



The Douglas Mendel Cambodian Relief Fund

The Douglas Mendel Cambodian Relief Fund, P.O. Box B Moab, Utah 84532, (435) 259-0321 ♦ Email:wndrlst49@hotmail.com January 2008

Donation of fire truck to Ratanakiri province

Cambodia 9 Nov 07

The highlight of this 3 ½ week adventure to Cambodia was attending the ceremony of a fire truck that was donated to the rural province of Ratanakiri, Cambodia. When I was in Cambodia in March of 2007, I had visited the fire station in Ban Lung, Ratanakiri and had asked the Major of the station if he would like a fire truck. It was my 3rd trip to the province and knowing that the station receives very little assistance from the government, I felt it appropriate to devote my energy, time and budget to helping the station with the greatest gift possible.

I told the major by the end of 2007, the station would have a fire truck donated by the The Douglas Mendel Cambodian Relief Fund.

As I had already talked to the Captain in Phnom Penh and a friend of his, Bunna about building a fire truck, I had a good idea it would cost about \$12,000.00 and it would take about 3 to 6 months to build the vehicle. The station in Ban Lung has 2 fire trucks, a 30 year-old Russian engine and a 25 year-old Chinese fire truck. I figured a fire truck built in Phnom Penh would help the local economy, and if the process went smoothly, it might be the first of a few to be built in Cambodia.

As I had given Captain Vannra in Phnom Penh and Bunna each a digital camera to record the building process of the fire truck, I was looking forward to seeing the pictures before going to the ceremony. It would be about a week before I would return to Phnom Penh, after visiting Sihanoukville, Bokor National Park and Kampot. I was giddy with happiness seeing the 25 pictures, that Bunna had brought to my guesthouse in Phnom Penh, of the 2 ½ ton Korean truck being transformed from a used

[More >>](#)

Helping the Royal Palace Fire brigade

When I arrived in Phnom Penh, Major Vannra from the only station in the capital of 1.4 million met me at the airport to pick up 7 boxes of gear for his firefighters. After several minutes of greetings, he asked me if it would be ok to donate 10 sets of bunker pants and coats to the Royal Palace. I was a little bemused, thinking why the Royal Palace would not have the resources or contacts to outfit their fire brigade. I actually never knew there was a fire station at the Royal Palace!



Ceremony for donation of gear to representative of Royal Palace

I said that I would be happy to help the Royal Palace, and in the ensuing days, my friend Bunna would go through the boxes of gear to pick out the best sets of coats and pants to donate to the Royal Palace.

After my travels through Cambodia, I was going to spend several days in Phnom Penh before heading back to USA. A date had been set for a ceremony at the Royal Palace for the donation of gear. A couple days before the prominent day, my friend Bunna, said that the venue had changed to my hotel, which was fine by me. I had invited a couple friends to the hotel for the ceremony.

[More >>](#)

The Douglas Mendel Cambodian Relief Fund

The Douglas Mendel Cambodian Relief Fund, P.O. Box B Moab, Utah 84532, (435) 259-0321 ♦ Email:wndrlst49@hotmail.com January 2008

Donation of fire truck to Ratanakiri province

piece of metal to a brightly painted red truck. There is a 2500 liter tank for water, 5 sections of hose, 2 nozzles, a compartment for gear, lights and siren and a pump for drafting water as well as pumping water with the flip of a lever.

A week or so later I would take a 13 hour bus ride from Phnom Penh to Ban Lung, about 320 miles to visit the station and attend the ceremony for the fire truck.



The day of the ceremony arrived and my friend Mr. Savet picked me up on a motorbike at 10 a.m. We were going to take a leisurely ride in the countryside before the ceremony at 2:30 in the afternoon. But, plans changed as Chief Rye Rye at the police/fire station had called and moved the timing of the ceremony to as soon as possible. I went to my room and changed shirts to a red collared polo, slightly wrinkled shirt. About 15 minutes later we arrived at the station, along with several other travelers I had met on the bus from Kratie (a relaxing town on the Mekong where I had spent 1 ½ days watching the rare Irrawaddy dolphin play) whom I had told about my endeavors. They were interested in seeing the ceremony and the fire truck. I gave my camcorder and digital camera to a couple friends. There was also a cameraman from the local TV station to shoot video of the mornings' activities.

About 11 a.m., the ceremony started with about 10-15 police/fire officers in attendance with Chief Rye Rye standing next to me giving a speech. Mr. Savet was to the side translating, basically saying how appreciative the officers and the community are for the donation of the fire truck to better protect Ban Lung and the surrounding area. After about 20 minutes or so, it was time for some handshakes, pictures and then the highlight, the starting of the fire truck, which had been in front of us the entire time.

A firefighter started the engine and a couple other firefighters opened the compartment, attached a few sections of hose to the pump and slowly water started flowing from the tank down 100 feet of hose to where a proud firefighter was holding the nozzle waiting for the water to come shooting out his end.

It was an amazing sight to see the firefighters enjoying their new fire truck, like kids opening presents during the holidays. Happy holidays to all of you who helped make this possible and best wishes for a great new year! ■

The Royal Palace Fire brigade

On Friday afternoon Major Vannra, Bunna, a representative from the Royal Palace and one of the 10 firefighters from the Royal Palace came to the hotel for the short ceremony. Pictures were taken, a few handshakes and it was done. An amusing moment was when the firefighter tried on a coat, which was a couple sizes too large. I had told them through Bunna that on my next trip I would bring more gear for the 10 firefighters, hopefully with sizes more appropriate to the smaller stature firefighters of the newly formed Royal Palace Fire Brigade.

