commodores who helped me empty my footlocker whispered that I was very fortunate, as I had been singled out from a prison population of thousands to be freed on that day. While they described the items I was prohibited to take out of the prison – phone numbers, notes or drawings depicting the prison, maps – I was piling into a plastic bag the envelopes containing the illustrations I had accumulated in Compound Six. I gambled that my discharge would be swift, as there was a certain aura conjured up by the royal intervention. I was right: the commodores were not inclined to search me.

We walked out of the compound, towards the front of the prison. In a conference room full of high-ranking officers, the prison director and several building chiefs, we sat down facing a large portrait of the King. A leather folder with blue-velvet lining was opened to reveal a crisp sheet of paper with a gold seal. The letter was read in Thai while a translator explained that the King had pardoned me for the crime of *lèse-majesté*. I was asked to kneel before the portrait and thank the King for his benevolence, after which I was congratulated. And I am deeply grateful to the King for sparing me years of suffering. I played enough chess in prison to know that kings and pawns seldom cross paths without consequence.

I was taken to an area just inside the main door of the prison, fingerprinted and farewelled by the officers. The officer taking my prints removed his own handkerchief and offered it to me to wipe the ink from my hands.

A steel door opened to reveal a dark loading bay, beyond which I could glimpse daylight and the barred gate. Before me stood six new prisoners preparing to be sent into the prison. I wished them luck. The gate opened and I was in the arms of my girlfriend. Over her shoulder I saw two vehicles, one belonging to the Australian embassy and the other to the policeman who had arrested me. After assurances from the consular staff I sat in the police officer's car and, with the embassy car following, we went to his office to prepare documentation. From there we went to Immigration to have my travel documents endorsed, and then to the airport.

Before I boarded the flight to Melbourne, my brother called to say he would meet me at Tullamarine. My father would come too, but not my mother: she had suffered a severe stroke. My jubilation at being released vanished and, ever since, my life has been in turmoil. But I am in Australia now, with my family.

Inmate helps fellow prisoner escape

January 22, 2013

Bangkok Post



A prison inmate helped distract police while another prisoner escaped to care for his four-month-old baby on Monday.

Police named the two prisoners only as Chaiyawat, 36, and Jirawat, 45. Pol Sen Sgt Major Pathom Pilpan said the two men attacked him when he was taking them from their cell to the courtroom. He was repeatedly struck with wooden walking sticks that had been issued to Chaiyawat, who had a leg injury. The officer sustained a head injury and a damaged eyebrow. Six officers intervened and grabbed Chaiyawat, but Jirawat was able to escape during the commotion. Police believed the escaped convict was hiding in a nearby forest. Chaiyawat told police that Jirawat had a four-month-old baby and his wife was also sentenced in another case. The baby was left with no parents, so he decided to help Jirawat escape. Chaiyawat was arrested on a charge of killing a village chief last year while Jirawat was arrested on drug charges, police said.



UPDATE: Escaped prisoner arrested

An inmate who had escaped from a courthouse in Kamphaeng Phet province on Monday was arrested 15 hours later at his friend's house nearby, police said on Tuesday. Jirawat Klangpakdee, 45, assaulted and injured a police officer, with help from a fellow prisoner, and broke out to care for his four-month-old baby. The escaped convict was hiding at the house where his friend's wife resides. The house owner is serving time in prison on drug charges, police said. A shop owner contacted police after Jirawat, who was still in prison uniform and leg shackles, came to her shop and asked for drinking water. Jirawat confessed that he broke out of jail because he was worried about his four-month-old baby because his wife had also been arrested on drug charges. He said he planned to collect money from his customers and give it to his relative who is currently taking care of the child.

Bangkok prison phone jammer zaps AIS

January 25, 2013

[Don Sambandaraksa](#)



A prison cell phone jammer has been blamed for a partial outage of AIS' mobile network in a residential area of north Bangkok.

Reports have filtered through of Bangkok's Klong Prem prison deploying a cellphone jammer to prevent inmates from using phones – which are widespread among the prison population. This apparently caused many dropped calls in the area. The jammer was reportedly turned off during the morning of January 24.

Prisons in Thailand are often broken into (as opposed to out of) with phones and drugs thrown into the premises. Radio controlled helicopters have been caught delivering phones, as have cats.

Bangkok-based travel blogger Richard Barrow had last year written about how an entry-level Nokia C1 sells for about \$500 (15,000 baht) in a prison, almost 14 times its retail price. A phone charger costs about \$84 (2,500 baht) on the inside.

AIS did not provide any official statement as to the incident or if they were actively working with the prison authorities in blocking inmates' use of phones.

Dtac was unaware of any problem on its network, suggesting that the jammer was limited to the 900 MHz GSM band which is exclusively used by AIS. TrueMove did not respond by the time of going to print.

Mobile Phone Jammers in Thai Prisons

February 9, 2012



Khao Bin prison in Ratchaburi is being prepared for the arrival of up to 500 convicted drug dealers. Unlike other prisons, this one already has in place a number of phone jammers. Prison authorities are concerned that some inmates are continuing with the drug trade while behind bars. In just the last four months, 1,500 illegal mobile phones have been found in Thai prisons. In order to stop prisoners using mobile phones, nine 25 meter high mobile phone signal jammers have been placed around Khao Bin Prison. Each one can cut the signal of a mobile phone up to 100 meters away. Khao Bin has the advantage of other prisons as it has been built in the middle of no-where. Signal jammers are hard to use at prisons in Bangkok as the areas around them have large communities.

No Mans Land in a Thai Prison



Some pictures of the no mans land between the prisoners' quarters and the wall.



Prison Lockers

June 20, 2012

Richard Barrow



Prisoners are not allowed back to their cells during the day so the authorities have to give them somewhere to store their things. In some prisons they get a locker each while in others they have to share. Anywhere you go there is going to be a risk of thieves, maybe more so in prison, so padlocks are used. I guess you have to be careful who you share your locker with as prison authorities do regular searches of these lockers looking for illicit goods.



siting Bang Khwang Prison

March 17, 2013

Ezra Kyrill Erker / Bangkok Post



THE VISITOR'S EXPERIENCE

When it comes to unsolicited visits from strangers, most inmates at Bang Khwang are happy for the respite from the tedium of prison life, but not all welcome the attention.

"I'm like a zoo animal asked to perform for the paying public!" complained one Asian prisoner.

Likewise, a Hong Kong prisoner on death row became distraught once it became clear that he couldn't communicate with his visitors who had assumed he could speak some English.

He had hoped that a friend or loved one had showed up for a visit and when it became clear that wasn't the case, tears were shed on both sides of the double windows.

Some inmates are so ashamed of their situation that they don't want their loved ones to see them, let alone strangers. However, most are grateful to have someone to talk to; it can offer a release of pent-up thoughts and a rewarding experience for both parties.

For foreigners lacking consular or NGO assistance, visiting an inmate can be confusing. Some take the express boat from Bangkok to Nonthaburi pier and ask for directions from there _ the prison dominates this part of town and isn't hard to find. Others ride the MRT to Bang Sue and take a taxi the 10km from there.

According to the Corrections Department, King Rama V arranged to buy Nonthaburi land for a prison in 1902. Construction didn't start until the reign of King Rama VI in 1927, however, finally being completed in 1931.

The facility houses those with appeals pending at the Appeal Court and the Supreme Court, those with sentences ranging from 25 years to life, and death row inmates.

The entrance of the prison is nondescript, almost decrepit.

The outside walls are 2,406m long, six metres high and one metre beneath the ground and are equipped with high voltage wires. Inside walls of each section are 1,298m long and six metres high, topped with barbed wire.

Large groups of female Buddhist visitors can be seen at times, as they make merit by praying by the prison's walls. A shop and visitor processing building across the road have now disappeared and paperwork is done near the entrance. Visitors must arrive an hour in advance of the visitation slot, of which there are five or six a day.

Once past the gate visitors must deposit their phones, money and other personal effects. They then go through a metal detector, get patted down and enter a courtyard with seats lined in rows. Signs warn visitors to refrain from speaking in any language other than Thai, to only use the designated window and to stop speaking immediately when the bell sounds _ dictates that are routinely ignored by visitors and prisoners. The guards are not unfriendly, but many of the fans and telephones don't work. You sit about 10m away from the prisoners, looking through two windows and speaking over a bad connection. Bells buzz intermittently until finally the line is cut off and you can only wave as the prisoner is led away.

On one of our visits a prisoner's friend arrived in the same time slot as us; the guards sent us in together.

"We're visiting the same prisoner?"

The friend gave a disapproving look. "That's who I'm visiting. I don't know about you!"

It can be a testy jockeying for visitation privileges because under the rules inmates are allowed only one visit per day, two days a week. If a "prison tourist" arrives earlier in the day than an important visit from a consulate, lawyer or family member who flew in from abroad, the rest are out of luck.

Australian retiree Ray Archer has been visiting prisoners for eight years and has found the experience to be rewarding. The 2,000 or 3,000 baht donations he occasionally makes to prisoners are tax deductible, which makes it an even more worthwhile cause.

Not all visits have been fruitful, Mr Archer said. Some inmates weren't honest, or tried to prey on his sympathies to get money or favours, and at least one prisoner he visited over several years went back to drug dealing soon after his release.

In general, though, the visits have given him a fresh purpose in retirement and he petitions prison officials and NGOs at times to help improve conditions.

Bill Francis, retired from the US Air Force, first came to Thailand to help after the 2004 tsunami and he started visiting prisoners a few years ago through a British charity. He developed a deep friendship with one European prisoner, and was granted a face to face visit with him once a year. The prisoner was recently released, and while happy for him in his new freedom, Mr Francis was saddened to lose a close friend.

”There was a real affinity, even a physical resemblance,” he said.

He plans to visit his friend in Europe next year to see how he is coping with life on the outside. Meanwhile, he will continue to visit other prisoners.

THE CONSULAR VIEW

Although one British prisoner told us that UK government policies on transfers were ”all to the detriment of the prisoner”, a local consular official spoke to Spectrum about some of the positive initiatives undertaken by the embassy.

”We visit our British national detainees every eight weeks and provide consular assistance with their welfare issues,” he said. ”We also ensure that any funds that they are entitled to from Prisoners Abroad _ a UK-based charity _ or have received from their families or friends are given to them accordingly.”

He also explained the prison transfer agreement between the UK and Thailand. ”British detainees have to serve one third of their sentence or four years, whichever is less, before they are eligible for transfer. If this is a life sentence then they would be required to serve eight years before eligibility. Once transferred back to the UK, the sentence would be re-calibrated to fall in line with UK minimum sentence terms.”

