

# Hellfire Pass revisited

In 1943 Hugh Clarke was an Australian prisoner of war (POW) in Burma, forced to work on the Burma-Thailand railway. One of the few men who survived a stint working on the notorious 'Hellfire Pass', Hugh Clarke's war-time experiences became the inspiration for thirteen books and innumerable short stories and articles. Described as 'our foremost chronicler of the experiences of those who suffered as prisoners of the Japanese', Hugh's descriptions of life as a World War II POW have touched generations of Australians and helped us understand this very disturbing chapter in our nation's history.

Hugh Clarke passed away in November 1996 and in April 1998 his widow, Pat Clarke, was one member of the Australian contingent of former POWs and their spouses to re-visit Hellfire Pass for the opening of a memorial site dedicated to the thousands of Australian, European and Asian pris-

oners of war. The travel agency organising the trip was World Holidays who produced, along with various other bits of paraphenalia and information about the infamous railway, a brochure entitled *Hellfire: the story of one man's survival of the Burma-Thailand Death Railway* by John WH (Bill) Toon.

When Pat Clarke opened the brochure to read about the experience of a man who, like her husband, seemed to have survived the unthinkable, she was shocked and horrified to instead read her husband's own experiences, stories and anecdotes.

The parts of Bill Toon's booklet which are directly copied from Hugh Clarke's work, 'Of elephants and men' (in *The Burma-Thailand Railway*, Erica Press, 1993) are chapters three, four and five. Pat Clarke says, 'These chapters are in fact a first-person account of my husband's experiences at Konyu Cutting (Hellfire Pass) in 1943 and of

the period immediately preceding and following that. They are not in any way the experiences of Bill Toon but are headed "Bill's experiences of the years in hell".'

Pat approached Bill Toon who immediately admitted that he had directly copied Hugh Clarke's work. He agreed to the distribution of a statement to that effect to the members of the ANZAC Day tour and he assured Pat that the remaining copies of the booklet would be destroyed. Pat also contacted the publisher and editor of the booklet, Peter Windsor, who sent her an apology for a 'possible infringement of copyright' and assurances that any remaining copies held by World Holidays would likewise be destroyed.

Unfortunately, the booklet had already been widely distributed throughout Australia (particularly in Victoria), made part of POW collections in libraries and included in time capsules. The Hellfire Pass Museum in Thailand displayed a prominent quotation of Hugh Clarke attributed to Bill Toon and the booklet in question is being used as background for a film on POW's.

Pat says, 'I find it extremely distressing to read my husband's experiences, his first-person account of them, and his individual attitude to life as a prisoner reproduced as the experiences of another person'.

Pat has written to the director of the Australian War Memorial, the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, a member of the War Memorial Council and officials of the Returned Services League and ex-POW associations.

She has sought legal advice and is working with the Australian Society of Authors to ensure that her husband's work and words are correctly attributed.

In the meantime, she asks all members of the Australian library community to assist her by removing any copies they may have of Bill Toon's book and forwarding them to the Australian Society of Authors where they can be stored for use as evidence, or destroyed.

Pat Clarke says, 'What I would like is an apology by the publisher and author advertised in such journals as *Barbed wire and bamboo*, *Mufti*, *Reveille* and the Australian War Memorial periodical, *Wartime*. ■

## New system for South Australian public libraries

**P**LAIN (Public Libraries Automated Information Network) Central Services is a cost-effective centrally automated online acquisitions, cataloguing and processing service supporting 138 public libraries in South Australia. The release of the PLAIN system in 1991 saw an automated networked library environment successfully launched throughout all public libraries in the state. The networked system highlighted the unique position of PLAIN Central Services in setting the standard for automated library networks in Australia.

An analysis of the current system highlighted a need for an upgrade in hardware and software to improve performance and functionality which will cater for the growing needs of libraries in South Australia. The PLAIN Development Project is now underway to design a new system

which will meet the needs of users taking advantage of leading-edge technology, while providing PLAIN Central Services with a flexible solution to both current and future needs.

Customised Software Solutions, a Canberra based internet consultancy company, have won the contract to complete Phase II of the PLAIN Development Project.

A new approach has been chosen to develop the software. The users sit down together with the software developers, setting standards and building original models. The users see the software at every stage of its development, with changes being incorporated during development. The advantage is a finished product which reflects the clients' requirements and is achieved within a comparatively short time-span. ■