



# RAF Butterworth/Penang Association



**Chairman: Tony Parrini    Treasurer: Len Wood    Secretary: Pete Mather**  
**(formed: 30<sup>th</sup> August 1996 at the Casuarina Hotel, Batu Ferringhi, Penang Island)**

## NEWSLETTER

**Summer 2006**

### Aims of the Association

The Association aims to establish and maintain contact with personnel and their dependants who served at Butterworth or Penang by means of annual reunions in the UK and the circulation of a membership list. The Association may also arrange holidays in Malaysia from time to time.

### Chairman's Corner

The FEAF Memorial Dedication and the Annual Reunion over the weekend of 13/14 May were very much the culmination of a great deal of effort over a number of years. The Dedication Day was particularly moving and, as you will see amongst a number of photographs, the day went like clockwork, although there were some doubts early in the day concerning the weather. However, almost 200 people from the various associations all seemed to enjoy the experience and, as yet, the Orderly officer has had no complaints!

I am awaiting a few invoices to arrive, but for all intents and purposes the FEAF Grove Account is almost "zeroised". I will produce final statements shortly, however, we do need to think about a pathway to the FEAF Memorial and I'm hopeful that my bid to "Awards for All" will fund the final piece of the jigsaw. Whilst some thought it looked like a "one man band" as far as the organisation was concerned, my thanks goes to Don Donovan who handled the administration of the day, to Len Wood who sorted out seating plans and to Brian Lloyd of the Changi Association who produced the Order of Service. I have written to the Air Training Corps, the Band of the RAF College and to No 33 Squadron thanking them for their involvement.

RAF Seletar has a member who is producing a DVD of the occasion and there is a large selection of photographs that need sorting out and putting on the website in due course.

Our AGM and Reunion was another pleasurable experience with a larger number attending than in 2004. The change in date seemed popular, although some of those who asked for a move to the Spring still couldn't attend. We accepted an increase in Subs to £10-00 per address, justified by the cost of the production of the Newsletter now that yours truly won't be able to take advantage of facilities available to him when he retires from work in September – (49 working days and counting as I type this!) Jean Allen volunteered to take over as Secretary, although Peter Mather will shadow and advise for the time being. Peter has now been elevated to Honorary Life Member of the Association in recognition of his 10 years service Hon. Secretary. For the record we have one other in the shape of John Gallop who served as Hon. Treasurer for a number of years.

...and this leads me nicely into reminding you that the RAF Butterworth and Penang Association celebrates the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of its foundation on 30<sup>th</sup> August – what a 10 years it has been! Here's to the next 25! (Will the last member to leave, please turn out the lights!)

Best wishes,

**Tony Parrini**

*Issue 13*

# Dedication of the Far East Air Force Memorial

at the National Memorial Arboretum on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2006.



*Richard Harcourt*



## Eastward

### Association Officials

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## **OBITUARY**

**Bob Allen**

**3 February 2006**

Bob was born in Nottingham but as he was brought up in Skidbrooke, near Louth, Lincolnshire, he always considered himself to be a 'yellow belly'.

He joined the RAF in December 1949, National Service, but quickly signed on for 5 years to get more money. He was posted RAF Manby in 1950 and trained to be an MT driver. He met me, Jean, in September 1951 and we got married in July 1952. Bob was posted to Egypt in October 1952 and returned in December 1954 when he was demobbed. He rejoined the RAF in 1958 and was posted to RAF Bicester where he remained until June 1961 when he was posted to Fontainebleau. He remained there until December 1963 and was again posted to RAF Bicester.

Bob was sent to Riyan in 1964 on a years unaccompanied tour, returned to RAF Bicester in September 1966. He was posted to Malaya in 1968 and served first at RAAF Butterworth and later at RAF Penang. Returned to Bicester in October 1971 and remained there until he was promoted to sergeant in 1974 and posted to Abingdon. He was posted to Waddington in June 1974 and remained there until he was posted to RAF Gutersloh, Germany, in August 1975. He retired from the RAF in 1977 and remained in Germany working for a German firm until 1982.

He worked for Pauls Malt in Louth who made malt for various lagers including Grolsch after he returned from Germany until retirement.

Jean Allen

## **IN GENERAL**

### **13<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> May 2006**

What a superb weekend for Association members who attended the Dedication of the Far East Memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum followed by the Annual Reunion at Solihull. Despite weather dissimilar to that experienced during our time in the Far East (it was perishing!) and that members are (perhaps!) not as sprightly as in previous years the meticulous planning for the Dedication by Tony Parrini was evident on the day and it was clear that the FEAF visitors at the event really enjoyed themselves.

The Annual Reunion 'official' dinner on the evening of 13<sup>th</sup> was, as always, a time for members to renew old friendships and for new members to get to know some of the 'old hands' of the Association. This, along with the meal and plenty to drink, and Tony's 'party piece' certainly made for a memorable evening. The AGM next morning, followed by the theme lunch, ended the reunion weekend for nearly all members....some points of administration always have to follow to finally conclude the reunion and start the preparation for the next one! One significant point from the AGM is that Pete Mather has relinquished his post of Secretary and Jean Allen has taken on the role. Contact details for Jean are included on the [Association Officials](#) page of the newsletter.

### **Electronic distribution of the newsletter**

Some members may recall that I raised this idea at an AGM a few years ago. It did not receive much support then, perhaps because it was an uncertain concept at the time? However, the world has advanced since with many more members having access to a computer and e-mail. With this in mind I felt it was time to re-examine the concept. To explore it further I contacted new member Richard Harcourt, who had also raised the idea and offered his skills and knowledge in this area. Using a group of Association members as 'guinea pigs' we trialled the last newsletter by sending it (retrospectively) via the e-mail system. Apart from a few minor problems we ended up with a copy that the members were able to download in a very short time and print from their computer. Having demonstrated that it can work, I can see several advantages to members and the Association in this method.

Preparing the electronic distribution copy is no different from what has been done before - all that differs is the method of distribution. The newsletter is currently prepared in colour but printed in monotone. Downloading the newsletter would give the recipient a colour copy. Under the present system the prepared copy has to be speed copied, losing quality (and printing quality is related to price). The printed pages are then collated, stapled (several hundred pages!), packaged, addressed, stamped and posted (they can get pretty heavy lugging them to the Post Office, I know from experience!).

The newsletter (already on disk in preparation for printing) can now be sent to many members' e-mail addresses simultaneously. Within minutes of the 'send' key being pressed the newsletter is waiting to be downloaded by the member. This cuts out a lot of the 'donkey work' described above and it saves on stationery and postage, a real bone of contention these days.

Another possibility for members who own or have access to a computer but do not have e-mail is to receive the newsletter on disk. This would be distributed through the postal service, as with the newsletter at the present time, and the member need only load the disk to access the newsletter. This too would help to reduce time and costs.

Both computer-based methods have the advantage that the reader can view the newsletter at whatever magnification they find most helpful, a real bonus to those with visual impairments. Of course, not all members have a computer or are connected to the internet and, if we solely switched to the system described above, they would miss out. This would be totally unacceptable! Members who are unable or prefer not to participate in the above would still receive their newsletter via the mail as normal. It is possible that, as the number of members receiving the newsletter in hard copy became fewer through the use of electronic distribution, colour printing of a smaller print run of the newsletter may become



financially viable. It all depends on the success of the proposed electronic distribution.

Just to recap, it is intended to continue trialling the distribution of the newsletter through the internet system for those members who have valid e-mail address registered with the Association\*. For members who do not possess a computer, do not have internet facilities or do not wish to receive the newsletter by any other means than Royal Mail (or equivalent) then things will remain the same....we will only change to the distribution for you should you wish it!