He said that the conditions of local prisons can be challenging. ”There are always issues for foreign detainees in prisons in this part of the world. One of the big problems is that cells are shared by a number of people and beds are not provided, so the basic comforts that would be present in a British prison are simply not there. Food and medical facilities perhaps don’t match up to the level that they are in the UK.”

The official encouraged British nationals to visit their compatriots in local prisons.

”We run a prison visiting programme and visitors to the prisons help out in many ways, by providing reading materials, simply someone to talk to, or as a liaison between the detainee and family members and embassy. There are never enough voluntary visitors to go around for all of our detained British nationals, so [visits] would be appreciated, yes.”

A spokesperson from Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, told us that many Australians find that ”overseas laws and legal processes can be very different to

those in Australia and harsh penalties can apply to actions that may not be considered a crime in Australia”.

”If an Australian detained overseas requests consular assistance,” she said, ”an Australian consular officer will visit the detainee as soon as possible ... to provide welfare support and to closely monitor the health and well-being of the Australian in detention.”

Some prisoners are eligible for government loans in order to access ”supplementary food, medical assistance and other essentials that may not be routinely provided by a prison”. A prisoner transfer treaty with Thailand, administered by the Attorney-General’s Office, came into force in 2002.

Surviving in a Thai Prison

April 18, 2007

Richard Barrow



Over the years, there have been many books about life in a Thai prison written by foreigners. They talk about sadistic guards and having to eat cockroaches in order to survive. The reality is far different. These prison blogs are the only account of life on the inside as written by a Thai person in the English language. Nothing has been sensationalized. The prisoner is the well known Internet celebrity Panrit “Gor” Daoruang who leaped to fame for his personal blog at www.ThailandLife.com. Panrit, who was previously known as Nattawud before a monk suggested he should change his name for good luck, has been writing about his life for the past ten years since the age of

only twelve. When he was only 16, this Thai teenager was invited by the Bangkok Post to write a weekly column about his life. Gor's autobiography is due to hit the bookstores in May 2007. It tells the story of his teenage years and the events that lead up to his imprisonment. Gor is currently writing the second volume which is about his life in a Thai prison. I am really jealous that he has already published his autobiography at the age of 21.

I have been visiting Gor and other foreign prisoners in Samut Prakan Central Prison for about six months now. Everyone knows me there. Of course I would much prefer to fly under the radar, but as I seem to be the only foreigner each time I go, it is rather difficult to remain inconspicuous. The first few times I visited the prison I was really nervous. It is not exactly like going to visit the dentists. In some ways it is worse. In Thai society there is a lot of stigma involved. I have been having trouble persuading Thai friends to go along too. Some are even worried about writing letters to the prison in case a neighbour spots the address. It doesn't worry me so much. I am more worried of being wrongly accused of something and ending up on the wrong side of the wall myself! Everytime I drive to the prison I always drive with the utmost care so that I don't run anyone down. Now that I have been there many times things are more relaxed. I took a foreigner there the other month and he said that he was pleasantly surprised that all of the visitors were quite respectable. The prison staff are also quite pleasant and chatty.

The following are some of Gor's prison blogs that he dictated to me during my visits.

It is now 6 months since you have been in prison. Can you give us an idea of what is happening in your life now?

Well, at the moment I have a really bad toothache. For people living on the outside, a toothache is not really a big deal. You can visit your local drug store to get some pain killer or go to your dentist if it gets really bad. However, here in prison, we have to wait for the doctor to visit our section on Mondays. If we are ill, or think we are going to be ill, we can apply for a doctor's appointment on Friday afternoon. Then we are allowed to go and see him on the Monday. However, there isn't usually much he can do to help. He usually just gives us a Paracetamol. This is mainly for headaches but he will give it to you for most problems. This is because he has now run out of the proper drugs. There is no more money for the prison to buy any more medicine and we will have to wait for about two months for the next shipment. These deliveries are only two or three times a year. It is free so we cannot really complain. If you are ill during the week, you can ask special permission to go and visit the doctor in a neighbouring area on Thursdays. However, everyone has to go there at the same time. Most people have problems like sore throat, headache and skin infections. As there are 50 people in a cell, diseases spread fast.

On your website, people have been donating money to help support you. Can you tell us how this money is being spent?

First I want to say a big "thank you" to the people that have been helping me and my daughter during this difficult period of my life. I really do appreciate people thinking of

me at this time. It brings tears to my eyes how generous people are being. I won't forget their kindness. I would like to write to them, but I am only allowed to send out one letter per week. At the moment they won't let me write a letter in English because none of the guards can read English.

In prison, everyone is allowed to have a bank account. The money belongs to us but we are not allowed to actually touch any cash. So, if we would like some money to buy some lunch, we need to ask the cell boss for a voucher in the morning. We then get this in the afternoon of the following day. So, you need to plan ahead. From the money that is donated to me, 4,000 baht is put in my account each month. I then buy at least 100 baht worth of vouchers every day. I mainly use this for food. That is breakfast and dinner. A plate of curry and rice is 25 baht. Then there are sweets too. I also buy food for the people that help me. For lunch I often eat food that is left over from the guards where I work. I also buy packets of cigarettes which is like cash inside. I use these to pay people to do favours for me.

Sometimes there are other things I need to buy. Like the other day I had to buy a new padlock for my locker because I lost the key. Or I might buy some shampoo or soap or boxer shorts. Today I will have to buy some new shoes. My last pair were confiscated by a guard. You are not really supposed to take your shoes up to the cell. The guards usually let me as they know me. But today there was a strict guard and he took my shoes and threw them away. Although we are allowed as much as we like in the bank account, we are not allowed to take out more than 200 baht per day (about \$5). We also have to spend all the vouchers that day or we will lose the money. In order to survive, it is really important to have people on the outside helping you. The prison only gets 33 baht per prisoner per day from the government in order to feed and house everyone. Obviously less than \$1 budget per day isn't a lot and so the food and living conditions are very bad.



Satellite view of Samut Prakan Central Prison. Klong Dan

The only way we can get extra food in one day is if someone from the outside buys something in the prison shop. Steve (from thai-blogs.com) kindly bought me some curries and fruit the other day. If people buy us something like soap or mama noodles we get it that afternoon. If they bought us a meal, we then get it the following day. People can also send us things through the post office. Though they have to make sure

that there is no metal or silver foil in the parcel. For example, the foil sealing a tube of toothpaste will set off the alarms and the parcel will be sent back. Once I even had a book sent to me that had a silver sticker on it. That was also returned to sender.

With the money left over, I usually ask for books to be sent to me. It is very boring in prison and reading is one way to pass the time. I just asked for another of the Harry Potter books to be sent to me. I like them because they are very thick. I was also sent a Thai chess set. Then each month I also have some money sent to my mother who is looking after Nong Grace. She will be starting Kindergarten in May and so there are lots of things to buy for her. I want her to learn English so we bought flashcards, video CDs, computer software and books.

Are there a lot of foreigners in the prison now?

There are hundreds and hundreds of them. They come nearly every day now. I think this is because the new airport is in Samut Prakan Province. Most foreigners are from the neighbouring countries. There are also a lot of Africans. New foreigners come every day and it is my job to interview them and to take down their details. At the moment we have only three farang prisoners. The one that has been here the longest is from Scotland. He had a problem with his Thai girlfriend and was later robbed by her friends. On the way home, at the airport, he was really depressed and got drunk. He then got into an argument with the waiters. They started fighting and the guy from Scotland grabbed a knife from the counter top and cut the waiter's arm. Not too seriously. However, he is here now for attempted murder. He has been here for about five months and it will probably be a year before he goes to trial. I feel very sorry for him and try to help.

The other two foreigners haven't been here long. One guy from Australia stole something at the airport. He has already been sentenced to 6 months. The other guy is from America. I am not sure yet, but I think there is something wrong with his visa. He hasn't been sentenced yet, but people with passport problems all get a minimum of one year in prison. But, if you are 19 or younger you are given 6 months in prison. I will try and find out more about him. Anyone who is caught with a lot of drugs at the airport are not sent here. We are not a maximum security prison. Our local one is in Rayong which is for prisoners with a sentence of 25 years or more. Some visitors to my website have been sending me English novels. I have then been passing them on to the foreign prisoners.

Click [here](#) to continue.

A Day in a Thai Court

September 7, 2006

Richard Barrow



Last Tuesday, I had the opportunity to visit the Provincial Criminal Court in Samut Prakan. It was a place that I didn't really expect to find myself going. However, I had always been curious to go inside this large building which is by the river in Paknam. I went there to support one of my students from years ago. His parents had asked me to go. They thought it would help in some way. His nickname is Gor and his life as a Thai teenager is well known to people around the world due to his thailandlife.com website.

To be honest I was a bit nervous about going. Although Samut Prakan is quite close to Bangkok, there still isn't that many foreigners in this city. Walking around all the usual places I don't really attract much attention. But, to go to a courthouse I knew I was going to stand out like a sore thumb. It wasn't really my own reputation I was worried about. More so of the school. It wouldn't look good for them if any parent saw me at the courthouse. Particularly at a trial of this nature. They might misunderstand. I arrived at the court a bit early and so had to sit down in a kind of a waiting area in front of the building. Straight away someone carrying the robes of a lawyer came up to me to introduce himself. Apparently he was the son of one of the teachers and he wanted to know if I was in some kind of trouble! He wanted to help me. I assured him I wasn't in trouble and that I was waiting for someone.

About ten minutes later I could hear sirens approaching. Looking around I spotted a prison bus entering a private entrance at the courthouse. Then came the sounds of chains. A number of people in the waiting area had already gone to take a closer look. They were calling out to the prisoners so they must be relations or friends. The prisoners were dressed in simple shorts and shirts. The colour is close to red ochre. The shorts being darker than the shirt. Around their ankles were heavy chains. To get off the bus, they had to hop down. The chain between their legs was held up off the ground with a piece of string. The bus windows had thick wire mesh. The guards sat at the front and back of the bus and the prisoners were in a cage in the middle section. If things didn't go well for my student then he would be leaving on this bus.

At 9 a.m. I went into the courthouse with Gor and his parents. He had committed the crime about a year ago and he had been out on bail since then. To pay for this, his

parents had to give the police their house registration. If their son had run away, they would have lost their house. The courthouse didn't seem to have any lifts and we had to walk up the stairs to the fourth floor. On the second floor there was a metal detector we had to pass through. A lone security guard was checking bags. He didn't seem to be that strict or thorough. Really just going through the motions. In fact, when we came back up after lunch, there was no-one on duty and the keys in my pocket sounded the alarm as I passed through. No-one seemed to care.

