

Basic Problems of Relief, Rehabilitation
and Reconstruction in Southeast Asia

by J. Russell Andrus

BASIC PROBLEMS OF RELIEF, REHABILITATION AND
RECONSTRUCTION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT
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APPENDIX I

. PROBLEMS OF RAILWAY REHABILITATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Railway rehabilitation should be made less difficult by the near-universality of the meter gauge in Southeast Asia. The Japanese, also, have found this useful, and reportedly carriages plying across Thailand are sometimes marked "Pnom Penh-Moulmein," and hence ply from Indochina to Burma. Locomotives being prime military targets, will probably be few in number, except for those imported by United Nations forces, and presumably available, through purchase or otherwise, when those forces turn over management of the rail lines. It is not so likely, judging by past experience, that a correspondingly large proportion of passenger and freight cars will be unusable after the Japanese withdrawal, but it must nevertheless be assumed that wartime damage and deterioration will be very great, so that a large import of rolling stocks will be necessary.

Figures were given on page 13 above indicating the density of freight cars in the four smaller countries of Southeast Asia. Official Indochinese statistics list 4,115 freight vehicles of all kinds in 1938, and 645 passenger cars, most of which were equipped with vacuum brakes, although the shorter Haiphong-Yunnan line may have used pressure brakes. There were 277 locomotives and 13 railcars at that time, with weights varying from 11 to 57.5 metric tons each, a large number being 53 tons in weight. There were reportedly 17 steam and five electric locomotives on the Hongay coal mine railway in 1940. It is possible that the Japanese have imported a few locomotives since their occupation of Indochina in 1940. It is doubtful if United Nations forces and relief agencies, etc., will be able to restore rail traffic to its prewar level without importing upwards of 200 locomotives, 3,000 freight cars and perhaps 400 passenger cars, if Indochina is retaken only with a mile by mile advance. Should Japan proper be conquered first, of course, the situation might be very much better.

The Thai State Railways had approximately 143 steam locomotives and 34 Diesel locomotives in 1941, passenger and freight vehicles numbering 370 and 3,817 respectively in that year. There is little to indicate damage to many of these locomotives or cars since the outbreak of war, except as they may have crossed into much-bombed Burma to be destroyed there. It should be noted, however, that the Japanese may be able forcibly to withdraw Thai rolling stock either into Cambodia or into Malaya, according to the direction from which United Nations forces attack that country (if it proves necessary to make such an attack). At the best, there might be necessary only the replacement of a few locomotives and cars lost by bombing and worn out in the normal course of traffic over the past few years. At the worst, perhaps 90 percent of the locomotives and two thirds of the rolling stock may be destroyed and require replacement.

The Burma Railways in 1940-41 were officially reported to possess 358 locomotives with a total tractive effort of 6,496,364 pounds. There were 762 passenger carriages and 384 "other coaching vehicles." Freight cars numbered 7,583, with a capacity of approximately 130,000 long tons, in addition to "other goods vehicles" numbering 2,006. It is thought that all but 125 of the locomotives were rendered unusable before their acquisition by the Japanese in 1942, and there have been numerous reports of successful bombing attacks

against locomotives in Burma since that time. There thus seems little doubt that very few locomotives, and perhaps not over a third of the rolling stock will be regained when the Japanese are expelled.

No comparable figures are available for Indonesia and Malaya, but from freight and passenger statistics cited above it may be assumed that the former had more locomotives and rolling stock than at least any two other countries of Southeast Asia, and that Malaya was not far behind Thailand. Rehabilitation needs there, as elsewhere, will depend mostly upon the amount of destruction occasioned by the reoccupation.