Meanwhile, we will continue to test out these ideas over a period of time. We intend that everyone should receive a newsletter that reflects their membership of the Association and yet practice 'good housekeeping' by keeping some costs down (see Chairman's Corner).

### **Lancaster NX611**

This aircraft 'Just Jane', as many members are aware, is kept in taxiable condition at East Kirkby in Lincolnshire. On occasions throughout the year visitors can (for a fee) have an escorted tour of the inside of the aircraft and in addition a 'taxi' run. Margaret and myself went to see NX611 last November. We watched and heard the aircraft on its' taxi run under a clear full moon night sky with contrails from aircraft passing overhead...it was very moving. It was also very cold with a heavy frost settling on the aircraft – just a hint of the conditions endured by the original crews.

This year we celebrated our wedding anniversary with both a tour of the aircraft and a taxi run (me) and it was wonderful. But what has this to do with RAF Butterworth? Well, I was coming to that!

NX611 was one of a batch of Lancasters destined for Tiger Force in 1945 and Butterworth was intended to play a role in the logistics of the Force. However, with the Far East war coming to an abrupt end the aircraft was 'mothballed' before being sold to the French Navy (as Western Union aircraft WU15) in the 1950's. After service in Brittany and Morocco NX611 was transferred to the New Caledonia, in the French Pacific, in 1962 flying via RAF Changi (I have a photograph of the occasion). NX611 (WU15) was struck off Aeronavale charge in August 1964 and donated to the UK based Historic Aircraft Preservation Society. Following a stay in Australia NX611 was flown back to the UK in May 1965 via RAF Changi and RAAF Butterworth where the now historic aircraft was escorted by an RAF Victor and RAAF Canberra. On return to the UK the aircraft was initially based at Biggin Hill, eventually becoming the gate guardian at RAF Scampton for a number of years before moving to East Kirkby.

So there was the link, a historical one in more ways than one.



*John Hardy/Robert Jackson*



*Richard Harcourt*

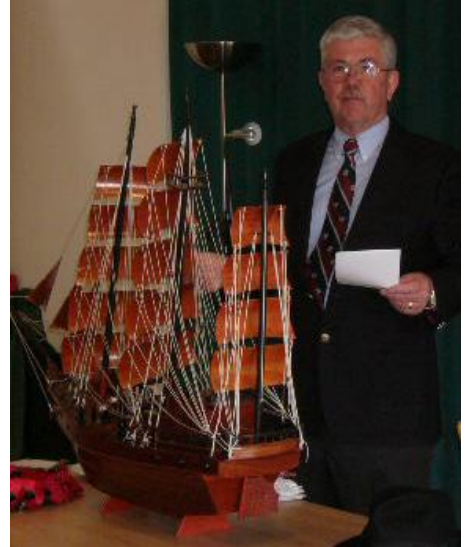


## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

At our recent reunion Dr Penlington, Medical Officer at Butterworth 1955-1958, asked for the story behind the Associations model of the sailing vessel on display at both the National Memorial Arboretum and at the hotel afterwards?

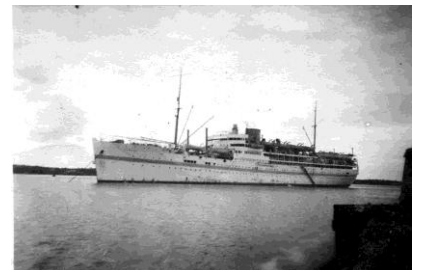
The story goes back to the Spring of 2002 when member Don Eckford (RAF Police, Penang 1964-1966) presented the one metre model to the Association to compliment the FEAF and RAF Penang badges. (Also now the badge of RAF Western Hill).

I met Don to receive the model when he was over from Germany visiting family in the UK. The boat originally was a gift to his son when working in (I believe) Indonesia but due to the nature of his business it was very difficult to keep it on display for others to appreciate. It then came into Don's possession but again it was not possible to display it to advantage and for most of the time it was stored in a basement room, and that is how the Association came to receive it as a most welcome gift. It was decided at the AGM of 2002 to display the model in recognition of the FEAF symbol of a junk at all future reunions and official functions.



Other points of interest from correspondence are:

- From RAF Seletar Association member, James Stowe, with regard to possible RAOB Lodges in the Butterworth region. The outcome of our communications is that James has written an article for our newsletter about the RAOB in Malaya.
- Troopships are frequently mentioned in conversation with members who travelled this way to and from the Far East. Being of a 'softer' generation the RAF kindly arranged for me to travel out to Singapore by Bristol Britannia and then on the return to the UK from Butterworth by VC10 so I missed the enviable experiences of my seniors who travelled by ship. Perhaps it is time to invite members to write about (and share) their experiences aboard the HMT's? Member Richard Lloyd (1950-1954) travelled by HMT Dunera which had a very interesting (and sometimes dubious) history eventually finishing service as an educational ship in the Mediterranean, and this has prompted me to ask for members' experiences and photographs etc of 'their' troopship!



- John Collett of 17 Phoenix Place, GIRALANG ACT 2617, Australia wishes to contact members of the Association who trained in Jujutsu with the late Professor KAM Hock Hoe during their time in Malaysia. The time scale given is from the mid 1950's to the mid 1960's. Some of the RAF personnel were senior Jujutsuan level. John can also be contacted by e-mail: [wjc@netspeed.com.au](mailto:wjc@netspeed.com.au)
- Ray Green, previously a member of the RAAF at RAF Western Hill has written with a view to forging a link between ex-RAF and RAAF members who worked at the radar base. Ray runs an

RAAF Association and (*with much help from Tony Flynn, Pete Mather and Tony Parrini* ) we have been able to put some names to faces of a photograph belonging to Tony Flynn.



Cpl Ray Green \* SAC Sandy McDonald  
 Flt Lt Roger Penman Fg Off Mike Good Flt Lt Derek Dunton WO Jim Hudson F/Sgt 'Taffy' Knowles\*  
 Flt Lt Peter Marshall \* Flt Lt Paddy McGuirk Flt Lt Roy Bullers Sqn Ldr Fred Flowers Flt Lt Tony Peipers\* Wg Cdr RG Sparkes Flt Lt Mike Dean  
 Cpl Garry Jones\* Peter 'Polly' Parrott\* Rex Palmer \* Dave Wilson\* \* denotes RAAF

Ray can be contacted via his e-mail address: [caru01@optusnet.com.au](mailto:caru01@optusnet.com.au) or [rsgreen@optusnet.com.au](mailto:rsgreen@optusnet.com.au)

Ray went on to become a police officer in Australia and recounts the following experience when visiting the UK in his official capacity.

"The only 'cold' beer I could find in London was opposite the Old Bailey in a little pub. Some of the private beers in the pubs in and around London that we were taken to were not too bad. Some of the pubs were a bit like blood houses and others real really beaut. We went into one not far from where we were staying and as soon as we walked in the Publican looked at me and the chap that was with me and said "you would have to be the Guv, and him your flunky". I didn't think we looked that much like coppers at all, but he picked us and also picked us in the right order. We stayed there for hours and when it was time to leave he wouldn't take any money from us. He also gave us a real good feed at the bar. One thing I do remember was him saying that the pub was his great grandfather's and had been handed down. The furnishings certainly reflected its age.

We had a great time there, apart from getting out of the way of the Bomb Squad when we were in Court....We were halfway through a complicated trial and the bells and whistles went off and the old Judge just looked up and said "I think we should leave" and before anyone could stand up and bow etc he was gone...the Bench was empty and his staff were right behind him going out the door....

The funniest thing was arriving at Heathrow on an Official Australian Passport (as opposed to a personal one) which stated that I was an Australian Federal Police Officer traveling on Duty. This little gentleman at Immigration asked me if I was intending to work in the UK, when I said "of course", he was about to refuse me entry because I did not have a work permit. I nearly stuffed his turban where the sun don't shine. Luck would have it that the Met Police were there to meet us and very quickly sorted that little lot out...."