When we entered the courtroom I must admit I was a bit surprised. I suppose I was expecting a big courtroom like those in the movies. This one was about the size of a classroom. I estimated that there could be as many as 30 courtrooms like this one in the building. The courtroom was divided roughly in half with the public section slightly smaller. We had to sit on some very uncomfortable benches which faced the raised platform where the judges would sit. There were two comfy chairs for them. Straight ahead was the symbol of the court. This was a two edged dagger pointing downwards with a pair of scales representing fair judgement. However, it was slightly crooked with the left scales a little lower. I hoped this wasn't a bad omen as it was in favour of the prosecutor's side. Above this symbol of the court was the King's portrait which was also crooked. However, he was leaning more towards the defendant's side on my right. Hopefully that would balance things out

Below the table for the judges was where the court clerk sat at her computer. As I said before, the lawyers for the defence were seated on my right and the opposing council was on my left. There weren't that many people in court. Gor, had come with his parents and other family members. Defendant 1 had come only with a friend who later turned out to be a witness. They all sat in the public section. A little later a group of people dressed in black entered the court. And then two shackled prisoners were escorted into the court. Shortly after this the back door opened and the lawyer for defendant 2 motioned to us to stand up. At the same time he was quickly putting on his black robes.

The two judges came in and sat down on their comfy chairs. We then sat down on our hard benches. The judges were dressed in black robes like the lawyers but they didn't have the white cloth over their left shoulder. The atmosphere in the courtroom was relaxed though one of the judges made it clear very early on that all mobile phones should be turned off. Rules on the door to the court also said that everyone should be dressed politely and that you weren't allowed to read newspapers while court was in session. A shame because the proceedings did get drawn out and a trifle boring.

First up were the two prisoners who were there to listen to their sentence. They both got life for a robbery that went tragically wrong when someone got killed. Next a grieving widow who was in a land dispute with her late husband's family. Then it was the turn of the case that I had come to observe. As we were the only people left in court, the judge looked my direction and asked who I was with. I just motioned to Gor and smiled. Then it was down to business.

First in the witness stand was the arresting officer. The seat for the witness is dead center between the judges and the public gallery. I could see that he stood and read

something from a piece of paper that was stuck to the desk. There was no hand on the bible. At first I thought he had his hand on his heart. His back was to me so I couldn't see clearly. But, both hands were up to chest level as he read. Then it dawned on me that he must have his hands together in a "wai". He was probably saying something like he promised to tell the truth and nothing but the truth. But, I couldn't hear very well. He had no microphone and there was too much other noise. There was even a tannoy outside which was disturbing us

An Average Day in a Thai Prison



A scene from the movie "Brokedown Palace" which is banned in Thailand

My first impressions of Thailand even before I came here weren't that good. While I was traveling in Australia I saw the movie "Bangkok Hilton" starring Nicole Kidman. I don't remember much of the movie, but what stands out is Kidman going through customs in Thailand carrying someone else's bag. She is stopped and they find drugs in the bag. It made me paranoid about never ever going to Thailand. I was afraid that someone, maybe the police, would plant drugs in my bag and that I would spend the rest of my life in the notorious Bangkok Hilton. About two years later, I was backpacking across Asia. My itinerary included lengthy stops in many Asian countries. However, I had only allocated a short stay in Thailand. I was still paranoid. Of course I ended up staying much longer but that is another story.

For the past few months I have been visiting one of my former students in prison in Samut Prakan. He has been telling me about life in a prison in Thailand which you can read at ThaiPrisonLife.com. I was at first horrified when I saw my student being sentenced to three years in prison. I didn't know how he would survive. Since I have been in Thailand I have read a number of autobiographies written by foreigners in Thai prisons. They all talked about merciless beatings, gang rape, sadistic guards, murder

and a lot more. However, since I have been talking to my student, I have started to see a different kind of prison. I am not saying he is in a holiday camp as it is certainly a hard life. However, the Klong Dan Central Prison seems to be a model of a modern Thai prison. There are no daily beatings. The guards aren't sadistic. There are no drugs in the prison. The food isn't even that bad.

I guess things have changed for the better over the years. It is also possible that some of the foreign prisoners exaggerated about their treatment in order to sell more books. Although I have found it a fascinating experience writing these prison life blogs, I don't think anything I have written here will propel a book to the top of the bestseller list. There are no dramatic incidents. His daily life is quite uneventful. I am not saying that these foreigners lied about everything. They were, after all, mainly locked up in high security prisons like Bang Kwan. I know I wouldn't survive there. But they have painted a picture that has tainted the Thai people and given the world an impression that all Thailand's prisons are a hell on earth. They are what you make of them. In the outside world we have to understand and respect the Thai culture in order to survive. From what I have heard from my student, it is much the same inside. He said that many of the foreigners don't respect the Thai way of doing things. They want everything done their way and their demands are often unreasonable. This often then leads to tension between the different nationalities and the guards that have to deal with it.

The following account is of an average day in a Thai prison. The interview was done over the period of four weeks.

You have been in prison for more than three months and you have probably settled into a routine by now. Can you give us an idea of what an average day is like? Also, let us know how things changed for you.

I was in that first cell for about 2-3 days. I was then moved to another cell. This one was very crowded. My old school friend, who is a trustee, suggested that I should try to transfer to his cell. To make the move, I had to bribe someone 10 packets of cigarettes. In prison, cigarettes are worth more than money and we use them to get things done. Once I arrived in the new cell, I then paid another five packets of cigarettes to the cell boss in order to have my own space on the floor. I don't really have a lot of room. It is about the width of my shoulders and the length of my body. However, I suppose I am fortunate because about 30 people in my cell have to sleep on their side on the bare floor. My mother sent me a mat to sleep on. We aren't allowed pillows. But, I have a pillowcase which I stuffed with spare clothes.

People start to wake up at about 5.30 a.m. I roll up my mat and put it in the center of the room. Other people who have any bedding do the same. Some people use the toilet in the cell but the cell boss doesn't allow anyone to make a smell. Which is understandable. So, most people wait until they are let out to go to the toilets on the ground floor. At first I was really too embarrassed to use the toilets in the cell for the first week or so. I couldn't go with everybody watching me. But, I got used to it. They say prison changes you. It really does. At about 6.30 a.m. the prison guards come to do the head count. We have to sit in rows in the cell and then count off one by one. At the moment, there are 53

prisoners in our cell which measures only 4 metres by 8 metres. Once the count has finished they let us out. Most people then rush down the stairs for the toilet and the showers. There is always a long queue. I take my time and wait for my friends. I always do everything with my group at the same time.

Most prisoners have to line up for the five minute shower. However, as I am now a trustee myself, I am allowed to use the water tub to take a bath. For this I splash water all over my body. Soap myself. Then rinse with more water. I then brush my teeth. A lot of the prisoners then go to the canteen to eat the government food. I don't usually do this because it isn't always that nice. Around the prison grounds there are places where you can buy food. For breakfast I sometimes have chicken and rice, or fish cakes or fried pork with rice. A plate of this costs about 25 baht. We use a flat plastic spoon to eat our food. It is the kind of Chinese spoon that is used to drink the noodle soup. We are not allowed forks for obvious reasons. After we finish eating we wash our own plates and spoons and keep them in a safe place for next time.

We are not allowed to touch money. We can buy coupons with money from our prison tab. It is like a kind of bank account inside the prison. We cannot set this up by ourselves. A relative on the outside has to do this for us and then pay money into it for us to use. If you don't have any relations then you will have a really hard life. You need money to pay for nearly everything. There are quite a few people without any relations and I try to help as many as I can. These coupons are only valued for the day. Unlike outside you cannot get a refund. If I buy 100 baht of coupons I have to use them all up otherwise they are wasted.



This picture of the prison cell is scanned from a brochure. It gives you an idea about the size of the cell. Behind the photographer is the open toilet. The width of the cell is 4 metres. The length is about 8 metres. You probably can see about 5 metres in this picture. So, this shows more than half of the cell. However, you can only see enough sleeping mats for 23 people. This cell has over 50 people! This is a bit of a propaganda picture. There are in fact two rows in the middle which doesn't give them much room to walk to the toilet. Also, no-one has comfortable beds and pillows like this. About 60% of the prisoners in his cell sleep on the bare floor. They also sleep on their side because

there isn't enough room. The only people that sleep on their back are prisoners who have bought extra space.

After breakfast, the new prisoners have to line up in the parade ground for the first month for the national anthem at 8 a.m. They also have to do army exercises. I don't have to do this as I have a job in the office. When we hear the national anthem, we have to stand to attention wherever we are. Then, as soon as it is over, I then go to my work place. Before I forget, I should tell you how we are supposed to behave in front of the guards. In some ways it is a bit like at school. If a guard walks past us we should turn to the side and stop to allow him room. If we walk past a guard who is standing still, we should go up to him, give a short bow, and then walk on.

This morning, I was only at work for about fifteen minutes when my name was called to go to the visitor's room. At the moment I have visitors about three or four times a week so I keep my prison uniform at the office just in case. Inside the prison we are allowed to wear our normal clothes. However, the visitor's room is on the other side of the wall so we have to change first. It is the same if we have to go to court. This only takes a minute and then I head over to the control area by the front gate. There are two visitor rooms. At 8.30 a.m. we are let in for the first round of the day. There are thirteen rounds in the morning for male prisoners. You are only allowed one visitor per day. At that stage we don't know who has come to visit us. Less than a minute later the relatives and friends of the prisoners come running up to the window. We get exactly 20 minutes to talk before the phone lines are cut. So, everyone is quick. Having visitors and receiving mail is the highlight of my day. It doesn't happen every day so I look forward to when it does happen.

During the week I work in the records office. In the office there is one other prisoner who works with me. My grandfather knows a guard and he got me this job. I spend most of my day writing or typing up records, either for new prisoners or for prisoners who are transferring to other prisons. After the guards found out that I am fluent in English they made me the official translator. So, whenever a foreign prisoner comes to the prison for the first time, I am called to the control area to interview them. I have to ask them questions and then write down the answers in Thai. There are 30 prisoners from places like Singapore, Hong Kong, the Middle East and Africa. There are also two farang prisoners. One of them used to teach English in Northern Thailand. He said he recognized me because he used to use my Bangkok Post column with his students. Another of the foreign prisoners also recognized me. It is funny because I have never been recognized on the street before. But, as soon I go to prison they start recognizing me. In total there are 590 foreign prisoners. However, most of these are from neighbouring countries like Burma, Laos and Cambodia.