I never thought my nonprofit would be able to help out the Royal Palace, but I feel privileged and honored to do so. ■



Ceremony for donation of gear to representative of Royal Palace.

The Douglas Mendel Cambodian Relief Fund

The Douglas Mendel Cambodian Relief Fund, P.O. Box B Moab, Utah 84532, (435) 259-0321 ♦ Email:wndrlst49@hotmail.com January 2008

The Fire Station in Phnom Penh

It is amazing to me that there is only one fire station in Phnom Penh, the capital city of 1.4 million. I have been helping the station with donations of supplies and gear since 2004. The station has about 80 firefighters that make about \$20/month, well below the poverty level for the average Cambodian citizen to make a decent living wage. Most firefighters have a second or even a 3rd job to try to make ends meet. I was overjoyed to see improvements to the station on this last trip.

At least 2 bathrooms were added, where there had been none previously! Several offices were updated. Major Vannra, second in command at the station, has a very comfy office with an overhead fan and a leather sofa. I always enjoy seeing the Major on every trip. I was happy to spend an hour or so in his new office and relax on his black leather sofa and shoot the breeze with him and a good friend Bunna. Bunna and the Major took on the project of building the fire truck from April to August 2007 that was donated to the station in Ratanakiri Province. During my brief visit with the two of them, I could tell the Major wanted to relax and enjoy the moment. He uncorked a bottle of wine, took a bar of chocolate out of his small fridge and got some ice from a



12 boxes (801.5 lbs) at the airport in Phnom Penh 10/27/07



Manning the hose with Chief Rye Rye and a firefighter

cooler to plunk down in the glasses for wine. It was definitely a memorable moment for us to clank glasses, toast the accomplishments and be with friends.

As the picture shows, quite a bit was donated to the station on this trip. About 28 bunker jackets, 13 bunker pants, 10 pieces of brass, several Streamlights (heavy duty lights for firefighters) and 14 fire chief shirts. Even though the coats and pants are generally on the large size for the smaller stature firefighters, at least they have the option of wearing protective gear, whereas before, they would fight fires in shirts and regular cotton pants.

As the Major and I were talking, he suggested that he would like to have at least 2 more fire stations built in Phnom Penh, one in the southern and northern parts of the capital for better placement of personnel and equipment to fight fires. I asked the Major how much one fire station would cost, and he thought maybe \$70,000.

[More >>](#)

The Douglas Mendel Cambodian Relief Fund

The Douglas Mendel Cambodian Relief Fund, P.O. Box B Moab, Utah 84532, (435) 259-0321 ♦ Email: wndrlst49@hotmail.com January 2008

The Fire Station in Phnom Penh



Kids in classroom at M'lop Tapang in Sihanoukville, Cambodia



Sunset on the Mekong, Kratie, Cambodia



Donation of dental supplies at M'lop Tapang (www.mloptapang.org), Sihanoukville, Cambodia



Ceremony at Phnom Penh Fire Station for donated supplies and gear

I am mulling it over, thinking about how I could raise that substantial sum or at least half, and having some entity of the Cambodian government match what I could raise in the future. My non profit has delivered 2 fire trucks to Cambodia . The big project for 2008 will either be a partial renovation of the station in Ratanakiri province or having another fire truck built in Cambodia to be donated to a needy station.

Any ideas, support or financial assistance can be emailed to wndrlst49@hotmail.com

or snail mailed to Douglas Mendel

P.O. Box B

Moab , UT 84532

(435) 259-0321

**Thank you again for the continued support
and all the best for a healthy and prosperous 2008!!**

The Douglas Mendel Cambodian Relief Fund

The Douglas Mendel Cambodian Relief Fund, P.O. Box B Moab, Utah 84532, (435) 259-0321 ♦ Email:wndrlst49@hotmail.com January 2008

The Irrawaddy dolphin of the Mekong

Even with the hectic schedule of visiting fire stations, organizations that assist disadvantaged children and a national park, I was able to make time to visit a relaxing town, Kratie, on the Mekong river. I had known about Kratie for a number of years, as it is the place to watch the rare Irrawaddy dolphin, an endangered species of dolphin only seen in a few places on the Mekong as it meanders from the plateau of the Himalayas to the sea.

I took a 7 hour bus ride from Phnom Penh to Kratie, about the half-way point to Ratanakiri province for an almost 2 day visit. I was looking forward to relaxing, going to a place I had never been to before in 12 previous trips and to also see the Irrawaddy dolphin, which I heard so much about and seen a few pictures of.



Irrawaddy Dolphin, Kratie, Cambodia

Once in Kratie, I was able to book a 1 day tour of the surrounding area, which would include visiting 2 temples and taking a 1 hour small boat ride on the Mekong to see the beautiful Irrawaddy dolphin. At one of the temples, I met a couple from Australia, and we realized it would be fun to meet up at the boat dock and take 1 boat to see the dolphins. After strolling the grounds of the temple, we eventually met at the boat dock and took a 5 minute ride to a spot where the dolphins swim about. The boat driver cut the engine and used a wooden oar to steer the boat in the current. For the next hour we would see the dolphins come out of the water solo, in pairs, and occasionally in a pod of three! It was an amazing sight to see the grey Irrawaddy dolphin come out of the water for air and frolic and play for short periods. The couple from Australia and I had such a great time during the day, we decided to come back in the evening to watch the sunset on the Mekong and see the dolphins at dusk.

Sunset on the Mekong is a magical sight, which is all the more special when the Irrawaddy dolphin comes out to play. It was definitely worth the stopover in Kratie, and I hope to make a return visit to see the endangered Irrawaddy dolphin in 2008. ■