Ray Green





## Members' Stories

### R. S. Lloyd 1950 - 1954

I had been in the Royal Air Force for two years before I was posted to the Far East. During that time I had completed basic training at No 1 School of RT Henlow. Started training as a U/T Ground Wireless Fitter at RAF Cranwell, a month into the course No 1 Radio School (Adults) moved lock, stock and barrel to RAF Locking. Then in September not only did Mr Atlee double regular pay but the new trade structure introducing technician ranks, and a pass mark of 60% (previously 40%), most of my course finally passed out as LAC Ground Wireless Mechanics.

Passing out in January 1951 I was posted with the rest of the class to REU Henlow. Due to Mr Atlee having increased National Service from 18 months to 2 years we found on arrival that Henlow didn't want us, hadn't sufficient accommodation and no work for us to perform. So we were detached to RAF Chicksands Priory. The accommodation consisted of wartime huts, no lino on the floors, no lockers, no curtains. Nothing. We lived here for 6 months whilst they sorted themselves out.

In this time I was 'selected' in the traditional way, i.e. 5'10" fall in over there, 5'11" ...and so on. We then had 4 weeks intensive training at RAF Chigwell followed by 3 weeks at RAF Uxbridge. I was one of the men who paraded in Hyde Park to receive the RAF's first ever set of Colours. For our efforts we received an illuminated copy of George VI's speech and immediate conscription into RAF Henlow's Guard of Honour on our return prior to the AOC's inspection.

On our return from Chicksands I became the Squadron Typist (because I could type) and from being unemployed I was now misemployed! Thus I went to the Far East sailing in HMT Dunera on December 19<sup>th</sup> 1951, arriving in Singapore January 18<sup>th</sup> 1952.

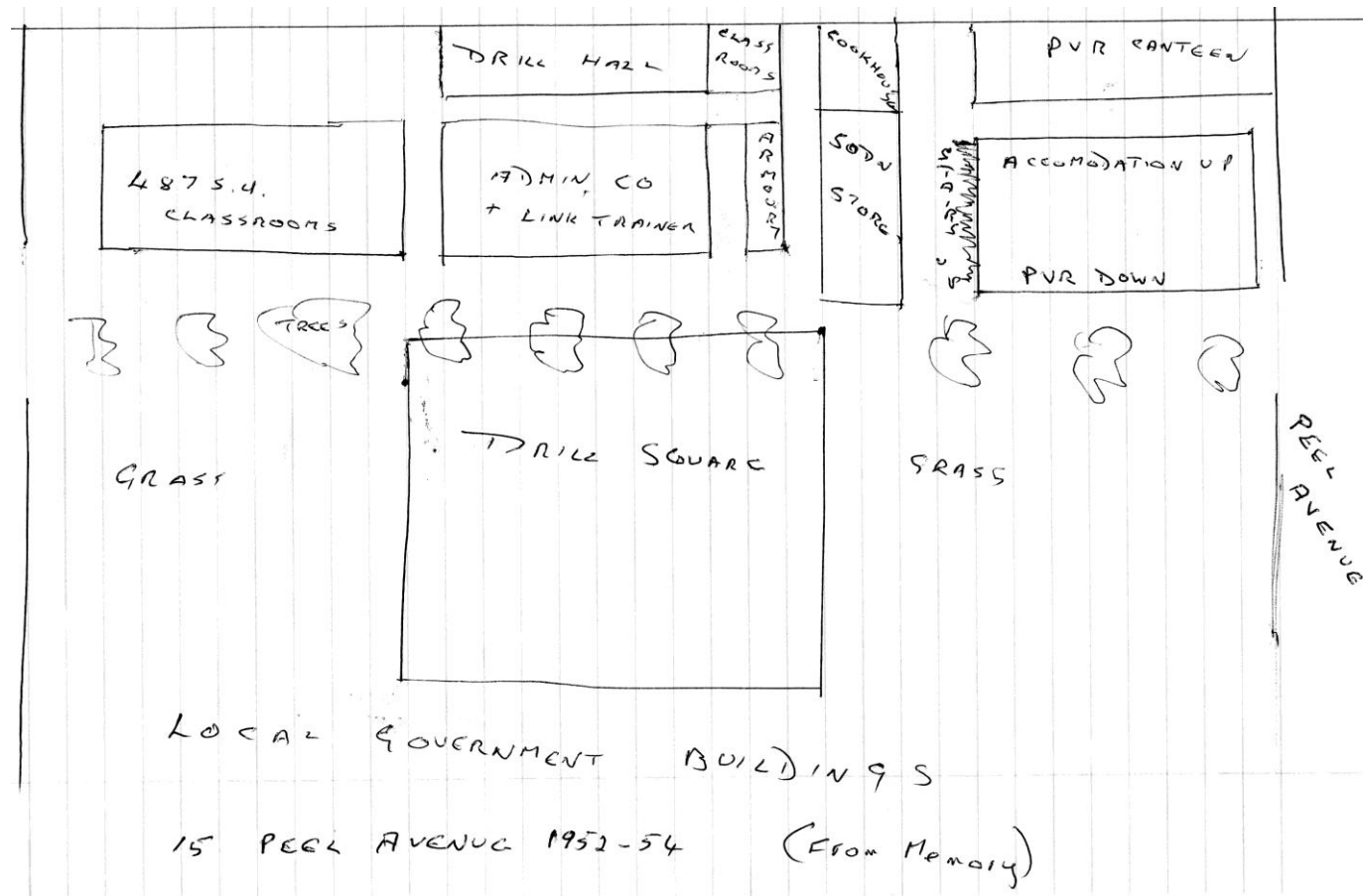
When the postings were given out on the ship I, along with four others, found we were posted to 487 S.U. Although we asked questions nobody seemed to know what this was. (Was it another 'secret' Signals Unit?) We spent 5 days at Changi before they finally told us we were to go to RAF Butterworth by air after lunch. We travelled in a Valetta via KL and arrived at Butterworth after dark and were promptly whisked away to a basha with bamboo walls and palm leaf roof.

The following morning was spent with our 'blue chit' and we were told transport would collect us from the basha. Next day a 3 ton Austin (all service vehicles at the time were Bedfords) in a paler shade of blue than was usual and with M.A.A.F. on the doors pulled up. A Junior Technician who was driving said, "Are you lot for M.A.A.F.?" We said, "No, 487 SU". "Same thing," he said, "Get your kit and get in". Away we went across the ferry to Penang, 15 Peel Avenue to be precise, where we were welcomed by the station commander, Flt Lt De Pass, CFI.

15 Peel Avenue was home to the Malayan Auxiliary Air Force and the Police Volunteer Reserve. It consisted of three two-storey buildings and several single storey ones. The first building on the right as



you came in the gate housed the PVR. They always had an armed sentry on duty which relieved us of the chore (communist bandits were active at that time). The central building housed the CO and administration (civilian), a link trainer on the ground floor, upstairs were the SNCO and Airmen's messes (no NAAFI). Our two chefs and the waiter were supplied by the Malayan Government. At the rear of this building was the drill hall (Badminton and Dances). The third building was home to 487, the Unit Commander, Flt Lt R.L.T. Bickers, and housed the many classrooms I was to come to know so well.



On reporting to our unit CO we were told that the fitting party had almost completed the installation of the Radar Convoy and that our task would be to maintain or operate (depending on trade) the Ground Control Interception Unit at Bayan Lepas airfield, that because of the Auxiliaries we would be working on Saturdays, Sunday morning, Monday and Friday nights until 2000 hrs, our weekend would be Wednesday and Thursday (subsequently changed to Tuesday/Wednesday). The Officers were seconded to the Malayan Government but the airmen were permanently detached from RAF Butterworth. The total strength of the unit was about 30. The Squadron consisted of Harvards and Tiger Moths located also at Bayan Lepas.