I spend most of my day around the office. Sometimes one of the foreign prisoners will come to me for help. Other times the guards will call for me over the loudspeakers to go and assist them with a foreign prisoner. So, I am kept busy. Now it is starting to be very hard work as some of the foreign prisoners are becoming annoying. They demand so much and don't understand why things cannot be done straight away. They sometimes get angry with me but there is nothing can do. I am a prisoner too. At the moment they

get some special privileges. But I heard one of the guards say that this might stop soon as they complain too much. We don't really get a proper lunch break. I usually eat outside the office. Sometimes I go and buy food for myself but other times the guards give us their left over food. I am also a bit like an office boy because the guards get me to run errands for them.

I finish work at about 3 p.m. This is when we all go to take a shower. We also have our last meal for the day at that time. By 4 p.m. we have to line up on the second floor of our building. We line up with other people from our cell. This area is like a factory floor because some people work here during the day. We are then taken up to our cell where we are locked in. Another head count is then done to make sure that we are all there. About this time they turn on the television. This is either a karaoke song or a movie. It is usually turned on until about 9 p.m. Sometimes they are late turning it on. The thing I don't like is that they don't wait until the end of the movie before they switch it off. So we often don't know what happens at the end. Everyone in the cell has to take turns standing guard during the night for one hour. If you don't want to do it yourself, you can always bribe someone else to take your turn.

At the moment I am reading my Harry Potter book a lot. I have nearly finished it. Hopefully someone can send me the next book as you cannot buy books inside prison. I also sometimes play chess. At about 8.30 p.m. our cell boss tells everyone to go to sleep. However, I cannot get to sleep until after 9.30 p.m. It wasn't easy sleeping at first because they keep the light on all night. We are locked in this cell for about 14 hours. Our cell has a window and I can look out at the road beyond the wall. Sometimes I can see a bus driving past. During the night I often dream of leaving the prison and catching that bus. But, I know that won't happen for a long time.

At 6.30 a.m. we are let out and the day starts again. When I was a free person I always looked forward to the weekends. But, not so much in prison. At the weekend there isn't much to do. We aren't allowed visitors and we don't go to work. We cannot hang around the cell. Everyone has to go down to the ground floor. In my section there are over 1,600 people. There isn't a lot of space. It is also very noisy at the weekend. Some people play football and others play takraw. I sometimes play football but I often just watch. Some people gamble by playing "hi-lo" with tamarind seeds. But, this is against the rules. The other weekend a fight broke out between two of the football players. One of them nearly got killed. I guess that was the highlight of that day.

First Day in a Thai Prison

October 27, 2006



Watch Tower at Klong Dan Prison, Samut Prakan

Last month I was telling you about the court case of one of my former students. He had been arrested last year for possession of drugs. The police found amphetamines pills on him. These are known locally as “yaa baa” or “crazy medicine”. The pills are not as strong as other drugs like heroin but they are addictive nevertheless. They were popular with truck drivers as it enabled them to stay awake all night. However, there were side affects which affected the brain and rational thinking. My former student first became addicted to “yaa baa” when he was 15. Many of his school friends at that time were also taking the drug. He tried to quit many times but it was very difficult.

After he was arrested in August last year he did in fact manage to turn his life around. For the year that he was out on bail, he managed to stay clean and was able to concentrate on his family and work. His court case was a few months ago. At that time we didn't know what the judge would do. In many countries he would have just been given a warning or at the least community service. But, in Thailand, penalties for drugs are harsh. I have heard of sentences of 15 years just for a handful of pills. In the end I think he was lucky. I think the judge took into account that he had a regular job with a responsible position, had a family to support and that this was his first offence. He had also taken the advice of the judge and pleaded guilty. My former student was sentenced to three years in prison. His friend, who pleaded not guilty, was sentenced to six years.

Over the past month I have been visiting him regularly in order to interview him about his life in prison. This wasn't easy for me to do. Prisoners are only allowed one visit per day and each visit is only 15-20 minutes long. I wasn't allowed to take a recording device so I had to write all of his answers down longhand. Then when I returned home I typed it up. The first interview is now over and you can read it below. I took it to him this morning in order to check the details. This first story is about his first day in an adult prison.

What was going through your head when you left the courthouse on the prison bus? I was in complete shock. It felt like the world as I knew it was coming to

an end. I had known for a year that this day would come but I tried to block it from my mind. I knew I would never see anything the same again. It was like a nightmare and I couldn't wake up. I don't remember driving through the city.

What happened when you first arrived at the prison? They took us to an area where we were told to take off all our clothes. We were then given a full body search by the prison guards. Not just the new prisoners but the older ones too that had been to the courthouse. I was then given some brown prison clothes. These were a simple shirt and shorts. Then all of the new prisoners were interviewed and a record made by some other people. I thought they were guards at first but I later found out that they were trustees. These are prisoners who have some power like the guards. They took down details like my name and address, occupation and the name of my parents. I was then fingerprinted. After this the trustees took us to an open area on the ground floor of one of the prison buildings. This is like a canteen. We were given brown rice and a kind of soup.

Where were you taken next? They took us up to our cell. For the first few days all of the new prisoners are kept together and then split up around the prison. We were taken to a cell that already looked full but I later found out was only half full. It was already early evening by this time and all of the prisoners had already been locked up in their cells. They were watching a movie on VCD. The cell boss told us where we could sleep on the floor. There was no mattress, no blankets and no pillows. The space we were allowed was marked by the blanket of a prisoner on either side. They had been here longer and had bought extra space so they were able to sleep on their backs. I was only allowed to sleep on my side. We slept head to foot. Meaning the feet of the prisoners on either side were near my head. I recognized one of the prisoners in the cell as a friend of my friend. We talked and watched t.v. for a while. Then at 9 p.m. the television in every cell was turned off and the cell boss told us to go to sleep. However, the light in the cell was kept on all night.

How was your first night? Really bad. I couldn't sleep at all. I was worrying too much about what was going to happen next. It was also very hot and uncomfortable. The cell was very crowded and I couldn't move. There were three fans in the ceiling but it wasn't enough for all of us. I found it difficult sleeping on the bare floor and with no pillow. I also couldn't turn over and had to stay on the same side all night. I was glad when morning came and people started to wake up. This then gave me more room. I found it difficult to stand up because I hurt all over. In one corner of the room there is a toilet for all of us to share. It is a Thai style toilet that you squat over. Around it there is a low wall so that all people can see is your head. It is kept clean and wasn't really smelly.

What time did you leave the cell? You cannot really call it a cell like in American prisons. It is not a small room with bunk beds that you share with a couple other people. Imagine a big hall that has a partition every four metres. The partition is a low wall with green bars going the rest of the way to the ceiling. It is the same at the front where the doors are. There are 16 of these cells on each floor. Each area is about 4 metres by about 8 metres I think. The place where I am sleeping now has 50 people. That first night

there were probably only 35 people in that small area. To answer your question, people start to get up at about 5.45 a.m. or so. However, we are now allowed out until 6.00 a.m.

What happened to you next? The cell boss told us to go down and take a shower. I was lucky as when I got down to the ground floor I met a friend from my old school. He is a trustee and he helped me that first day. He said I could take a bath with the other trustees. He also gave me a bowl and lent me some soap. The trustees have a big water tub and we scooped the water over our bodies. Some people did this naked but others, like me, kept on our boxer shorts. The other prisoners had to take a shower. This is like a long corridor with a wall either side. Each person is allowed five minutes in the shower. The water is turned on for 2.5 minutes for you to wet your entire body. Then it is turned off while you then soap yourself quickly. Then the water is turned back on for another 2.5 minutes for you to wash off the soap. You have to be quick because you don't get a second chance.

When did they cut your hair? They cut my hair that first morning. I had breakfast that first morning with my friend. Other prisoners had to eat the government food which is not very nice at all. It is stale brown rice with some kind of curry. Sometimes the curry or soup is good, other times it is disgusting. They give you food three times a day. The last meal is about 3.00 p.m. However, if you have money, you can buy your own food in the prison shop. So, that first morning my friend bought me white rice and fried pork with basil. After I had finished eating, all the new prisoners had to line up for army like exercises. This is very difficult and exhausting. You have to do it for about two hours with a short break in the middle. All the new prisoners have to do it for the first month. I was lucky because after a short while my name was called to say that I had a visitor.

What was it like having visitors for the first time? That first day was very bad. My girlfriend, mother and brother came to see me. I cried a lot as I was so sad. At that time scared also because I didn't know much about prison life. I wanted to touch my girlfriend but could not as there was glass and bars separating us. We could only speak to each other using a telephone. I spoke to my mother as well but we were only allowed 20 minutes altogether. It was hard saying goodbye but we weren't allowed to stay after the phone line was cut. When I went back inside the prison, the exercises had finished. I then met up with a prison guard who is a friend of my grandfather. He told me that he would arrange work for me which will make life easier. He said if I worked then I didn't have to do the daily exercises, which made me happy. That first day there wasn't much else for me to do. So, I just hanged around. The time went very slowly. At about 4 p.m., we were all told to go back to our cells. We were then locked up in there for about 14 hours until the following morning. Then the day started again.

Back at the Thai Courthouse

September 22, 2006

Richard Barrow



Criminal Court in Samut Prakan, alongside the Chao Phraya River

I had last seen my former student at the Criminal Court in Samut Prakan. He was no longer “defendant number two” as he had already been tried and convicted. The judge had sentenced him to three years and a fine of 200,000 baht (about \$5,400 which is two years wages in Thailand). He had just turned 19 when he was arrested by the police. In America he would have probably got community service, or at least a suspended sentence. I watched in the rain as he boarded the bus for Klong Dan Prison. His baby daughter had come to the courthouse for the trial, but she wasn’t here on the day that he was dragged off to prison. Maybe just as well. How do you explain to an innocent child that she won’t see her father for a long time. Her mother had already abandoned her when she was only one year old. Now her father was leaving too. For the next three years he will be sharing a cramped cell with 50 adult prisoners. His teenage years finally over.

