

BRIDGE ON THE RIVER KWAI

In August 1995, a scene occurred western Thailand that 50 years earlier no one could ever have imagined. It happened at the bridge on the River Kwai.

During World War 2, the Japanese army had forced Allied prisoners of war from Britain, Australia and the Netherlands to build a railroad. The Japanese soldiers committed many atrocities, and some 16,000 Allied POWs died building what has been called Death Railway.

But after the war, a former Japanese army officer named Nagase Takashi went on a personal campaign to urge his government to admit the atrocities it had committed.

After many years of effort, the result of his crusade was a brief ceremony in 1995 at the infamous bridge. On one side of the bridge were 50 Japanese, including five war veterans, and Mr. Takashi. Eighteen schoolteachers from Japan carried 200 letters written by children expressing sadness for what had happened during the war.

At the other side of the bridge were representatives of Allied soldiers. Two old soldiers from Britain declared the business of 50 years ago finished at last. A young woman from Australia came to deliver, posthumously, her father's forgiveness. A son of a POW came to do the same. And there was 73-year-old Australian David Barrett, who said he made the pilgrimage because he felt that to continue hating would destroy him.



The two groups began to walk the narrow planks of the black iron bridge toward one another. When they met in the center, they shook hands, embraced and shed tears. Yuko Ikebuchi, a schoolteacher, handed the letters from the Japanese children to the veterans, and in tears turned and ran without a word.

Forgiveness can transform the very place where atrocities have occurred into something beautiful.

And forgiveness is a display of God's mercy.

Jesus said it: *For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins* (Matthew 6:14-15 NIV).

– Beecher Hunter