When the fitting party had completed its task we used to travel the 12 miles to Bayan Lepas. Twice a day I was in sole charge of two vehicles, one containing the receiving equipment, one with the transmitters and a Coventry Climax generating set. Never having worked at any trade, the other lads all being Radar Mechs and the Tech Sgt being in hospital, the early days were a very steep self-teaching curve.

The unit had no Discip. Staff, no Police (although the RAF police lived two streets away) and basically you were trusted to be a good boy. The one who didn't got an immediate posting.

I spent a full tour on Penang and didn't want to go home. I completed the training of the first G.W.

Mechs to graduate in M.A.A.F although we hadn't been trained as instructors. I know a lot of the local people through my association with the Auxiliaries and had been to tea with families, a Chinese wedding and even a Chinese wedding dinner. I love sunshine and life for a single lad was very good.

I still have one question that nobody has ever answered. On completion of the training course I then became TSTS and set their workshop Practical and Theory tests. I marked the papers and announced the results. I was only an SAC and neither an NCO or Signals officer ever checked the papers.

Memories come flooding back as I write this; we were more like a family than a service unit. We used to have an issue of 50 Players a week as we were 'On Active Service'. Our unit used to get 200-300 cigarettes each, every quarter confiscated originally by Customs. I gave up smoking years ago but I think we all smoked in the '50s.

In December the Auxiliaries held a dance in the drill hall to which we were invited. We, in turn, would hold a dance to which we invited the Auxiliaries. Then came Xmas Dinner held in the drill hall, the officers and their wives waited on table. I recall Mrs De Pass commenting on the hundreds of white balloons we had used to help decorate the building, then she had a thought and asked if they were what she thought they were. We had no other use for them – the married men were well provided for!

Then we had a New Year party followed by Chinese New Year and anybody else's. We didn't need any encouragement for a party.

The mess couldn't spend money on drinks! But if you vote for the \$200 to be spent on sandwiches and nibbles that put a lot of beer in the fridge. It was our money after all.

Power at the airfield, bearing in mind we were located the wrong side of the runway, was provided by Lister Diesels, each generator 20 KvA. As we were supposed to be a mobile convoy these were mounted, one to a vehicle. The headroom was such that refuelling from a jerry can was a logistical nightmare and exhausts from these went through an aperture in the floorboards and then were fed under the boards. My vehicles were some distance from my Diesel and the first I knew was when the power failed. The fan belt had broken and the heat from the exhaust had set fire to the floorboards. After putting out the fire it was decided to say nothing and carry out our own repairs. It was probably the fact that RAF Glugor had lost a boat by fire and a Court of Inquiry had been convened. We didn't want one.

The Coventry Climax petrol generator was used once a week to keep it in good trim. On a day of monsoon rain I did not observe the door to the radiator blow shut. When I tried to switch it off it continued running on a hot spot. We had to run it until the fuel drained out of the feed pipe. Fortunately, no permanent damage occurred.

We used to practice GCI with the Hornets from RAF Butterworth, usually in the dark from 1800-2000. Our call sign was VICTOR which, I'm afraid, our U/T Controllers' pronounced as ' WICTOR'. June 1954, we had just had 200 Auxiliaries from Singapore for a fortnight's camp. We had done a lot of overtime to ensure the new convoy was serviceable. First day they exercised until 1330, return to Peel Avenue for lunch just after 1400 to be told, 'you're going home tomorrow'. I refused to go and clear until I had eaten. By the time I finally got to RAF Butterworth to clear it was gone 1500 and they only worked until 1600. Got a jab and some money and that was it. One day in a train to Singapore, one day at Changi, 5 days in a Hastings in paratroop mode to Lyneham to be told, "You can't go on leave – no documents!" I wasn't the only one!

Richard left the RAF in 1974. He also served at RAF Khormaksar and RAF Luqa (Malta) as well as various UK stations.



### **Why Penang?**

By Laurence M. Bean

"Why Penang?" was the question asked by our Newsletter editor, Dave Croft in a recent email. Dave is not the only one to have asked this question over the past few years. Quite a few people who we have met and told that we live here, and are not just on holiday, want to know more.

My introduction to Penang was on 11 May 1966. Letting down on the approach into what was then RAAF Butterworth, I saw the island for the first time. Setting foot on the island itself a few days after arrival and experiencing the sights, sounds and smells, left an indelible mark that was to last for a very long time. It was also here that I met the lady who was to become, and still is, my wife.

I left the RAF at the end of my 5 year engagement in September 1969. However, I never really settled back into civilian life and in June 1970, I rejoined, albeit in a different trade, that of Clerk Secretarial. One of the first things I did on re-entry was to apply for an overseas posting. No prizes for guessing what was first choice! By that time though, the withdrawal of forces from East of Suez was underway and I found myself in Cyprus instead.

With all the British forces now out the Far East, there was no way of getting back there as a serviceman. My wife managed to return several times from 1975 into the mid-1980's. It was not until October 1986 that I managed to return to Penang. Although it had changed considerably, I was still very much drawn to it. It was during this stay that we decided that we would return to live here later.

In October 1988, I left the RAF and joined British Aerospace (BAe), working for them in support of Project Al Yamamah. I remained with the company for almost 11 years and during that time, we were able to get back to Penang twice a year. These holidays always seemed too short though.

I left BAe in August 1999. We had already got a place in Penang and now decided that we would divide the year between there and the UK. Over the next couple of years, we decided that we would make Penang our permanent home. In September 2001, we sold up in the UK and packed a few boxes with those belongings we wanted to keep and made the move. Just after arrival, we applied to join what was

then known as the “Silver Hair Scheme”. Contrary to popular opinion, it has nothing to do with the colour of my hair! Under this scheme, we are able to stay in Penang on a long-stay visit visa. This was currently 5 years at a time but has recently been increased to 10 years.

Almost two years ago, we purchased a property in Batu Ferringhi and have now set up home there. Now we have a ninth floor apartment with a west facing view over the bay area. A perfect place for a retirement home.



From a newspaper cutting submitted by **Harold Baker**

### **LONELY LEGION'S VIGIL**

#### **Guarding Jap Stores 2,500 Feet Above Penang**

##### ***HIGH UP ON PENANG HILL THERE LIVES A LONELY LITTLE LEGION OF THE R.A.F. REGIMENT***

It consists of one officer and 32 men, a flight from one of the RAF Regiment squadrons forming the island garrison. They provide a 24-hour guard on a great store of food and petrol which the Japanese built up over many months, carrying these supplies by the funicular trains that crawl up the hill.

Their apparent object was to turn the hill into a self-sufficient outpost and to fight on indefinitely from its dominant height even after the Allies had recaptured the remainder of Malaya.

They did not fight on from Penang Hill, but the stores they so laboriously gathered together remained when the Allies cleared the enemy from the island.

The RAF Regiment are now guarding them not for their own use, but for the benefit of the Penang population. The stores are dispersed over a group of seven houses, most of them the palatial peace-time summer houses of Penang's European residents.

#### **Teams of Four**

What were once elegantly furnished bedrooms and lounges are now miniature warehouses stacked to the ceilings with tins of tea, rice, biscuits, fruit, fish and vegetables, bottles of coffee and sauce and many other provisions intended to keep the Japanese fighting fit over a long period of last-ditch resistance.

The men charged with guarding these precious supplies live and work on the premises. Each house is occupied by a team of four – a corporal and three men. Three may go out together, but a fourth always remains behind. Gold could not be guarded more jealously.