The sentencing was on Thursday 10th September. We had tried everything we could to get him out of going to prison on that day. But, the attempts to get him out on bail for the appeal court failed because the paperwork wasn’t in order. We were told to return on Monday to resubmit the documents. But, we all knew that once he had entered the prison and had been processed, the harder it would be for us to bail him out. When I arrived at the courthouse in the afternoon of Monday 14th September I could see by the glum expressions on his parents faces that their bid had failed. This was no longer going to be a simple task and it could drag on for a long time. I asked how he was doing as I knew that they had gone to visit him at the prison on Friday. She then tearfully said it was bad. Someone had already tried to rape * him. His aunt then said that she was going to the prison the next day to find out what she could do. Her father is a village headman and they hoped that he might be able to use his influence to do something.

Then his mother said, Do you want to go and visit him? I said, “Where? Do you mean here at the courthouse?” She said “yes”. He had apparently been brought back to the courthouse on the off chance that he would be granted bail. I was feeling a bit braver compared to last time so I followed her to the waiting area in front of the lockup. This time I was expecting the smell so it didn’t throw me so much. She gave the guard her i.d. card and then got a queue number from him in return. She said that she had already been in to see him so I would be going in alone. I wasn’t at all nervous this time as I knew what to expect. Obviously everyone was staring at me as I was the only foreigner there. But, I just ignored it all. About five minutes later my number was called and the friendly guard waved me through the door to the lockup on the other side.

Now this was a bit nerve racking. He didn’t know I was coming and I wasn’t sure if I would recognize him. It wasn’t just the thick wire mesh and the dimly lit room. Nor the two metre wide corridor between us. I knew that he would no longer be wearing civilian clothes. He would be wearing the brown prison uniform. He would also be shackled at his feet. Plus I knew that they would have shaved off his hair. I walked up and down the wire fence a few times desperately trying to spot him. On the other side all I could see were dozens and dozens of faces staring back at me. All of them looking much the same in the dim light. Then there was a glimmer of recognition and my former student stood up and came to the wire fence.

As I told you before, the only way we could communicate was with the use of telephones. But as the line wasn’t that good, and because there were about a hundred prisoners milling around behind him, we had to shout to be heard. How on earth you can have a normal conversation by shouting I have no idea. “How are you doing?”, I shouted. ” Doing good” he replied. We only had ten minutes so we couldn’t talk for long. I couldn’t bring myself to ask him about conditions in the prison. It was a sensitive subject and certainly something you couldn’t shout about. “What did you say? Someone tried to rape you? Shout it again.”

He told me that he was worried about his daughter. Since his wife had run off with another man, his daughter had been living with his parents. They were only teenagers when they got married. Their baby daughter had been born out of wedlock which is increasingly becoming a common story these days in Thailand. His parents barely had enough money to look after themselves, so he had been giving them most of his wages up to now. He made me promise that I would do everything I could to make sure his baby daughter was well looked after. I couldn’t hear what he said at first and so he had to shout again. I assured him I would look after her for him until he got out. That is when he started to cry and things went downhill from there. He also said he was worried about his new girlfriend of 10 months. He feared that she wouldn’t wait for him. He was sobbing more now and I was finding it difficult to hear him. I told him again that I would look out for his family and said that I would go and visit him at Klong Dan Prison on Friday.

Tomorrow I will tell you about what it is like to visit a Thai prison.

The Courthouse Lockup

September 18, 2006

Richard Barrow

This is now the final part of the series of blogs I have written about my two days in a Criminal Court in Thailand. The time between the court case and the reading of the verdict was an agonizing nine days. Defendant number two obviously didn't get much sleep in the days leading up to the verdict. At 9.34 a.m. on Thursday 10th September 2006, defendant number two was sentenced to three years in prison. It was a shock for all of us, but at the same time strangely relieving. Not only because it was finally over, but also because it could have been a lot worse. With good behaviour he could get out in two years. For us it was the end of a one year wait. He had originally been arrested on August 14th 2005, one year ago. He had been beaten up by one of the policemen in order to extract a confession. His parents bailed him out using their house as security.

We left my former student in the courtroom and made our way down to the ground floor. His aunt had been the one organizing the paperwork and lawyers and she got to work immediately sorting out the next step. Three things needed to be done. Separating the evidence, applying for the appeal court and applying for bail. I didn't think it would take so long so I decided to hang around. But, lunch time came and they were no further forward. The paperwork wasn't in order and they had to resubmit it after lunch. His mother then asked me if I wanted to go and visit him in the lockup. I said no initially as the thought of going to that place freaked me out. But then I changed my mind. It was bound to be a lot worse for him.

So, she went off to get a number for the queue. Relatives are allowed to bring food for their lunch. So, she also went to get some fried rice. Then we went to the waiting area. His girlfriend and brother went too. It was the smell that hit me first. It was so out of place in Thailand. Thai people are normally very hygienic and shower several times a day. But, this stench was bad. By this time they had already started calling out numbers and people were going in about ten at a time. Every time they opened the door the smell became worse. It was obvious that the lock-up was behind this wall. I could hear people shouting. At the top of the wall there were vents which explained the smell. About ten minutes later they called our number and we went in.

The area we went into was dimly lit. We were told to go to the left for the male prisoners. In front of us was a thick wire mesh that went from floor to ceiling. There was then a two metre wide corridor which was patrolled by guards. Then on the other side there was another wire mesh. The sparse room on the other side was large. The prisoners are not told when someone has come to visit them so you have to try your best to attract their attention. They then come to the wire mesh where there is a row of telephones. This is how we communicated. However, the line wasn't that good so everyone had to shout.

And because everyone was shouting it made it difficult to hear. It didn't help that there were also 80 or so other prisoners in the room also talking loudly to each other. I didn't say anything. What could I say? I just smiled and nodded at him and then left. It was very upsetting.

The afternoon dragged on and they weren't getting anywhere with the paperwork. It was now a race against time. There are two prison buses per day. The first one leaves at lunch time. The last one leaves at 4.30 p.m. We all knew that once he enters the prison and gets processed, the harder it will be to get bail. Time was running out fast. The paperwork was wrong again. There was an error in one of the documents. The junior lawyer ran back to his office to get it retyped. But, we all knew it was too late. In the distance we could hear the distinct sound of the chains. They had started to move. They were getting ready to load the prisoners onto the bus. I went outside and stood near the fence separating us and the prison bus. It started to spit with rain but I didn't care.

About ten minutes later the first prisoners emerged from the building in pairs. They were holding hands like Sunday school students about to go on a picnic. However, they wore prison clothes and were shackled at the feet. They hopped up the steps of the bus as if they had done that many times before. I had looked for my student but couldn't see him. We waited another ten minutes and then finally the next group of prisoners came out. These were the ones that had been sentenced on that day and weren't wearing the brown prison clothes. They also weren't shackled. However, they were stripped to the waist and came running out of the building in pairs with their arms around each others shoulders.

We moved around to the side of the bus. Some relatives were already talking to their loved ones. We couldn't really see inside the bus. All we could see were their fingers poking out through the wire mesh and their faces. You had to shout to be heard. His girlfriend was standing beside me. Her eyes were red but she wasn't visibly crying. She was trying her best to smile. They weren't saying much. What could you say? Looking back behind me I could see his mother standing with the rest of his relatives. She was crying hard and they were trying to comfort her. We all knew that this moment was going to come but it was still shocking nevertheless. I tried my best not to think too much and just kept my chin up. I had no idea what lay ahead for him. All I knew was from the books I had read and the movies I had seen. I knew full well that the environment he was about to enter was full of danger.

As the bus pulled out I waved and said a silent prayer. He was now heading to the prison and there was nothing any of us could do. I wondered what it was going to be like for him, his first night in a Thai prison.

To be continued....

Judgement Day in a Thai Court

September 14, 2006

Richard Barrow



The Scales of Justice inside the Court Room

I was telling you before about the day I spent in a criminal court in Thailand. It was a long day and the bench I was sitting on was extremely uncomfortable. But, at least I knew for sure that I could go home at the end of the day unlike my former student who was now standing trial. The actual trial was the week before and nine days later we had returned to hear the verdict. How would you feel on a day like this? I don't know about you but I would be terrified about not knowing what my future would hold. I like to be in control, but on this day, two judges would decide the fate of defendant number two. How do you prepare yourself for this? Do you say goodbye to your loved ones? Do you do your last minute washing and put away your underwear neatly in the drawer? Well, if you are Thai you don't. One thing I noticed is that they don't like to talk about anything bad that might happen. If you talk about it then you are inviting trouble. Best to ignore it and hope for the best. The only thing he could do was light incense sticks and pray at the spirit house in front of his home.

At 8.30 a.m. we were back at the Criminal Court in Samut Prakan. Everyone was visibly nervous and tense. I think we all just wanted to get this day over with. We waited outside as it was so hot and would be hotter in the corridor on the 4th floor. The courtroom itself was air-conditioned but it would still be locked at this time. So we sat and waited. A short while later, the sound of sirens indicated that the prison bus had arrived. We all looked at each other. Even though we were all hoping for a suspended sentence or at least community service, we all knew that defendant number two could very well be shackled, and sent away on this prison bus in just a few short hours. You

know, the sound of chains never go away and I can still hear them now as I type this. It is such a haunting sound.

It was now approaching 9 a.m. and it was time to make our way up stairs. A light was on outside the courtroom indicating the court clerk had already arrived. We went in and sat down on the hard benches. The public gallery was crowded and I tried to work out how many cases were going to be tried this morning. There were two lawyers on the defendants table and two on the prosecutors side. I didn't recognize any of them and it was beginning to look like no-one else would be coming to hear the verdict. About ten minutes later the back door opened and one of the judges made an appearance. The court clerk motioned to everyone to stand up. As before, the lawyers quickly put on their robes. It was funny, it was always last minute for them to put on the robes.

I could see the judge ask the court clerk about the whereabouts of the other judge but I didn't catch the reply. He then decided to continue without him. This was the guy that was cutting his finger nails with one of those big scissors with the bright orange handles. I guessed he was going to let his friend read the verdict. The first case was again a kind of land dispute due to a death in the family. It didn't last long. By this time the second judge had arrived and sat down in his comfy chair. But, it looked like he had forgotten something and he soon got up and left. Next to arrive was a prisoner with chains. He was escorted by a policeman who held in his hands a pair of handcuffs. It did cross my mind that it was strange that he was carrying the handcuffs as the prisoner was already chained. He then put them down on a seat near me. I should have seen that as a sign.

