



When MTA contract administrator Robert Sechler was just a teenager, he moved with his parents to Burma, a Southeast Asian country sandwiched between India and Thailand. Sechler recently recounted his adventures and his interest in the Rangoon Electric Tramway in a book entitled, "Electric Traction in the Burmese Capital."

The Burmese Days of Robert Sechler

By GAYLE ANDERSON,
Associate Editor
Burma, officially named Myanmar, is about the size of Texas. A developing, agrarian country now ruled by a military regime, it is an isolated stronghold where the Internet is illegal, terrorism is expected and journalists are restricted.

Like many former British colonies, the Southeast Asian country of Burma bears the emblem of an exotic empire and high adventure.

Yet, the one thing that intrigued the teenaged Robert Sechler upon arriving in the Burmese capital of Rangoon in the heat of his high school days in 1958 was the vanquished electric trolley system that had sketched the face of the city in the books he had devoured about his soon-to-be home.

As the son of a university professor turned diplomat and an art teacher, he would prepare for a new living situation with research of little-known facts about the city. Already a self-proclaimed "transit buff," young Sechler was sold on the prospect by descriptions of an electric tramway that once had raced round the capital.

The prospect was short-lived. Rangoon's trolleys and tracks had been devastated in World War II and replaced with what an United States Information Service employee called "strange buses."

Forty years later, Robert Sechler, now a senior contract administrator at MTA, has published a book on the tramway and brought its heady days back to life in his detailed account of the determined little railway.

In his book, "Electric Traction in the Burmese Capital," Sechler writes with an anticipated thrill of discovery: "In the street's center were substantial silver metal pylons of a kind easily recognized by student of electric traction. And flanking these poles, peering out of asphalt paving, were shiny rails."

Thus begins the saga detailed in the slim paperback volume. Sechler takes his reader on a transportation odyssey across the face of Asia and pages of history to tell the story of the Rangoon Electric Tramway and Supply Company, Ltd. From its start in the 1880's as a steam tramway, its electrification, modernization and the program of replacement by trolleybuses, Sechler reveals what happened to it, and

describes the remarkable vehicles which replaced it.

Truly a labor of love, Sechler kept his book alive through a series of personal eras, which included college, military service, marriage and family, and a career in transportation.

He published a "rough version" of the material in 1981, where it was eagerly devoured by the transit faithful in London and the United States, and feedback from Burmese transit employees. This new information has been incorporated into the second edition released this year.

***Electric Transit in the Burmese Capital* can be purchased for \$12 plus shipping costs. Contact Robert Sechler, 922-7334, 16th Floor Gateway, or at (714) 995-9387.**

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