When they are not on guard they spend their time sorting the tins and boxes into various categories, cooking their meals, sharing the “chores”, walking in the cool air, writing letters home describing the magnificent view of Penang and the mainland before them, and meeting the trains that lumber up and down the steep hill all day.

#### **Carried Up Daily By Trains**

The trains carry their daily rations from the Regiment's stores below and the men wheel them home on hand carts – the only form of transport available on the hill top.

One house is the billet and office of their flight commander F/O Donald Gee, of South Shore, Blackpool, Lancashire, who was an anti-aircraft sergeant in England and was commissioned before he sailed overseas last July to join the squadron in Rangoon.



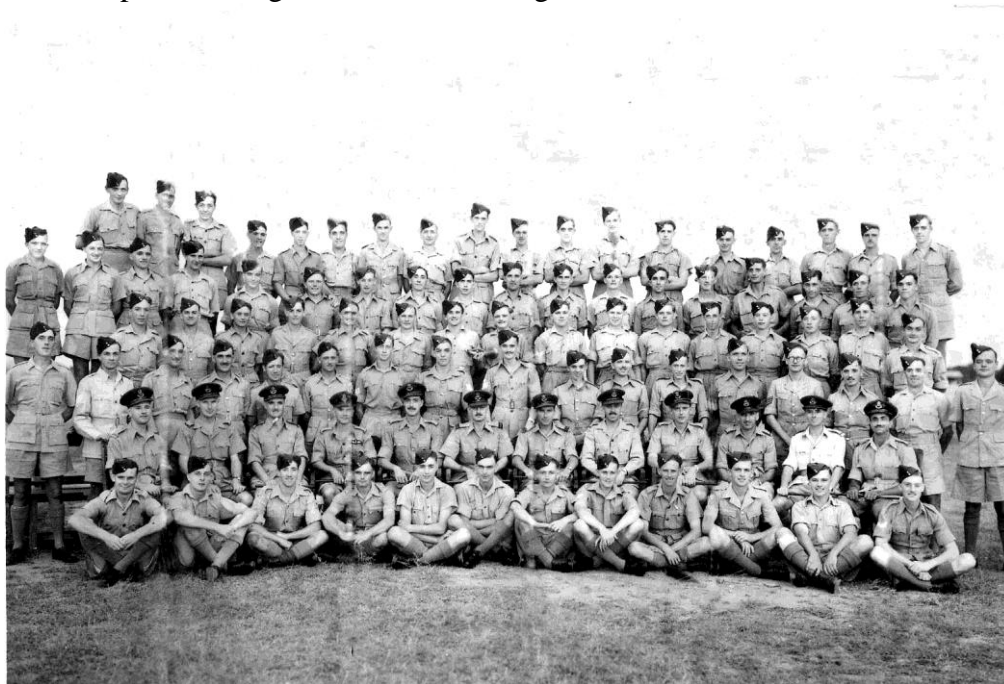
“Most the men up here are Burma veterans awaiting repatriation”, he said. “They had some grim times in Burma, moving through wild jungle country in grilling heat and drenching monsoon rain, living in bashes at Imphal and in tents all the way down to Rangoon. This seems to be a grand way of rounding off their overseas tour and getting them fit again for the return home.”

“For a change they are living a really civilised life in bright, airy houses, some of them with two bathrooms. Even after a few days the improvement in their general health has been remarkable. It is so cool and peaceful up here and they are getting plenty of exercise.”

“The only transport we found when we arrived were two Japanese trucks, both of them complete wrecks. So we have to walk wherever we go and as that means plenty of climbing the chaps are all in fine fettle.”

F/O Gee makes a daily round of the houses to assist his men in their stock-taking and goes out on long reconnaissance patrols, looking for any other dumps which the Japanese may have left behind.

“Every evening we sit outside our houses, or stand on guard, looking down at the twinkling lights of Penang, wondering what sort of time the lads in Georgetown are having at the dances and the shows” said Cpl. H. T. Baker, of Clacton-on-Sea, Essex, who has been overseas since March 194... and has followed the 14<sup>th</sup> Army from Imphal to Rangoon as anti-aircraft gunner.



“Some of the lads find it tantalising to be so near those lights and yet so far. The last train up each evening is 5.30 and the last one down, 5.45. After that there is no contact with the foot of the hill and so we spend every evening up here, making our own amusement.”

### **Ideal Life**

“For me, though, it is an ideal life – such a restful change from the sweat and the strain of Burma.”

“We have one shop on the hill – a coffee shop. Apart from that, the railway station, the police station and a few scattered houses, we are a little world of our own up here. But we have made some good friends among the local people. They are always popping in to see us or inviting us to their houses.”

“We have no trouble in understanding each other, thanks to two bright lads who have tacked themselves on to us and act as our interpreters. A boy of 13 from Madras spends most of his day at my house, making himself useful in various ways. He can speak Chinese, Malay, Hindustani and English and he learned Japanese for three months at his school during the occupation.”

Civilians and the RAF Regiment “watchmen” sit side by side as the train creeps up the hill, spreading out below a widening and enchanting vista of Penang Harbour and the Malayan mainland, and the monkeys scamper into the undergrowth at its approach.

**Harold returns to Penang every year spending several months at a time on the island.**



**Eric Sharp**.....Eric has written a number of contributions for this issue, these are as follows:

Between Jan 1954 and Feb '56 I was stationed at Butterworth with The Far East Training Sqdn,, 33 Sqdn and 33/45 Sqdn. A happening occurred in which an airman was killed, the details of which I have used ever since when giving Firearms and small arms training.

The Airman's name was Leopard stationed as an Armourer with 60 Sqdn in Tengah. The Squadron came up to Butterworth for APC training and were parked on the North end of the old dispersal runway. I was Engines but was very friendly with all the FETS armourers who were led by a superb trades man and extrovert, a Cpl Ray Edmead. .

Any way, the story is this: 60's Vampire aircraft had been off live firing their 20mm Cannons. On landing and after chocking and Engine shut down the first task was for the Armourers to declare the guns safe. This entailed removing the 20mm BFM's (Belt Feed Mechanisms) and rack roller units thus proving that there had either been a gun stoppage or, what we all prayed for, a clean shoot, i.e. all the rounds had fired. The next action was to fit the gun cocking tools, which were a gizmo which had a wire that attached to the breech block in the forward position and by pulling on a Toggle at the other end pulled back the breech block and cocked the action. Any empty case or live round would be ejected and fall to the ground. The cocking tools were then removed. Remember this was a Vampire whose belly wasn't a lot more than a foot off the deck. Having carried out this check and ascertained the breeches were clear, the armourer would go forward to the nose wheel bay, and with power on, press the guns override button which was in the bay. To do this one had to kneel and face forward, feel up into the bay and press the



button . This had the same effect as pulling the trigger in the cockpit, allowing the breech blocks to fly forward.

All these actions young Leopard carried out except that, after cocking the actions, he did not lay on the ground and physically shine a torch into the breeches or poke a finger into the breeches to know they were empty. On going forward to push the override button one of the guns behind him fired and killed him. On the face of it was an accident that should not, and normally could not, have happened.

I do not think any one of us saw an accident report. If there was one! Life was reasonably cheap in those days. Our teams summation of events came to the conclusion that young Leopard's log book held by the good Lord had been closed. The events as they surmised was this: it had been a clean shoot, all the ammunition for that gun had fired except for the very last round in the belt which had suffered a "light strike", that is the firing pin in the breech block did not strike the primer in the base of the shell or cartridge with enough force to fire it. When he cocked the action with the cocking tool the million to one chance happened, the ejector either broke or failed and did not pull the round out of the breech. When he pushed the override button, the primer in the round did not light strike the second time.