The prisoner was asked to stand up in order to listen to the verdict. I didn't listen as I was more interested in observing the second judge who had just returned with a pile of papers. Probably the documents for our case. He looked my way a few times and I tried to see any indication of what he was going to say. But no clues. I was just starting to wonder how much longer we would be kept in suspense when the prisoner sat down and the two defendants in our case were told to stand up. It was 9.34 a.m. The charges were then read out aloud and the judge then gave the verdict. First for the friend of my former student. You might remember the drama in court the week before when I said that this guy had lied through his teeth in order to incriminate defendant number two. I had hoped that the judge had seen this and would not let this guy go home alone today. At the very least they should get the same sentence.

“Defendant number one, you are sentenced to six years in prison and a fine of 400,000 baht” (just over \$10,000 which is a lot of money). By this time my mind was in a kind of trance. Everything around me was blocked out. Even what the judge was saying. I was only waiting to hear two things: the number of years and the fine. “Defendant number two” That is my former student. “You are sentenced to three years in prison and a fine of 200,000 baht.” Everything after that was a blur. The policeman picked up the handcuffs near me and put them on the defendants, now prisoners, straight away. His family then ushered me out of the court into the corridor. The lawyer was waiting outside and immediately they started discussing what they could do next.

To be honest, I was shocked but also partly relieved. It could have been a lot worse. When I went home that night I posted on the regulars forum the news. But, I was so emotional that I couldn't write anything longer than three sentences. It was a kind of delayed shock. Even now, exactly seven days after the event, it still affects me to remember the details of that day. From the courtroom we went downstairs to the ground floor. A plan had already been formulated. First, they wanted the evidence and paperwork to be separated. As defendant number one had pleaded not guilty, he would be taking a different course now. Next, they needed to prepare the way to go in front of the Court of Appeal. (In Thailand, there are three courts.) As this might take some time, their first priority was to try and get him out on bail. No-one wanted to see him go to a Thai prison today. I have read too many books to know that prisons in Thailand are not the healthiest of places.

As this is getting too long, I will write the conclusion of this first part soon.

Courtroom Drama in Thailand



The Courtroom at the Samut Prakan Criminal Court

The first witness was called to testify and he was sworn in. The prosecutor then proceeded to ask him pertinent questions regarding the day the alleged crime took place. The first witness was the arresting officer. In the movies, what would happen next is that the court clerk would be typing up the entire interaction. However, this wasn't the case in this Thai court.

When the two judges first entered the courtroom they were carrying what I at first thought to be small laptops. They placed these on the bench in front of them. I thought to myself, very hi-tech. They then hunted around for a place to plug them in. There were no sockets available so the court clerk unwound one of those cheap power extensions that you can buy at Big C for 120 baht. She then passed up to the judge a tray of cassette tapes. So, the hi-tech laptop turned out to be a very low-tech cassette tape recorder!

Now came the interesting part that I found to be so curious. After the policeman answered each question, the judge then spoke into the microphone, paraphrasing what the policeman had just said. Sometimes he wasn't clear what the witness had just said so asked questions to clarify. What was even more interesting was that the judge was choosing to be selective. The judge didn't record some of the things that the policemen said. So, some things were therefore not entered into the record.

After the prosecutor had finished, it was time for the cross-examination by the defense lawyers. As there were two defendants, there were two lawyers. They were going into a lot of detail, which I couldn't see the sense of. For example, the exact details of the events leading up to the alleged crime and also the route taken on the motorcycle that eventful evening. The judge entered most of this into the record but sometimes not. I am not sure if the defense lawyers were annoyed or not when the judge did not record the answer. Before the defense lawyer asked the next question he often paused to make sure the judge was keeping up. Sometimes he would wait for the judge to speak into the microphone. Other times the judge was doing it at the same time as new questions were being answered. Very bizarre.

Whilst this was going on, the other judge was lounging back in his comfy chair cutting his fingernails. Every now and then he would ask the witness his own questions, but mainly he left the proceedings up to the first judge. Once the cross-examination was over, the prosecutor then had a chance for redirect. Then the next witness was called. Another policeman who was also there at the scene. As he came in, defendant number one (my old student) leaned towards me and said "that was the policeman who beat me up in prison in order to get me to confess".

The second policeman was then sworn in and asked similar questions by the prosecutor and then the two defense lawyers as before. By this time, the judge had already given his first cassette tapes to the court clerk who was now starting to type up the testimony. After she had printed them out, she passed them to the judges who checked them and then told each witness in turn to sign the documents. During the morning, three policemen were called to the witness stand to testify.

Before the break for lunch, the judge asked the parents of the two defendants to approach the bench. I couldn't catch it all as the judge was talking quietly, but from what I could hear, he was telling them that the evidence was overwhelming and it looked almost certain that the two defendants would be serving a lengthy time in prison. He urged them to persuade their sons to change their plea to guilty. He said that if they did that, he would then be sympathetic and half the sentence. (It should be pointed out, that up to this point, the judge had only heard the testimony from one side. The defendants hadn't yet entered the witness stand.) So much for innocent until proven guilty.

After the court clerk had finished typing up everything and the policeman signed the documents, a break for lunch was called and we were told to come back in 90 minutes. As the defendants were already out on bail, they were allowed to leave the courthouse as well. I went with defendant number two and his parents to a nearby restaurant to eat som tam. His lawyer came too and they discussed the case over lunch.

Back in court, the lawyer for defendant number two told the judge that they had decided to change his plea to guilty. However, defendant number one changed his mind and decided to proceed with the not-guilty verdict. He was then called to the witness stand and sworn in. This time, his defense lawyer asked the questions first. I think he was onto the second or third question when he realized that his second witness shouldn't really be in court listening to this testimonial. He had actually been there all morning. So, he quickly told him to go and wait outside. The judge didn't make any comment.

What happened next is that defendant number one proceeded to stab my old student in the back. He denied all knowledge of the alleged crime and said defendant number two was acting alone. His family, who knew the full story, were shocked and kept shaking their heads in disbelief. But, there wasn't much they could do. After the defense lawyer finished, the prosecutor then asked her own questions. He was then asked to step down and the next witness was called.

The friend of defendant number one then came into the court. But, he wasn't dressed properly and the defense lawyer told him to go back out and tuck his shirt in. As there was another case waiting, the judge decided to take this opportunity to switch cases. I guess his reasoning was that this new case was just a simple land dispute and wouldn't take long. Then, for some reason, the prosecutor decided to leave. Maybe she needed to go to the bathroom or maybe she was just bored. I don't know. But, she never did come back.

This switch in trials lasted about ten minutes and we were then soon back on track. The second witness was then called. The defense lawyer then asked him information about the day in question. However, he tripped up a few times and seemed to contradict the testimony of defendant number one. This was mainly because this guy was lying through his teeth. He was pretending to have been there at the time of the alleged crime and was trying to show that his friend knew no knowledge of what was happening.

As the prosecutor had already gone home for the day, this witness wasn't cross-examined which is a shame. There were so many holes in his story. I just hoped that the judges could see that for themselves. As defendant number two had now changed his plea to guilty, he wasn't called to the witness stand and so wasn't able to say his side of the story.

By about 3 p.m., everything had been typed up and signed. The judge then checked his desktop calendar and told everyone to return in nine days time to hear his verdict and the sentencing. We were all under the impression that it would all be over in one day. Now, both defendants will have to wait nine days to find out whether they will be serving time or not. Their lawyers had told them that the maximum length of prison term would be 45 years! But, they were all hoping for a suspended sentence. As you can imagine, they didn't sleep very well that week.

Becoming a Cell Boss



The old Paknam Prison in 1937. Due to overcrowding, a more modern and bigger prison was built outside the city in 1997. In that year there were 125,000 people in Thai prisons. By the time the new prison had been completed in 2001, Thailand had 244,000 prisoners. An overwhelming 66.46% of the prisoners were there for drug related cases.

You said before that you are a trustee. Is that still true and how are you treated differently?

I am not really the main kind of trustee like you think. These trustees wear a dark blue uniform and have power over the other prisoners. Some are well liked and very kind. Others are like sadists and enjoy the power they have over you. There are two kinds of trustees. The trustee with brains and the trustees with brawn. I am in the former group because I work in the office. The other trustees only have the job because of their muscles. I think anyone can be a trustee. I heard that some people are applying now for the job. I guess you could also bribe your way to being a trustee.

I think most of the guards know me now as I not only work in the office, but also around the prison. Whenever there is a problem with a foreign prisoner, the guards call me to go and help. This means I can walk from section to section by myself. Normally, prisoners are not allowed to do that. That is an advantage for me as I can then go and visit the doctor on any day I like. I can also go and pick up medicine for any of my friends that need something. Prisoners are also not allowed to take food or cigarettes up to the cell at the end of the day. But, I can usually do that if it is a kind guard that knows me.

Before the prisoners go up to the cell, they are searched. The way this normally happens, is that the prisoners are told to take off their shirt. Then the trustee on his left will

search his shirt while the other one pats down his shorts. If a prisoner wants to smuggle some cigarettes up to his cell, what he normally does is fasten them to the inside of his left leg with a rubber band. The trustee who is patting down his shorts, is on his right hand side so he wouldn't normally spot the cigarettes. However, once or twice a week they do strip searches. Each day we have different guards and some are stricter than others. The normal way for this is that five prisoners at a time are called to the front. They then have to take off their shirt, shorts and underwear and then turn around 360 degrees. The trustees then search the clothes while the guards watch. If any contraband is found, the prisoner is forced to lie down naked on his front and the guard then hits his backside with his wooden truncheon. Whilst I have been at this prison, the guards have never found any drugs so I guess the prison is drug free.

What usually happens next?

After they are searched, then everyone goes up to the cell. By this time it is about 3.30 p.m. Now I am the cell boss which is sort of good news, but it is also really bad news. I didn't ask for this job. The old cell boss is now chained up in solitary confinement. Last week, there was an incident in our cell. It happened during the middle of the night and as I was sleeping I didn't learn about it until the following morning. Normally these kinds of things don't get reported if it happens to boys from Burma, Cambodia or Laos. They are never here longer than 90 days. But, this hilltribe boy knew someone who had been here for a while and he reported it for him. The cell boss didn't actually have anything to do with this incident, but he is responsible for anything that happens. So, all of them have now been chained up and moved to a different section of the prison. The cell boss will probably wear leg irons for about three months. I doubt he will get his job back again.

I suppose the guard gave me the job as cell boss because he knows that I can be trusted and that I haven't caused any problems in the past. But, it worries me that I will be responsible for anything one of the 50 prisoners in my cell does. Just yesterday an incident happened in our cell. During the night everyone has to take turns "standing guard" for an hour. I know this sounds a bit silly because we are in a locked cell, but we still have to stand guard. Anyway, last night, this one kid fell asleep during his watch. One of the patrolling guards saw him and he was punished with 20 squat jumps. I had to do 10 squat jumps. Of course, when we went back up to the cell, I punished him myself by getting him to do 50 more squats jumps. They have to understand that while I am cell boss, they will have to be on their best behaviour. I don't want to be put in chains.



