

halfway round the world

By HIX

It had looked like a solid idea the night before, just after the escape from the steaming air terminal. An early morning trip on the canal at Bangkok might be very interesting, and the staff at the hotel produced a hard sell. You simply mustn't miss the floating market or the Buddhist temples, or the house boats. You'd never forgive yourself if you went back home without riding in a sampan. And that early in the morning, it would be cool. That's when the sampan population did its marketing. And there would be curios to buy along the way.

Be in the lobby at seven sharp. Leave a call with the desk for six a.m. to allow time for breakfast.

The sampan, in imagination, would be wide and luxurious, sailing serenely over the canal to the strains of stringed instruments.

The sampan was narrow, tilted up at either end so that one sampan could ride up on the back of another sampan without dealing it a mortal blow. There was a horrifying expanse of canal between the sampan and the wharf, and the expanse did not stay put. It leaped up and down, the sampan corkscrewing wildly in the wash from other sampans.

Patmen jockeying for position at the landing stage expressed doubt upon the ancestry of other boatmen.

It was a crowded moment. The boatman was encouraging. He said he wouldn't let me fall in, but it looked like a gamble. The time is past when Hix can make a successful broad jump, and the canal looked a little unsavory, what with floating debris lapping the pilings. "If you fall in, you ridiculous old fool," I told myself sternly, "and swallow any of that water, you'll sink like a ton of bricks. Watch it."

And about then there came a brief lull, the sampan stopped corkscrewing and the intervening space grew miraculously calm. The guide got a firm grip, the boatman pushed from the rear, and the perilous passage was accomplished. The guide (he'd been a Buddhist priest for a brief spell) folded his hands in silent prayer, and the boat was under way, drag-racing with two

other sampans while speed boats tore past at an amazing rate, and sampans coming downstream cut across the bows, creating a wake that sprayed the passengers.

But the hotel manager was right. It was cool, there was a wonderful breeze, and the fierce tropical sun was not yet too high for comfort.

There was a woman bathing a baby in a white enamel dishpan on a landing stage. There was another woman shampooing her little boy, working up a magnificent lather, crouching on the bottom step. Glistening little brown satin bodies gambled like porpoises, hitching spare found that they had two inches leeway under the mounting pressure, and there was the sampan, its nose riding up over the edge of the landing stage, and there was the transfer again of one large and resisting body to the steep stone stairway. When a sampan tugs in one direction, the current and backwash thrash in another, and a passenger takes an involuntary third direction, it poses a pretty problem for a guide and a boatman working in close harmony. Getting out is easier than getting back in again. The guide perspired freely, and so did the passenger. It was a tense moment.

One of the party came back to the sampan with a lone banana in a netting sack.

"Gave all the rest to the elephant," he explained, "but there's one left. Want it?"

"You've gotta be kidding. What elephant?"

"The elephant out back of the shops. Quite a sight. You toss him a banana, and he ups with his trunk, and it's gone before you can sneeze. The he waves his trunk around for more."

"And NOW he tells us!"

We surged on down the canal, past the Thailand navy, the royal palace and the royal barge. Dripping brown heads appeared above the flood, one hand churning the water with practiced ease, the other holding aloft a pair of brass temple bells, for the assault on the sampan. Temple bells erupted all along the coaming, and eight-year-olds in the scantiest of swim trunks clambered over the edge, to drop before the passengers, extending the temple bells in one hand and holding out the other hand for baht. (Not a typographical error. Bahts are the coin of the realm.)

"Look at the boats. They're made of teakwood by hand, and they cost \$3,000 American money," the guide instructed, pointing to a boatyard where matronly looking craft, broad of beam, were taking shape under the skilled hands of the craftsmen.

Teakwood. We'd always thought of teakwood as something rare and beautiful, something that cost a mint when exhibited as a large camphor-line teakwood chest in the exclusive shops specializing in Oriental imports. Coffin Corner, where the canal made an abrupt right-angle turn, had a grim display of teakwood caskets, brass bound, and suitable for a last journey. And on a landing stage were stacks of firewood, cheap stuff, only mahogany. Monks were constructing a dormitory out of rosewood, a glut on the market, and Thailand stake trucks had polished mahogany siding.

As the canal narrowed, small boys in the altogether swarmed about the sampan, and plump babies, sitting on little enamel potties, were being toilet trained on the overhanging front porches of

the crowded houses.

The guide threw in a lot of information for free. Yes, Thailand had indeed been Siam before its name was changed thirty years ago. Natives still thought of it as Siam. Young men, when they reached the age of twenty, were obligated to become monks for three months. At the expiration of this period, they could make a career of being a monk. During the three months, they were obliged to beg for their breakfast, rice and a little fruit. That was their only meal. The rest of the day was spent in meditation and prayer. He explained that if you were hungry enough you didn't waste time thinking of other bodily pleasures, it was only the well fed who became strong and virile and able to indulge in imagination. When you were planning on how to get the next breakfast without hitting up folks who had provided it the day before, and casting about in your mind to determine how much rice you could cadge, and where that next cocount was coming from, you had little time to think unworthy thoughts. Also, during that period of three months, you were not permitted to tell a lie. This, he said with an earnest sigh, was a very great difficulty.

There had been a prolonged drought in Thailand, but on Saturday night it rained, and the water jars were brimming. Every house has huge pottery water jars ranged under the eaves to catch the rain water as it cascades from the streaming eavespouts. Every drop is precious for drinking and a happy splash after a swim in the canal. Little boys laded the rainwater over each other, head and all, prancing about in the sunshine afterward to dry off.