Since then, when instructing at my Rifle and Pistol club I have used this story to ram home the gun safety theme of "Remove the source of ammo", cock the action, at all times keeping the weapon pointed in a safe direction and look or feel that the breech is empty before allowing the action to go forward.

When my Wife and I had a holiday in Penang a few years ago I had hoped to find Leopard's grave, but nobody out there could tell me where the British cemetery was . I asked several locals including some in Western Road and all I could get was a negative or a "maybe Ipoh". So I gave up and got on with the holiday. Since then there have been several mentions in our Newsletters about the Western Road Cemetery and the Latest No1 for 2006, Royal British Legion Magazine has an article and picture of a memorial there to those that died in the "Emergency"

The War Graves Commission only lists ten graves in Western Road, none of them RAF and none later than 1949. Maybe we were not actually at war when we were there ... just mucking about!

Future visitors might make a point of visiting this little piece of England and looking out for young Leopard.



45 Squadron Butterworth 1956

*Gil Potter*

Dear Dave.. I have just dug out the attached snap just to prove that the Squadron nobody knows about at Butterworth did exist. It came about like this: The Hornets were on their last legs, FETS (Far East Training Squadron) amalgamated with 33 Sqdn. All our Hornets, ground crew and instructors moved from our spot in the middle of the old dispersal runway to 33's end nearest the main E/W Runway, forsaking our tents for a share in 33's permanent buildings. 45 Sqdn down in Tengah virtually disbanded. Their aircrew flew their Hornets up country and joined us. All their ground crew were just found other jobs down in Singapore. Hence 45/33 Squadron. Why 45 had *preference*. I am not sure. Probably because 45's *C.O* became the head man! 33's old Boss flew home in a Canberra with the Squadron Silver, a not uneventful trip as they came a cropper somewhere in India.



I am the very handsome guy on the left, I am sorry not to remember the name of the lad in the middle. If he reads this he may remind me. Tony (Ginger, Georgie) Watson, one of my sailing mates is on the right. Again if Ginger reads this, please get in touch.  
Regards. Eric Sharp.

Dear Dave.

Looking through my Butterworth bits to see if I could spot that building (*the mystery building that has been a source of enquiry from a previous newsletter. More in this issue. DC*) on the South side of what to me was the Main Runway. I don't have a picture, after all it was an insignificant little place. As I remember it was a roofed but pretty open parking compound for fire extinguishers. I enclose three snaps taken on the other side of the Runway but still facing the sea The Story is this ... It was January 1st 1956. All the 45/33 Sqdn Venom's were armed up for a max. effort strike against old Chin Peng. The kites were all lined up in dispersal with the Old Vamp' T11 as a spare.

They went for a mass start. All started but one that just would not start. Adrenaline was running pretty high. The lads literally hauled the pilot from the cockpit and shovelled him into the T11. Just so we could say they were all up in the air. Off he went like a scalded cat trying to catch up. You will see that the old kite was an early T11 with the canopy lid in the top of the canopy. In all the haste the pilot omitted to lock the lid and just before rotate it blew open. He aborted like mad, took to the bondoo and came to a resounding stop as it jumped the monsoon ditch bursting through the slabs and burying both main wheels in the far side of the ditch. One picture shows the general view with the Island across the Strait.





Another shows the main under carriage buried in the slabs. The last shows the lads answer to recovery. We filled



the drain with old empty rocket boxes and laid PSP on the top behind the wheels and over the boxes. A tractor pulling a wire strop fixed to the main u/c pulled it back over the ditch. Lads on the booms kept it level till we got a wheeled dolly under the nose. The kite was serviceable in short time, a new nose wheel strut and a good look over and it was back on the line. The pilot took a bit of ribbing

Regards. Eric Sharp.



#### **THE ROYAL ANTEDILUVIAN ORDER OF BUFFALOES ("THE BUFFS")**

Like the East India Company, the Chartered Bank of India, Australia and China (now the Standard Chartered Bank); the North Borneo Company; Sir James Brooke and the successive two White Rajahs of Sarawak and other distinguished persons and organisations, the British and Commonwealth Armed Forces made their mark on countries around the world where they were posted, garrisoned or simply stayed for any length of time. In the great majority of cases they were most welcome particularly because of the great contribution they made to the local economy in terms of employment and spending power. Every RAF station had its 'village' just beyond the main gates where, as we all fondly remember, the enterprising local shopkeepers catered for just about every requirement we could create. One only has to recall the vast Batu Garrison in Kuala Lumpur; Kinrara Military Hospital; the Army Logistics spread at Taiping; HQ Malaya Command and others to mention but a few of the military presences up country in addition to the vast complexes in Singapore. The contribution to Malaya's economy was considerable.

As the thousands of ex Malaya and Singapore hands grow older and fewer it is, perhaps, timely to recall the widespread presence in many bases, of the RAOB in the Far East. The Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes (the Buffs) had a very strong following in all Branches of HM Forces and was particularly active in all the armed forces Overseas Commands and amongst civilian communities, too. So strong was this following, in fact, that the Grand Lodge of England formed the Overseas Buffaloes Association (OBA) for which a special 'jewel' was struck with a red, white and blue ribbon and a medallion showing a world map. An OBA lapel badge was also minted. I still have a copy of the OBA Bulletin no. 25 for September 1955 in which the RAF Seletar Lodge features quite prominently in terms of a regalia visit paid to the Singapore Imperial Lodge no. 7510 in June 1955. This was the latter's 500th meeting since the liberation. Again, a commemorative 'jewel' was struck. Incidentally, the Singapore GLE 'jewel' comprised a jungle green ribbon with the well known 'chop rimau' tiger under the inevitable palm tree as the medallion component. (I don't know whether any royalties were paid to the Archipelago Brewery for this use of its Tiger Beer trademark!).

The RAF Seletar Aero Malaya Lodge 'jewel' comprised a green and purple GSM style ribbon with a ferocious tiger against a black background surrounded by gold laurel leaves forming the medallion. The Lodge building was situated on the 'golden mile' road leading from the main gates to the bus turnaround junction at the Airmen's Mess. I recollect it was near the Astra Cinema. I also recall that in addition to Seletar's Aero Malaya Lodge no. 7312, Changi also had a bustling Lodge along with Tengah, the Naval Base and Nee Soon Garrison.

Some people wonder just what the RAOB did. One of its philanthropic aims was to help the less fortunate and the above mentioned OBA bulletin account of the Imperial Lodge visit recounts that some \$180 dollars was raised for the Singapore Children's fund. I recall a very successful concert put on by the Seletar Lodge by the 'Buffercoons' (terribly non-PC!) where a number of us made up and dressed like the Black and White Minstrels of old and performed a number of music hall turns. Again, the quite tidy proceeds were donated to a Singapore deserving charity.

I wonder whether any RAOB lodges existed in the northern parts of Malaya where a British military presence existed? I am thinking particularly of Butterworth and Penang. Kuala Lumpur had the Malaya Lodge no. 8224 which met in the Police Volunteer Officers Mess in Victory Avenue where the National Mosque now stands (adjacent to the Malaysian Railways administrative building). I was raised to the Second Degree at this Lodge on behalf of the Aero Malaya Lodge in September 1956 as I had left the RAF at that time and joined a British merchant company in KL.