The Old Paknam Prison in 1937

When we go up to the cell in the late afternoon, I tell the prisoners to first go and wash their feet in the toilet cubicle. There is a concrete tub of water here. Then I tell them to sit down in rows. When the guard comes each prisoner has to count off in turn. I put the foreign prisoners who cannot count in Thai near the front. I then count for them pointing to each one in turn. “*Neung, song, sam, see...*” Then, when everyone else has finished, I shout my number out last. Then everyone is free to do what they like. In my group of friends we have a kind of errand boy who works for us. In Thai we call our groups “*baan*” or “*house*” in English. Most houses have their own errand boy to do odd jobs. Most of these boys don’t have any relatives on the outside to help them so they don’t mind helping us. In return, we give them food and anything they need to be more comfortable. So, after we are in the cell, I tell him to prepare my bedding. He also washes my clothes. I know it sounds lazy, but at the same time he is doing me a favour, I am doing a favour for him too. That is how we survive in prison, by helping each other.

Now that I am the cell boss, people have to “*pay*” me packets of cigarettes or bottles of Coke for favours. When I first came I had to pay my cell boss 4 packets of cigarettes in order to have a space on the floor. Every cell is the same. I haven’t done this yet. I don’t really want to, but I think it might cause problems if I try to change things. For example, there isn’t enough room for everyone to sleep on their backs. How do I choose? The obvious way is for people to pay for extra space. Sometimes I don’t like being cell boss. But, it has advantages too. We are normally allowed to bath twice a day. The second time is at 3 p.m. before we come up to the cell. However, it is really hot now and everyone is already sweating again even before they go back to the cell. As I am the cell boss, I can take a bath in the toilet cubicle in the cell. I let the others in my house do the same. But only us. If everyone took a shower here then there would be a big mess and

the guards will punish us. No-one complains as this is what the previous cell boss did. It is the same in the other cells.

I know you were having a difficult time when you first went to prison. Have things changed now?

Yes, I have relaxed more and settled down to a routine. It is the same thing every day in the same order. So, it is a bit like school. You could say I am comfortable now. I have read the book "Damage Done" by that foreigner. Prison here is nothing like that. We don't eat cockroaches. There is no black hole. Guards don't beat prisoners for no reason. In fact, most of them are very kind though also strict. They are just doing their job. If you try and break the rules you get punished. That Australian also talked about people taking drugs all the time. That is not true here at all. The most people do is take an overdose of cough medicine which makes them feel drunk. When I first came here I was really shy about going to the toilet in front of people and also the strip searches. But I got used to that now as it happens to everyone. I suppose prison changes you in some ways. I am not sure how easy it will be living my old life again.

What are some of the most difficult things you have to face?

Every night seeing buses pass on the road below, knowing that I cannot leave this place. I miss my daughter and I am sorry I won't be there when she starts Kindergarten in May. I also miss my girlfriend. At the start she came often to visit me. I still wrote to her every week even though she stopped coming for a long time. Then last month she came to say she was breaking up with me. I wasn't angry with her. I understand, she is young and has her own life to lead. I told her that it is alright if she goes with other boys. But, I said that when I get out, I will go and court her again. She said she will come and visit but I don't think she will. Tai, my ex-wife has come to visit me twice this year. She has also written to me three times. I don't know whether I will get back with her, but she will always be a part of my life because of our daughter. As my ex-girlfriend has now quit from working in our online shop too, my ex-wife has agreed to start work there next month. Let's see what happens.

I am used to the day to day life now. It is often boring but it is now part of my life. Weekends are not so fun as there is nothing to do. There is no work at the weekend and we just hang around outside. Holidays are the worst like the recent Songkran holiday. For five days in a row we had nothing at all to do. No work, no visitors, no letters from the postman. Some people tried to play water fights but there wasn't really that much water. So, for five very long days we just sat around and talked, played chess, read cartoon books and watched others play football. I have also got a tattoo now. Don't tell my mum as she will be really angry. She will say that it will make me look like a prisoner. But, I am a prisoner. Even after I leave, a piece of me will always be that person. I sometimes think about what my life will be like once I leave here. I honestly cannot say. I know I am luckier than most people as they will find it difficult to get a job. I don't really like to think about it too much. I am just trying to live my life one day at a time. What I am concentrating on each night before I go to bed, is getting out of here

and hugging my darling daughter. I miss her so much that it sometimes makes me cry. “Nong Grace, be good. Your father will be with you soon.”

Two Prison Escapees caught by Pattaya Police

Posted on February 24, 2013 at 4:53 pm

Two prisoners who escaped from Police Custody by picking the locks of their handcuffs and cutting through the roof of a Police Van have now been re-captured in the South of Thailand.

In the early hours of Sunday, the two escapees, Khun Daimarat aged 32 and Khun Akapan aged 34, the son of a Highway Police Officer, arrived at Pattaya Police Station where they will be kept until their next appearance in Court. On Saturday they had been located and arrested at the Bangpu Resort in Nakhon Si Tamarat in the South of Thailand.

The pair had planned their escape from custody with the help of family and friends who were able to smuggle a pair of scissors and paper clips into the cells at Nongprue Police Station, where they were initially held last Wednesday. As they were being transported to the Pattaya Provincial Court, the pair were able to escape from their handcuffs and cut through the roof of the Police transporter. They made good their escape close to the train track in Soi Kao Ta Lo in East Pattaya.

It is thought they first hitched a ride to Chonburi City and then made their way to Bangkok where they stayed one night until catching a train to the Southern Province. Their intention was to stay with a friend but he refused to allow them to stay after he was aware what they had done so the pair checked into a local resort where they were later arrested.

The pair are facing extortion charges and charges relating to their escape from custody.

Related Story: <http://www.pattayaone.net/pattaya-news/75709/scissors-paper-clips-men-escape-police-custody-jomtien/>

A Foreigner in a Thai Court

May 27, 2007

Richard Barrow

When I was younger, I once sat on the jury of a murder trial. It lasted for about seven days. I had always been fascinated by courtroom dramas and after watching "Twelve Angry Men" I fancied myself as Head Juror. Alas, I was only 19 at the time and no-one voted me for that position. Although it was a serious case, I did enjoy my time listening to the arguments of the prosecution and defence. The evidence was overwhelming and I think we all knew what the verdict would be quite early on in the case. On the final day, we were sent to deliberate the verdict just before lunch. There wasn't really much to discuss and I think we could have gone back in straight away with a guilty verdict. However, out of respect for the accused, we decided we should at least put on a show of having a deep and meaningful discussion. We were also hungry and decided to order the free lunch and give our verdict after we had sufficiently rested.

In Thailand, the Courts of Justice don't quite work in the same way. In the Criminal Courts, there are always at least two judges and no jury. Although it may seem to be unfair not being judged by a panel of your peers. I think it is probably better if amateurs, like myself, didn't have so much of a say in the lives of the accused. But then, that leaves a lot of responsibility on the shoulders of the judges. A few days ago I was in court for the trial of a defendant who had been accused of attempted murder. This was a Westerner who was being put on trial in a foreign land. Everything was conducted in Thai. At the beginning of the case, there was a discussion between the judges and the defence team as to whether there should be translations for the defendant during the trial. The judge was of the opinion that it would slow the proceedings down too much and asked the lawyer to only translate what she felt was necessary. Really, John was lucky to have a lawyer that spoke English. Another prisoner that I spoke to said he couldn't afford his own lawyer. So, the court appointed one for free, who unfortunately didn't speak any English. He said there was a court interpreter, but all he said was "You,

come here. Sit down. Stand up. Sign here” etc. Other than that, he had no idea what was going on or even how much time he was sentenced to. In fact, he was the last to know.

The courtroom wasn't very large. There were probably about six or so of these rooms on this floor alone. At the front was the raised platform where the judges sat. Above them is a portrait of H.M. The King. Below it is the symbol of the court, a downward pointing dagger with scales balancing on it. In front of the bench sat the court clerk. On the judges right was the table for the prosecution. On the left was the table for the defense. In the middle of the room, facing the judges bench, was the chair and table for the witness. The room was roughly split in half with a low railing. Behind this were the benches where members of the public and interested parties sat. In Thailand, courts are usually open to the public. So, in theory, if you are respectfully dressed, you could go and watch a trial. Just remember no cameras are allowed and you should turn off your mobile phone.

At about 9.35 a.m., John (not his real name) was escorted into the courtroom by a policeman. He was barefoot and chained at the ankles. A piece of string was attached to the chains which enabled him to pick them off the floor as he hobbled along. The policeman told him to sit down on the front bench next to where I was sitting. I asked him whether he remembered me visiting him in prison and he said “yes” but he didn't remember my name. While we were waiting for the judges to arrive, I tried to have a conversation with him. He wasn't looking too good.

Shortly later, the two judges arrived through their private entrance at the front of the court. No-one announced their arrival, but everyone stood up anyway. They wore a black robe with a dark velvet edging around the neck and down the front. People didn't *wai* the judges, but bowed instead. The public prosecutor was sat on my left. I recognized her instantly as she was also in Gor's trial. The first day was reserved for the prosecution. The burden of proof rests on the prosecution and she has to prove the crime beyond a reasonable doubt. In the morning, she called three witnesses: the victim, the arresting officer and a witness to the crime. Each one was called forward where they then put their hands together in a prayer like gesture and promised to tell the truth and nothing but the truth. As in Western courts, the prosecutor asked a series of questions and then the defence were allowed to cross examine. However, there were some notable differences.

In Western courts, there would be a stenographer who would make a record of everything that was said. However, in Thailand, this is left up to the judge. In front of him was a tape recorder. This wasn't to record the witness. What happened is that after the witness had answered the question, the judge would then paraphrase what he had just said. But, he didn't do this for everything. Only what he deemed to be relevant. During the cross-examination, I could see the defence lawyer pausing before he asked each question so that the judge could have time to record the answer. However, sometimes the judge didn't bother to record anything which obviously annoyed the defence. He just told them to ask the next question. The witness had said he was in hospital for four days. However, under cross examination, he said he was only in ICU for the first day. The judge didn't record that.

