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SOLDIERS OF SIAM



Fig 1.1. HM King Vajiravudh, in his Service Uniform as an honorary British General, with a Durham Light Infantry cap badge, 1916.

socio-political essays and over 1200 books. Rama VI made Thailand one of the first 15 nations to join the Scout movement, which is now in 215 countries. He regulated gambling and prostitution and he ended polygamy. His nephew HRH Prince Chula Chakrabongse categorised him firmly as a liberal.² King

THE KING, THE WAR AND KAYSORN

Vajiravudh was an altruistic and original thinker, without doubt.

His father, King Chulalongkorn, made a semi-secret visit to Armstrong's armaments factory in Newcastle upon Tyne in 1897.³ In the early 1890's, Armstrong's Factory had supplied the Chulachomklao Fort at the Pak Nam, the mouth of the Chao Phraya River just south of Bangkok. You can visit and still see the heavy 'disappearing guns' on phenomenally well-engineered, folding stands. (fig 1.2) Armstrong's Factory had been a world industrial leader in breach-loading gun making and ship building.

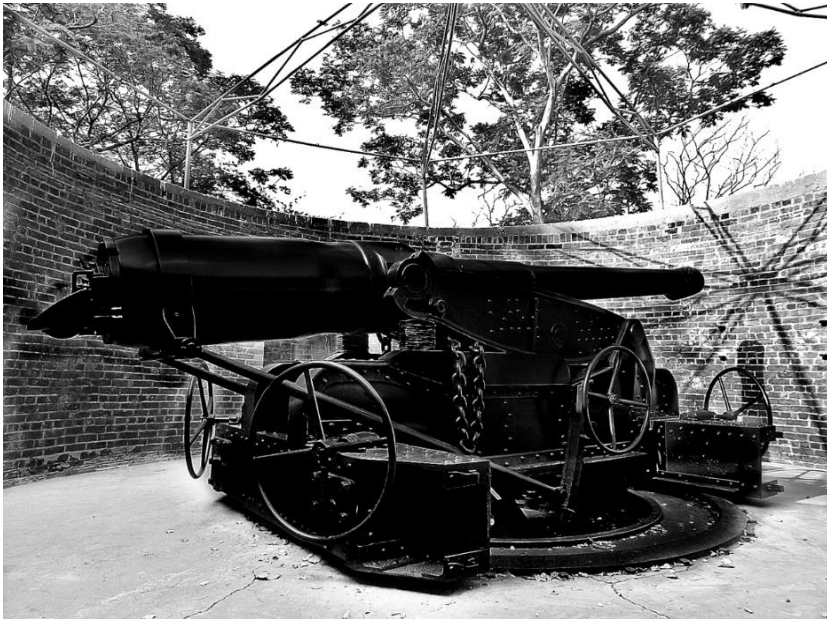


Fig 1.2. One of Armstrong's disappearing guns in Pak Nam, Thailand. Its Thai name, Seua Morb, means crouching tiger.

King Chulalongkorn appreciated that without help in traded defence equipment, the developing Southeast Asian nations would have been militarily-choked by the more aggressive of the continental European colonial powers. Lord Armstrong wrote that

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But, the Transport Corps was still working as usual, sending supplies all over the place. We went everywhere and that meant driving quite considerable distances. We were still there 39 days after the Armistice day.¹⁸ Then, we received new orders to move into Germany. That made us anxious. There was a rumour that the Allies were being poisoned by the Germans, but I hadn't seen any evidence for it, so I just got in the car and kept going. We passed the Fort at Verdun, totally-destroyed, with over 1000 houses flattened and absolutely nobody there. Although they had cellars for some shelter, without food, no one could survive.

We kept going, stayed a night at Landau,¹⁹ (fig 2.49) and reached Mussbach²⁰ where we stopped. (figs 2.50-2.54)



Fig 2.49 The Hotel Zum Kronprinz in Landau where a Siamese Transport Corps Captain had a narrow escape, or a missed opportunity.

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On October 16, the *SDA* described local flu, totalling 2000-3000 cases. The *PBZ*, on October 19, had an article under the inside page headline '*Die Grippe in Neustadt,*' saying that in the previous eight days 248 cases of flu had been registered at the hospital at the rate of 22-46 patients per day. On October 22 daily flu deaths in Landau with angina and pneumonia were recorded. The next day in Hassloch, just east of Neustadt, the schools were closed. On October 24, flu prevention measures were listed thus:

- *The flu is ordinarily transmitted by coughing and sneezing*
- *Every case of flu should stay in bed. One in seven cases need to be hospitalised*
- *Avoid getting together with people in closed rooms*
- *Do not cough or sneeze at people, cover with your hand and turn your head away*

On October 29 '*many deaths*' from flu were reported in Neustadt, the common cause being pneumonia. In Deidesheim, a little north of Neustadt, children and middle-aged people (notably, not babies or the elderly) were described as particularly vulnerable to the flu. That is different from Covid-19, where the elderly and those with high blood pressure and high cholesterol seem much more vulnerable. The final Rhineland newspaper flu item was on October 30 with the report of the flu death in Frankenthal of a sixty-five year old headmaster and composer, Herr Julius Schmitt.

As a harpinger of Covid-19, the Spanish Flu witnessed 100 years ago by the Siamese clearly demanded very similar good hygiene and social distancing, as well as school closures and an analysis of hospitalisation. There may well have been racial variation, then as now, in genetically-determined cytokine response, that is to say inflammation chemicals driving different patterns of pneumonia reaction. There is no debate as to the Thai

soldiers' grasp of the serious danger from the flu. It is extraordinary how much could be deduced that parallels modern scientific advice, while still attributing pneumonia to the cold temperatures.

Notes.

1. Phusrisom K, Martin S. *The Siamese Expeditionary Force of World War One and the Spanish Flu*. Hektoen International. Fall, 2016.

2. This apparent order of magnitude difference in flu rates, though not proven, is epidemiologically important. The references are:

a. Byerly, C R. *The U.S. Military and the Influenza Pandemic of 1918–1919*. Public Health Rep. 2010; 125 (Suppl 3): 82–91.

b. Quinn S C, Kumar S, Freimuth V S, Musa D, et al. *Racial Disparities in Exposure, Susceptibility, and Access to Health Care in the US H1N1 Influenza Pandemic*. American Journal of Public Health: February 2011; Vol. 101, No. 2, pp. 285-293.

c. Zhang Y, Makvandi-Nejad S, Qin L, Zhao Y, et al. *Interferon-induced transmembrane protein-3 rs12252-C is associated with rapid progression of acute HIV-1 infection in Chinese MSM cohort*. 2015 May 15; 29(8): 889–894.

d. de Jong MD, Simmons CP, Thanh TT, Hien VM, et al. *Fatal outcome of human influenza A (H5N1) is associated with high viral load and hypercytokinemia*. Nat Med. 2006 Oct; 12(10):1203-7. Epub 2006 Sep 10.

e. Kash J C, Tumpey T M, Prohl S C, Carter V, et al. *Genomic analysis of increased host immune and cell death responses induced by 1918 influenza virus*. 2006 Oct 5; 443(7111): 578–581. Published online 2006 Sep 27.

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