I have searched through my Grand Lodge of England directory published at the time of my sojourn with the Far East Air Force but can find no entries relating to Northern Malaya Lodges. Unfortunately, I cannot remember whether the Malaya Lodge comprised servicemen as well as Police Officers - I'm sure it must have because many Police Lieutenants were actually ex-servicemen and it was quite a big Lodge membership wise. It is possible that many military units up country were too small or too transient to form viable lodges. I remember, for example, the RAF (?) unit based at Fraser's Hill in Pahang where Singapore RAF personnel and others went on a two week Ground Combat Training course during their tour of duty on the Island. We went as far as Kuala Kubu Bharu by night sleeper train from Singapore but did not sleep! We were the train guard each with rifle and five rounds and yes! we were ambushed by terrorists. The train stopped but security forces ahead of us drove the CTs off. Included are some names of Aero Malaya Lodge members of my time (1953 - 1956) I have discovered on a scrap of paper amongst my RAOB memorabilia; Bros. Coleman; Nev Glaister; Paxton; Footitt; DeLancey; CP Hamilton; Bros. Vincent; Robinson; KOM Hyland; Bros. Jones; Throope; Marfitt; CP Moore; CP Ross; Bros. Wallis; Drake; Colman; Bissett; Reeves; Vidler; Padfield; Parkinson and Davis. Are any of the foregoing in the association and can they recall Lodge meetings and events? I can remember that every occasion was most memorable.

Something from the above should prompt a few contributions, Dave. I know Buff events guaranteed a rollicking (but responsible!) good time but the less fortunate always benefited. I continued attending Seletar meetings when I took a civilian job in Singapore and joined the Malaya Lodge no. 8224 when posted up country.

Regrettably, opportunities for continuing RAOB involvement became more rare and I have to admit having become a lapsed member. But this does not diminish my memories of wonderful times with many fine friends in the movement.

Jim Stowe

RAF Seletar Far East Flying Boat Wing 1953-195



## Butterworth Remembered

In March 1955 I arrived At Butterworth after spending the previous twelve months at Seletar in Singapore. My first impression of Butterworth was mixed, but after I had settled in I enjoyed it there immensely. I was given the job of running the P.O.L. Store (Petrol, Oils and Lubricants). Actually I was second in command, mind you there was only two of us working there!

Visits to Penang Island at the weekends was always looked forward to, lots of time spent on the beach, swimming etc. I remember swimming in the sea and being swept onto the rocks. I clambered over the rocks and was sitting holding my head, which was bleeding quite badly, when a young lady arrived on the scene and asked "could she have a look at my head?" Well how could I refuse? She did her best, cleaned it up and poured some iodine on it which made my eyes water. The young lady in question was a Salvation Army girl and we became friends for a while. She asked me to go with her to Salvation Army meetings but I never took up her offer. I've never forgotten her, though I can't for the life of me remember her name. Anyway back to RAF Butterworth..... My time there seemed to fly by and before I knew it, it was Sept 1956 and time to return to the UK. My O.I.C. was Squadron Leader John Fowler, one of the best people I have ever worked for. Also I remember in the office was a Flt Lt Hitchmann, an ex bomber pilot who had been grounded and was waiting to retire. He loved to talk about flying! Every time a large piston engine aircraft flew over he'd be out of his seat, head out of the window declaring 'there's a real aircraft'

Those of us lucky enough to serve in Malaya were given the best posting in the world. I've been back a few times in recent years and I'm going again next year.

Gerry Pearson.



## Mystery stories from Butterworth

The previous newsletter (Spring 2006) featured two mysteries and asked if members could help solve them. I have had good responses to both mysteries although one, the mystery building, has featured more uses than expected....still, that is the name of the game as my old Flight Sergeant would say when he put me on a charge, again!

**The helicopter**.....In respect of the helicopter photograph that was shown in the last newsletter (Spring 2006) the following replies from Laurie Bean have been received:

"I have just looked through the Spring Newsletter on the Association's website and noticed a query regarding a group photo. This photo shows what appears to be a line-up of squadron personnel in front of a Whirlwind helicopter.

The aircraft in the photo is a Westland Whirlwind HAR Mk 4. The serial number is only partially visible and shows XD18?. Seven Whirlwinds bearing serial numbers in the XD18X range were allocated to No. 155 Sqn at KL in 1954. Four of those seven, went on to be converted to HAR 10 standard in the early 60s. The other three were not so lucky. They suffered various mishaps which led to their being written-off in the late 50s. All the Sqn's surviving HAR 4's were handed over to 110 Sqn when it was reformed, by amalgamating No's 155 and 194 Sqns, at KL on 3 June 1959.

Two possibilities, if the photo was taken at Butterworth, that dates it later than 1 September 1959, when 110 Sqn moved there. The background in the photo looks very much like that where the helicopters operated in Butterworth. I would stick my neck out and say a 110 Sqn grouping at Butterworth. The sqn re-equipped with

Whirlwind HAR 10's in Jul 63 so, that would date the picture somewhere between 1 September 1959 and July 1963.

Sorry I can't be more helpful. Perhaps someone else can narrow it down further."

*The following reply was received after the editor replied to Laurie:*

"Glad to help out. However, having stuck my neck out, I might be about to get it chopped!!

Looking a little deeper into the records, I find that only 1 of the helicopters that I mentioned went on to serve with 110 Sqn. That was XD183 and that was after it was converted to HAR 10 standard. So, it looks as though the grouping is of 155 Sqn and not 110.

I have asked the RAF Museum at Hendon to let me have copies of the AM Form 78, Aircraft Movements Card, for the seven helicopters in question. I'll know more when those copies arrive in about 4 weeks. I'll update you when I get more info."

**Further to Laurie chasing up the problem:**

"I have now received the record cards that I was waiting for. Unfortunately, they are not much help. It seems the Museum does not hold cards for all the aircraft that I was interested in, only half.

So, it's now back to best guess! As the photo came from an ex-member of 155 Sqn, I'm inclined to think the photo to have been taken as the squadron disbanded at KL in June 59. If that is so, the only XD18? helicopter that seems to have been on strength then was XD182. So, that's what I will go with. Let's see how close I am."

***And from Brian Lloyd, Secretary of the Helicopter Association:***

"I think this is 110 Squadron. One of the ex-KL Whirlwinds, I think it is XD183 which went from 110 to 103. The other XD's were 184, 185, 186, 187 and 188."

**The mystery building at the end of the runway. The following replies have been received:**

***From Laurie Bean (continued from his previous letter):***

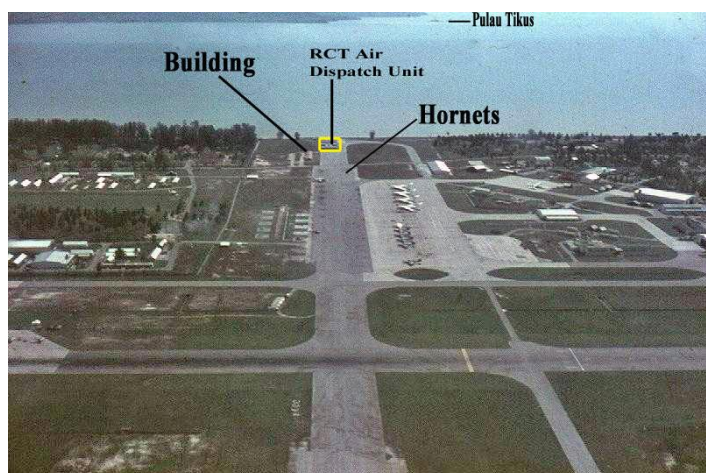
On now to the other "hot potato"! The photo of the mystery building. I can offer no clue as to its purpose but I think I can pin down the location.

George Gault, in his email to you that is included in the current Newsletter (Spring 2006), is right. The Hornets are parked at the western end of the old East/West runway. I have attached a slightly revised copy of the early 60's aerial photo annotated with what I think are the likely positions of both aircraft and building. There is evidence in that photo of the foundations of previous buildings on the site. Could our mystery building have been one of these?

In the Hornet photo that sparked the discussion, the photographer was facing west, and the Tanjung Bungah area, including the small island of Pulau Tikus, is visible. The buildings that are visible at the end of the E/W runway in the later aerial shot, were, when I first went to Butterworth in May 1966, occupied by a RCT Air Dispatch unit. The grey cells not being what they once were, I can't remember the unit number. The narrower strip of tarmac that the RCT unit is standing on was, I believe, a later extension to the E/W runway.