I also noticed that the judges participated more in the questioning of the witness. Sometimes they asked questions that they felt the prosecutor should have asked. Or a question to clarify an answer. Like in my previous trial, the prosecutor sometimes left the courtroom during cross-examination. Although there were two judges, there was only one lead judge. The other was there as support. Every now and then he would change tapes and the court clerk would then take this to type up. At the start of each tape he would record something and then quickly rewind it to see if it recorded properly. The last witness of the morning was supposed to be the doctor. However, he didn't turn up which seemed to annoy the judges. After a few phone calls, they decided to postpone the next trial date. The prosecution were supposed to finish on this day and then the following week the defence team would have their turn. But, as the doctor couldn't come the trial was put off for just over two weeks.

It is doubtful that the verdict will be read out on that day. From previous experience, I would say it would take them two to three weeks before they set a date for the verdict to be read. By about 12 p.m., the court clerk had finished typing up the testimonials from the witnesses. These were then read out in court. Each witness was then asked if what had been read was a true account. They said it was. Then each relevant party had to sign these statements. At first John didn't want to sign this document. It was all written in Thai. He said that he was being framed and didn't want to be a part of all this. The lawyer managed to persuade him in the end by saying that he was only signing to witness this document. Not to say what was written was the truth.

Update: I was unable to go to his other trial dates. As expected it did drag on as court dates were put off to another time. He was finally sentenced to nearly seven years in late October – five months after the first court date and one year after his arrest.

Scissors and Paper Clips used as two men escape Police Custody in Jomtien

Posted on February 20, 2013 at 10:11 pm

Two arrestees who were facing multiple charges including sexual assault, firearms and extortion managed to escape from Police Custody on Wednesday afternoon using scissors and paper clips, which Police suspect was smuggled into the cells at Nongprue Police Station.

Khun Daimart aged 32 and Khun Akapan aged 34 had been earlier arrested on multiple charges and took part in a press conference at Nongprue Police Station. They were being transported to the Pattaya Provincial Court where it was expected they would be ordered to stay on-remand pending their trial.

A total of 8 people were being transported in a small pick-up which had been modified to allow for the secure transport of arrestees. The truck was fitted with a steal cage although the roof of the pick-up was thin aluminum which the men are thought to have cut through during the trip after they picked the locks on their handcuffs with the paper clips.

Police were made aware of the escapees by another prisoner who knocked on the rear window of the cab. It is thought that during a traffic jam the men were able to escape somewhere on the Sukhumvit Road close to the Jomtien turn-off.

Police Colonel Somnook armed himself with an assault rifle and mobilized 50 Police Officers and Police Volunteers who began a search of the area. All they found was the shirts the two escapees were known to be wearing.

The two men remain at large and are now the subject of a man hunt which is currently ongoing.







Alleged Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout in handcuffs (R) is escorted by Thai and US special forces to board the airplane for extradition to the USA at Don Mueang airport in Bangkok, Thailand, 16 November 2010. Bout, 43, was arrested in Bangkok in March 2008, in a sting operation led by US agents who posed as arms buyers for a leftist rebel group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). The former Soviet air force officer has denied allegations that he supplied illegal arms to buyers in Africa, South America and the Middle East. EPA/STR

I visited Thailand recently for a holiday and went to a police gear shop. I bought some handcuffs there.

Thai police uses 2 kind of handcuffs which both operated by a flat key. The first cuff has s "super K" engraved on the cuff lock case and the other has a logo that looks like "2000" to me. The Super K cuffs were used by the patrol police and the locking mechanism is not ratchet, it is a star shape wheel that engaged into holes on the cuff bow. The "2000" cuffs is Peerless style design and is used by the "Super Cops" which is similiar to SWAT. The keys are different for both cuffs. The cuffs came with pouches, leather with Thai police logo for Super K and Nylon with "Super cops" sign for "2000".

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Narcotics Act B.E. 2522 (1979)



“Narcotics” means any form of chemicals or substances which, upon being consumed whether by taking orally, inhaling, smoking, injecting or by whatever means, causes physiological or mental effect in a significant manner such as need of continual increase of dosage, having withdrawal symptoms when deprived of the narcotics, strong physical and mental need of dosage and the health in general being deteriorated, and also includes plant or parts of plants which are or give product as narcotics or may be used to produce narcotics and chemicals used for the production of such narcotics as notified by the Minister in the Government Gazette, but excludes certain formula of household medicine under the law on drugs which contain narcotic ingredients. (section 4)

In order to be controlled properly, narcotics are classified into 5 categories because they are of different danger and medicinal purposes.

Lists of narcotics according to the Notification of the Ministry of Public Health No. 135 (B.E. 2539) are as follows:

Category I 32 dangerous narcotics such as heroine, amphetamine, methamphetamine, ecstasy and LSD;

Category II 100 ordinary narcotics such as coca leaf, cocaine, codeine, concentrate of poppy straw, methadone, morphine, medicinal opium and opium;

Category III narcotics which are in the form of medicinal formula and contain narcotics of Category II as ingredients;

Category IV 15 chemicals used for producing narcotics of Category I or II such as acetic anhydride, acetyl chloride, ethylidine diacetate, chlorpseudophedrine, ergometrine, ergotamine, isosafrole, lysergic acid, piperonal and safrole;

Category V 4 narcotics which are not included in Category I to IV – i.e. cannabis, kratom plant, poppy plant and magic mushroom.

Offences and Punishments under the Act

CATEGORY I:

Production importation exportation

- Life imprisonment (section 65 para. 1)
- For the purpose of disposal: death penalty (section 65 para. 2)
- Pure substances of 20 grams or more shall be regarded as commission for the purpose of disposal (section 15)

Disposal or possession for the purpose of disposal

- Pure substances of not more than 100 grams: imprisonment of 5 years to life and a fine of 50,000 – 500,000 Baht (section 66 para. 1)
- Pure substances of more than 100 grams: life imprisonment to death penalty (section 66 para. 2)

Possession

- Pure substances of less than 20 grams; imprisonment of 1 to 10 years and a fine of 10,000 – 100,000 Baht (section 67)
- Pure substances of 20 grams or more shall be regarded as commission for the purpose of disposal (section 15)

Consumption

- Imprisonment of 6 months – 10 years and a fine of 5,000 – 10,000 Baht (section 91)

Deceit, threat, use of violent force or coercion of another person for consumption

- Imprisonment of 1 – 10 years and a fine of 10,000 – 100,000 Baht (section 93)

Instigating another person for consumption

- Imprisonment of 1 – 5 years and a fine of 10,000 – 50,000 Baht (section 93 bis)

CATEGORY II:

Production importation exportation

- Imprisonment of 1-10 years and a fine of 10,000 – 100,000 Bath (section 68)
In case of morphine, opium or cocaine: imprisonment of 20 years to life and a fine of 200,000 – 500,000 Bath (section 68)

Disposal or possession for the purpose of disposal

- Imprisonment of 1 – 10 years and a fine of 10,000 – 100,000 Bath (section 69 para.2)
- In case of morphine, opium or cocaine, if pure substances of more than 100 grams: imprisonment of 3 – 20 years and a fine of 30,000 – 200,000 Bath. But, if pure substances of more than 100 grams: imprisonment of 5 years to life and a fine of 50,000 – 500,000 Bath (section 69 para. 3, para. 4)

Possession

- Pure substances of not more than 100 grams: imprisonment not exceeding 5 years and a fine not exceeding 50,000 Bath (section 69 para. 1)
- Pure substances of more than 100 grams shall be regarded as commission for the purpose of disposal (section 17)

Consumption

- Imprisonment of 6 months – 10 years and a fine of 5,000 – 10,000 Bath (section 91)

Deceit, threat, use of violent force or coercion of another person for consumption

- Imprisonment of 1 – 10 years and a fine of 10,000 – 100,000 Baht (section 93)

Instigating another person for consumption

- Imprisonment of 1 – 5 years and a fine of 10,000 – 50,000 Baht (section 93 bis)

CATEGORY III:

Production importation

- Imprisonment not exceeding 3 years or a fine not exceeding 30,000 Bath or both (section 70)

Exportation disposal

- Imprisonment not exceeding 1 year of a fine not exceeding 10,000 Bath or both (section 71)

Deceit, threat, use of violent force or coercion of another person for consumption

- Imprisonment of 1 – 10 years and a fine of 10,000 – 100,000 Bath (section 93)

CATEGORY IV:

Production importation

- Imprisonment of 1 – 10 years and a fine of 10,000 – 100,000 Bath (section 73)

Exportation disposal

- Imprisonment of 1 – 10 years and a fine of 10,000 – 100,000 Bath (section 73)

Possession for the purpose of disposal

- Imprisonment of 1 – 10 years and a fine of 10,000 – 100,000 Bath (section 74 para. 2)

Possession

- Imprisonment not exceeding 5 years and a fine not exceeding 50,000 Bath (section 74)
- Quantity of 10 kg. upwards shall be regarded as possession for the purpose of disposal (section 26 para. 2)

Deceit, threat, use of violent force or coercion of another person for consumption

- Imprisonment of 1 – 10 years and a fine of 10,000 – 100,000 Bath (section 93)

CATEGORY V:

Production importation exportation disposal

Kratom Plant

- imprisonment not exceeding 2 years and a fine not exceeding 20,000 Bath (section 75 para. 2)

Others

- imprisonment of 2 – 15 years and a fine of 20,000 – 150,000 Bath (section 75 para. 1)

Possession for the purpose of disposal

Kratom Plant

- imprisonment not exceeding 2 years and a fine not exceeding 20,000 Bath (section 76 para. 4)

Others

- imprisonment of 2 –15 years and a fine of 20,000 – 150,000 Bath (section 76 para. 2)

Possession

Kratom Plant

- imprisonment not exceeding 1 year or a fine not exceeding 10,000 Bath or both (section 76 para. 3)
- quantity of 10 kg. upwards shall be regarded as possession for the purpose of disposal (section 26 para. 2)

Others

- imprisonment not exceeding 5 years and a fine not exceeding 50,000 Bath (section 76 para. 1)

Consumption

Kratom Plant

- imprisonment not exceeding 1 month or a fine not exceeding 1,000 Bath (section 92 para. 2)

Others

- imprisonment not exceeding 1 year and a fine not exceeding 10,000 Bath (section 92 para. 1)

Deceit, threat, use of violent force or coercion of another person for consumption

- imprisonment of 1 – 10 years and a fine of 10,000 – 100,000 Bath (section 93)

Instigating another person for consumption

- imprisonment not exceeding one year and a fine not exceeding 10,000 Bath (section 93 bis para. 2)