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Australian Amputee on 10,000km Charity Ride to Support Injured Veterans

A former Australian soldier riding from Hanoi to Sydney to support veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and other injuries pedalled into Kuala Lumpur last night.

Laurie 'Truck' Sams, 67, who served with Australia's Special Air Service Regiment in Vietnam in 1970 before losing a leg in a parachute accident in 1995, left Hanoi on May 12 aiming to reach the steps of Sydney Opera House six months and 10,000km later on November 20.

Mr Sams is well known to Malaysian military authorities. In 2002 he led a group of ex-Malaysian commandos into Thailand to locate the bodies of Malaysian forced labourers who died on the notorious Thai Burma Railway in WW2. More than 40,000 Malaysian workers died along the 415km route, and Mr Sams' expedition was sponsored by then Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir bin Mohamad and farewelled by current Prime Minister and then Defence Minister Dato' Sri Haji Mohammad Najib bin Tun Haji Abdul Razak. Mr Sams' father William was an Australian Army POW on the death railway in 1942.

So far the epic charity ride has taken Mrs Sams more than 5400km through the steamy jungles and paddy fields of Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and halfway down the Malay Peninsula. He leaves first thing tomorrow for Singapore via Malacca and Johor Bahru after a send-off at the Australian High Commission, Kuala Lumpur.

Riding with Mr Sams from Surat Thani to Singapore is Matt Brown, 50, one of a group of ex-SAS veterans on sections of the journey to provide support and motivation.

"These guys are younger than me and they're super competitive, so I'm not being given the chance to slacken off," he lamented. "We fly from Singapore to Perth but then there's the whole of Australia from west to east and we're only at the halfway point of the ride about now."

A world champion parachutist, Mr Sams was awarded Australia's Star of Courage in 2001 for saving his tandem parachute student in the 1995 accident. After learning to walk with a prosthetic leg he began a series of trekking and cycling expeditions around South-East Asia to raise awareness and money for charitable causes.

He said he set his sights on "the long ride home" to Australia as a friendship initiative between Australia and Asia and to support injured veterans, adding:

"I'm blown away at the number of vets suffering from PTSD and other injuries, not just from Vietnam but all the conflicts we have been involved in before and since. I lost mates in Vietnam and many others are still suffering terribly, so I'm using the ride to raise money for their treatment and to really shine a spotlight on their problems."

Mr Sams said sponsors were still being sought for the ride and anyone interested in finding out more about the ride and contributing could go to the ride website at www.thelongridehome.com.au.