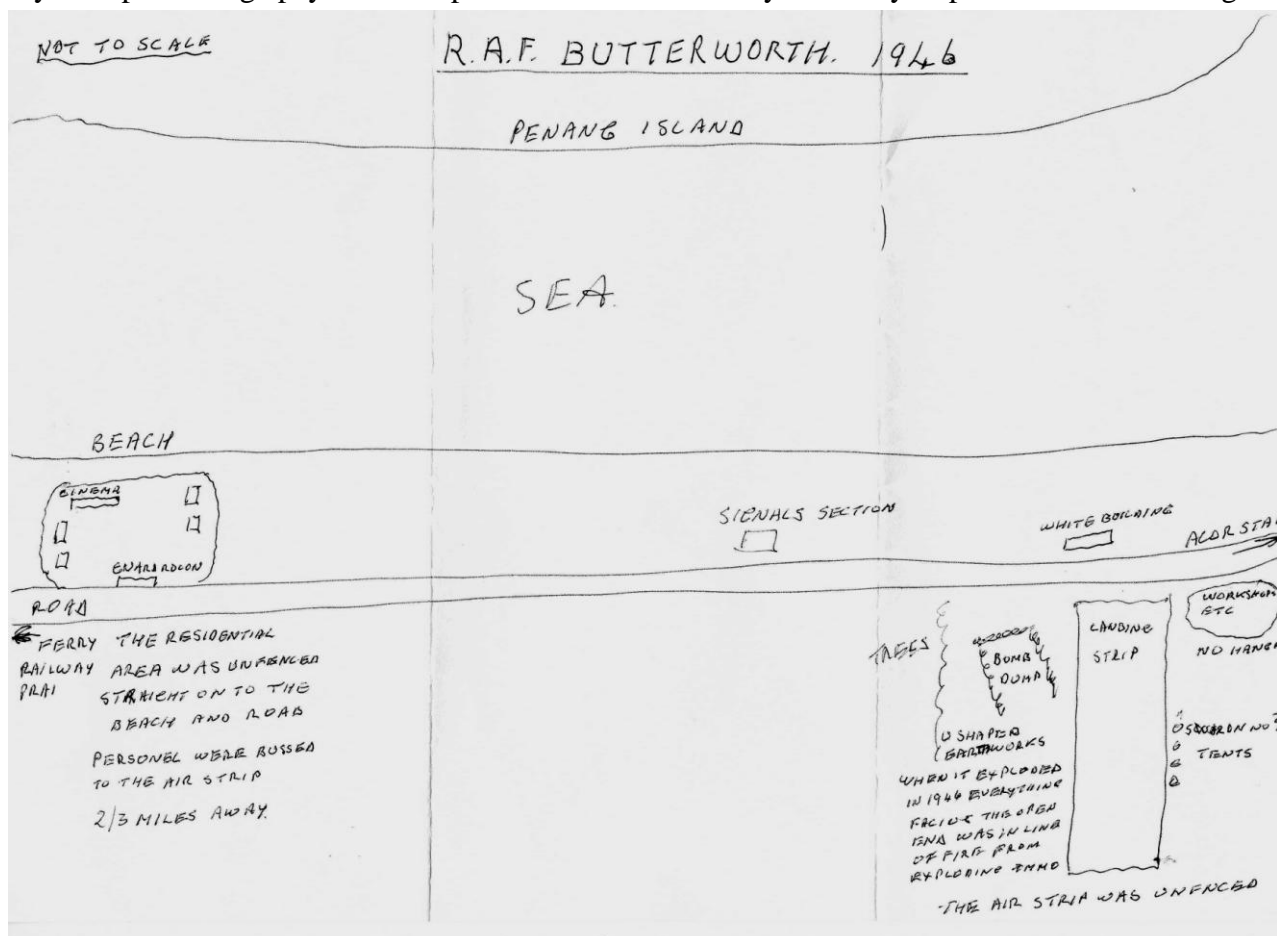
Now, for the other photo shown in the current Newsletter, Sam Mold's shot of the E/W runway from 52/53. If this photo is enlarged in a photo editing programme, it shows something in the area that is arrowed but, whatever is there, is not big enough to be the mystery building. It looks more like an area of land with evidence of construction work. The area arrowed is also not in the right position, it is too far down the side of the runway. In Sam's shot, the mystery building should be just off the right hand end of the runway and towards the camera position.



I hope someone can come up with the answer soon.”

**From Les Downey:** Re the ongoing saga concerning the 'White Building'.

My attempt at cartography and description of the base in January 1946 may help to set the record straight.



The unfenced residential area consisted of newly built palm thatched wooden huts between the main road and the beach. The airstrip was miles further north again unfenced and with no hangers. The resident squadron of fighters were using tents as workshops and got shot at when the bomb dump blew up. In 1981 my wife and I had a three week holiday at the Bayview Beach Hotel. We hired a car and went across to the mainland but I couldn't find any traces of the original installations. The photographs on pages 13&14 of the Spring Newsletter explained why. The present base and runway manned by the Australians on the opposite side of the main road seemed to be nearer to

the ferry than the one I knew and could be the reason for the different explanations being offered especially if the old strip had been torn up and relocated.

The cinema shown in the map had proper tiered benches for the patrons. One night a violent storm blew in from the sea and because the building was parallel with the beach the wind lifted the thatch on that side and let the rain in, everyone just shuffled to the left and carried on watching the film. The whole area outside was littered with coconuts and one or two palm trees but no one had been hurt.

***From Margaret Cheeseright*** (approx. 1953/4). "I can tell you what the building on the runway is, it was a school. My eldest son attended the school, you can guess they didn't learn much with the planes taking off and landing. Fortunately there was only 33 Squadron there and the odd plane coming up from Singapore to do their 'stint' on the nearby firing range. The Australians would come up too train as well. I must admit they livened up the Mess when they came up, they always had a pianist with them so we had some good sing songs. I hope this has been of use".

PS...."Looking at the photograph again it threw me at first, there used to be a monsoon drain across the end of the runway and I seem to remember a pilot being killed coming in to land, he ended up in the drain and broke his neck! He was one of the new pilots', the old ones 'would go round again'. My late husband had flown Lancasters towards the end of the war so he was more experienced".

***From John May:***      **Subject: The building at the end of the runway.**

From Sept. 1954 to Feb. 1955 I was a member of a small detachment of 5 of us fitting Radio Compasses in Mosquitos and Hornets. Our leader was a Corporal "Scouse" Griffiths.

Every month on payday, an Indian chap stood outside the cookhouse with a stall, selling all manner of things including cameras. The idea was you paid for the goods in monthly installments.

Scouse decided to buy one of the cameras, and in true scouser tradition, bought it under the name of "Corporal Shakespeare", knowing full well the number of installments in no-way equalled the number of months we were expected to be there. Each month the Indian chap would greet him with "Ah, Corporal Shakespeare, man of many letters!".

Being the only one who possessed a camera, Scouse became the official photographer for the group, and wherever we went, Penang Hill, Snake Temple, Penang racecourse, etc., Scouse took the photographs and at a later date we used to develop the films and print off enough copies for each of us. Scouse joined the photography club, and every so often, he would borrow the keys to the club, and we would go in and do the business.

The club was situated in a small detached building near the end of the runway!

I would like to thank all who sent in correspondence relating to identifying the helicopter serial number/squadron and the mystery building. While we may never completely solve a query at least the discussion has been opened up by members, which is just great!.....DC.





**13th May 2006...a selection of photographs of the day from Mike Ward and Dave Croft**





