

from Ricklefs' assertion that the text was an 'autobiography', but if so, I am thinking of something more in the style of President Soeharto's 1989 autobiography which was translated into English in 1991, *My Thoughts, Words and Deeds: An Autobiography as Told to G. Dwipayana and Ramadhan K.H.*, except that Mangkunagara I's faithful courtiers who, perhaps, transformed their master's words into poetry will forever remain humble ghostwriters.

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Siam and World War I: An International History. By Stefan Hell. Bangkok: River Books, 2017. 320 pp.

The dispatch of a Siamese Expeditionary Force to France in 1918 was a minor sideshow on the fringes of a global tragedy. The force numbered only 1,295 men, arrived only ten weeks before the armistice, was not involved in any fighting, and suffered ten casualties,

mostly from influenza. The diplomatic significance far outweighed such realities. Stefan Hell tells the tale as part of Siam's claim for a place in the world of nations—as a prequel to his excellent book on *Siam and the League of Nations* (2010).

Until mid-1917, such an expedition was unlikely. Siam was committed to neutrality. There was a strong pro-German lobby among the Siamese princes educated in Germany, and others of the politically aware. The British were opposed to such an expedition, fearing that the diplomatic gains would accrue to France. The drive came mainly from King Vajiravudh (Rama VI), who was a keen Anglophile, fascinated by anything military, and alert to the diplomatic opportunity to strengthen Siam's claim to a place in the world of nations and initiate revision of the unequal treaties of the mid-nineteenth century. After Germany weakened in early 1917, the king told his ministers that the Allies would win the war and dominate its aftermath, hence Siam should align itself with them.

Siam officially declared war on Germany and Austria-Hungary in July 1917. The king dressed up as King Naresuan for the event and had his portrait painted. But at this point there were no plans for action. Prince Charoonsakdi, the Siamese minister in Paris, argued that Siam should “take some active part or make a bit of a show” as “Our voice in the Peace Conference will be more considered as having made sacrifices in lives & material” (p. 140). The king embraced the idea. Plans for a force of forty thousand were mooted but quickly reduced to a small volunteer contingent.

The Siamese Expeditionary Force reached France on 30 July 1918. One part was an Aviation Corps, consisting of 370 men, who spent all the time in training, saw no action, and returned home as a valuable resource for Siam. The remainder formed a motor transport company working behind the lines on the Marne. The diplomatic value of the project was almost undermined when French and Siamese soldiers fell out due to cultural differences and communication difficulties. Matters improved after the armistice, when the unit was relocated into occupied Germany, where the Siamese worked hard and fraternized with the local women. The Siamese troops stayed on to take part in

the victory celebration in July 1919 before returning home to yet more celebrations, and another opportunity for King Vajiravudh to dress up as Naresuan.

Stefan Hell has researched the story thoroughly in the archives of France, Germany, the United Kingdom and Thailand. His account is a straightforward narrative, with almost no commentary. The pages are crammed with photographs, many from the Chakrabongse Collection (Prince Chakrabongse was the Thai army chief at the time, and his granddaughter is the publisher of this book). The book is well organized and the writing is a joy to read.

Siam gained its intended prize of a seat at the Peace Conference in Versailles and membership in the new League of Nations. Victory over Germany meant that one of the unequal treaties was annulled, and the new friendship with the United States resulted in a second being revised in 1920. At Versailles, Siam did not press hard for France and Britain to follow suit, perhaps wisely given the ethno-diplomatic attitudes of the time. A British memo described Siam as “but one generation or so removed from semi-barbarism” and quite unqualified to shake free of the tutelage of the West (p. 261).

The one disappointment of the book is the limited space allowed for the experience of the ordinary members of the expeditionary force and its impact on their lives. A handful of the photos capture the wonderment and uncertainty of the Thai soldiers newly arrived in France. A letter from Corporal Khlueb Keson records his reaction to seeing Vietnamese labourers being used as virtual slave labour: “How miserable is it to be a colony?... We should protect our nation and not allow it to become like theirs” (p. 195).

Stefan Hell refrains from any moral comment on the expeditionary force. As a diplomatic ploy, it was an enormous success, yet the enthusiasm of the Thai court elite for sending their soldiers to the edge of the killing fields where ten million had already died is chilling, but no different from the elites of Europe.

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White Métisse. By Jack Yeager. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018. xx+270 pp.

Published thirty years ago, Kim Lefèvre's *White Métisse* traces the final decades of colonial rule in Indochina through the experience of one girl caught between two peoples at war and the two poles of her being, French and Vietnamese. Born to a French father who abandons her and a Vietnamese mother for whom she is the embodiment of a shameful transgression, the narrator's formative years are marked by ambivalence and subject to an existential volatility heralded in the first chapter's title: "Wandering". The narrator's family, who "always lived on the lookout" (p. 58), relocate regularly—fleeing poverty, the judgment of those around them, and the fury of war. Early in the novel, when the Viet Minh enter her village to enlist support against the French, her mother hides her in an earthenware jar; her French blood is a betrayal of the nation and a reminder of its subjugation. The young narrator, left alone in the dark, understands suddenly that she is the enemy of her countrymen, the only people she has truly known, the people whose grief she will later share when their homes are destroyed to save them from being captured by the French.

The image of unwitting enemies shrouded in darkness is a powerful one, and one through which we might better understand the internal and external conflict that punctuates *White Métisse*. Indeed, the novel not only offers an account of these decades of turmoil, detailing the devastating effects of war on both North and South; it exposes the violent hypocrisies of traditional Vietnamese society, giving voice to those who, because of their mixed race, have been