It was a relaxing sort of a morning after experiencing the cold chill of flying over Vietnam the day before on the trip from Manila, viewing that forbidding land from six miles up, with a temperature of forty degrees below zero in that vast emptiness above the jungles where boys from home were fighting. Small puffs of smoke were plainly visible as the plane steadily bore toward the border of Cambodia, and the Mekong River snaked its tortuous way toward the sea, a mere thread on the map, a mighty force on the land when monsoons send the water over its banks to feed the delta.

The Bridge on the River Kwai is an easy driving distance from Bangkok. The sound of temple bells is everywhere. There are golden carp in shallow pools, hiding from the midday sun, swimming out in the evening, waving languid tails.

Equatorial heat can be endured if there is water and a breeze.

We are halfway around the world.



It took six hours to erect two of the above signs by the Dallas Lions Club and probably only a few minutes by vandals to steal one of them. The signs were put up Tuesday and by Thursday one sign, erected near the Yalick Farm on 118 and 415, was stolen. On Wednesday it was noted that sign had been punctured with bullet holes. The above sign stands on Memorial Highway coming into Dallas near Elston & Gould Tire Shop.

obituaries

HARVEY KITCHEN

Harvey Kitchen had been ill for a long time, in and out of Nesbitt Hospital. June 20 he died.

A Golden Wedding anniversary a few days before his death was observed quietly.

Mr. Kitchen was born at Alderson, son of the late William and Adaline Davis Kitchen. While living at Alderson he was active in Alderson Methodist Church, superintendent of its Sunday School, a trustee for forty years, and a Boy Scout leader.

In 1958, Mr. and Mrs. Kitchen moved to Idetown, and at that time transferred membership to the Dallas Methodist Church. Mr. Kitchen served on the Dallas Township School Board, and was a stalwart of the Back Mountain Memorial Library Auction.

In 1907 he started work with the Lehigh Valley Railroad, where he was maintenance and way department manager.

He leaves his widow, the former Clara Searfoss of Alderson; a daughter, Mrs. Donald D. Smith of West Dallas; and a granddaughter Donna. There are four sisters: Mrs. Ruth Avery of Alderson; Mrs. Mary Bigelow of Oneonta, N.Y.; Mrs. Gertrude Williams of Kingston; and Miss Edna Kitchen, Wilkes-Barre.

Burial was in Kocher Cemetery at Ruggles, following services held Monday morning from the Nulton Funeral Home in Beaumont. Officiating ministers were the Rev. Robert Sheehan, Dallas United Methodist Church and the Rev. Russell Lawry, a former pastor in Dallas, now of Scranton.

C. J. DRESS

C. J. (Ned) Dress, resident of Beaumont for the past 42 years, died in Nesbitt Hospital June 21.

He was a former store-keeper in Wilkes-Barre, and a manager of American Stores Company in Kingston. Residents of the Beaumont area remember him as the manager of the home cannery which for a time operated in Beaumont, when people were asked to increase the food supply of the nation by canning fresh fruit and garden vegetables.

He belonged to Our Lady of Victory parish and its Holy Name Society.

He leaves his widow, the former Verna Murphy of Wilkes-Barre; two sons: Edward, of Big Stone Gap, Va.; and Lanning, of DuQuoin, Ill.; six grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren; sisters: Mrs. Marie Bonner, Mrs. Caroline Stoeckly, and a brother Joseph Reiss, all of Wilkes-Barre. A son Hillman died four years ago.

Services were held Wednesday morning from the Nulton Funeral Home, followed by a Mass of Requiem celebrated by Msgr. Francis A. Kane at Gate of Heaven Church.

Fellow ushers of Our Lady of Victory Chapel acted as pallbearers. Burial was in St. Mary's Cemetery.

at Pensacola Commendation Medal

Naval Aviation Officer Candidate Lawrence G. Stets, son of Mr. and Mrs. Bernard A. Stets of Pole 26, Harveys Lake, has reported to the Aviation Officer Candidate School at the Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Fla.

While at Pensacola he will begin his training under the Naval Aviation Program. Men will receive Military and Physical Fitness training as well as classroom instruction leading to their commissioning as Ensigns in the U.S. Naval Reserve.

receives degree

Miss Jo Ann Ruckno, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. George L. Ruckno of Crestview Drive, Dallas, received the degree of Bachelor of Arts at the commencement ceremonies of Manhattanville College, Purchase, N.Y., recently.

A graduate of West Side Central Catholic High School, Miss Ruckno majored in political science. While a student at Manhattanville she was treasurer for the International Relations Club during her junior year and the chapter director of the Project of the Americas.

Miss Ruckno plans to be married July 19 to Michael Allen Jones, son of Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Jones of Memorial Highway, Shavertown.

Jackson Twp. Democrats form club

The newly formed Jackson Township Democrats' Club elected officers at a meeting held earlier this month. Officers inducted were President Frank Schultz, Vice President William Harebin, Secretary Eleanor Ivan and Treasurer Lois Malak.

Details of the August outing were discussed. The next meeting will be held Tuesday, Aug. 15, at the Farmers Inn.

in Vietnam

Marine Sergeant James M. Edgerton, son of Mr. and Mrs. Mills Edgerton of Route 1, Noxen, and husband of the former Miss Sonia S. Smith of Pine Drive, El Cajon, Calif., is serving with the First Marine Aircraft Wing in Vietnam.

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