



## *'EASTWARD'*

The newsletter of the  
**RAF Butterworth & Penang Association**



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

# **SUMMER 2011**

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.



*Issue 30*



## *'EASTWARD'*

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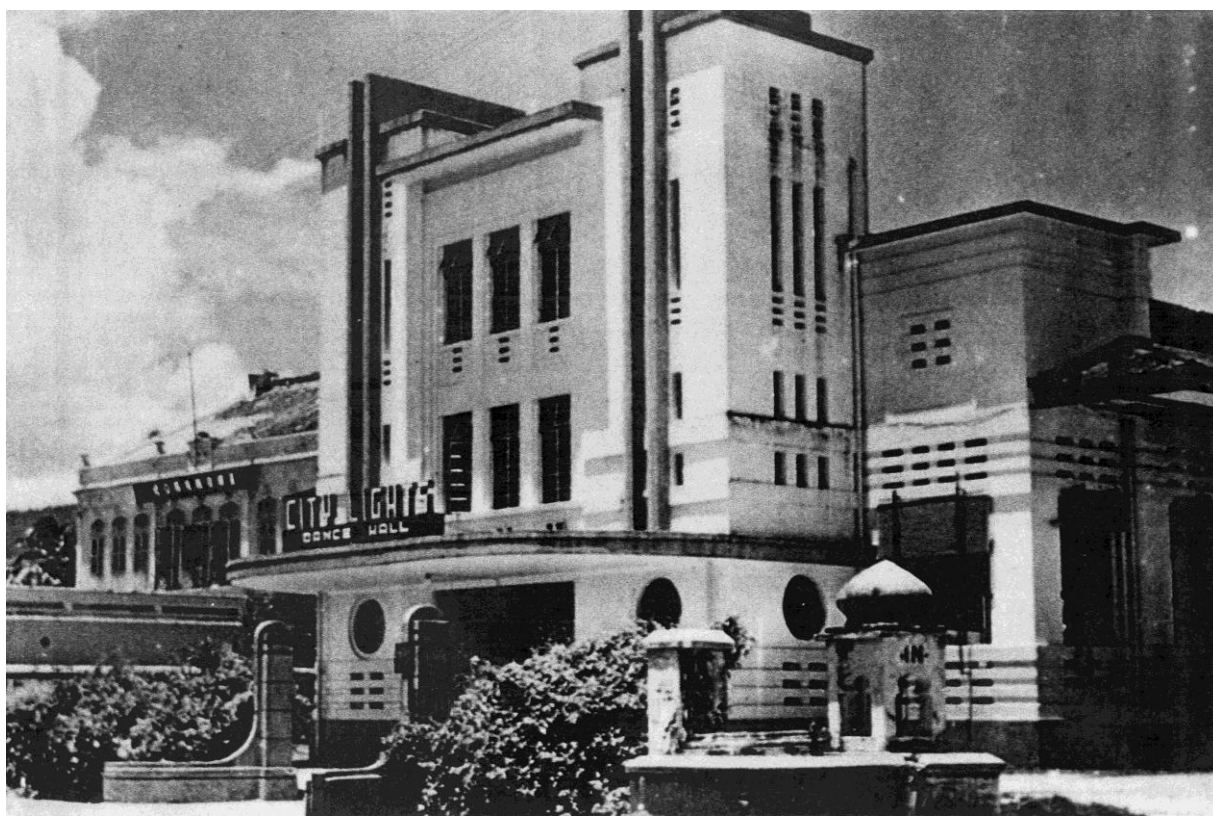
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PENANG FORCES FAVOURITE - THE "CITY LIGHTS" DANCE HALL

## CHAIRMAN'S CORNER



I place on record my thanks for entrusting the RAF Butterworth and Penang Association to me as Chairman for the 15<sup>th</sup> time in succession. It is a humbling but delightful duty which I am most proud to perform alongside our hardworking and enthusiastic committee. Being the smallest of the Far East Air Force Associations makes life a little easier, but it is the trademark of being a family of members that really makes us unique. With this in mind, please keep the committee informed of any major health problems you think we should know about.

For those unable to attend the reunion in early June, you missed another well organised and enjoyable event. My thanks goes to Len Wood for all his hard work in negotiating such a good deal and to all those who helped make the event go with a good swing! It is always good to see some new faces swelling the ranks and finding colleagues of yesteryear that they haven't seen since they left Malaysia many years ago. Judging by the reduction in overall attendance, and in the opinion of the AGM, Bradford/Bingley is too far north; we have therefore sent out a search party to look further south to see what's available at a reasonable price for next year. Hopefully, Len Wood will find something in time for this Newsletter.

After a report of her visit to the Mount Miriam Cancer Hospital during her stay in Penang, Nadine Wood encouraged us all to support a raffle in aid of their "needy cancer patient fund" that provides various respite and pain relieving drugs for the poorer end of the community. It was with great pleasure that I was able to forward a cheque from the Reunion Group for £300. I am happy to take any further donations from those that weren't present (cheque to RAF BPA) and I'll arrange to forward any accumulations received by the end of September to the hospital. Anyone visiting Penang will, I know, be welcome to visit the hospital by contacting Keith Tan as per his letter below.

*Greetings from Mount Miriam Cancer Hospital, Penang, Malaysia.*

*On behalf of the members of the board, the Sisters of the Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood, the management and the staff of our hospital, we sincerely thank you for your generous contribution and support. The donation will benefit our "needy cancer patient fund". It has always been the aim of the hospital to improve the quality of treatment we give to the patients. However as a not-for-profit organization, this can only be realized mainly with the help and financial support from the public and strong supporters like you.*

*This coming July 23<sup>rd</sup>, Mount Miriam Cancer Hospital will be having a fund raising concert – "Sparks of Broadway" benefiting the above mentioned fund. We are printing a souvenir programme book for the night. All donors to the fund (rm500 and above) will be mentioned in the book. With your kind permission, we would like to seek your approval to list the name RAF Butterworth and Penang Association. (Note: I have agreed to this – TP)*

*Once again, thank you for all the support.*

*God bless*

*Keith Tan*

*Community Relations, Mount Miriam Cancer Hospital, Penang.*

*Tel: 04-8907044 ext 236. Direct: 04-8932236*

The AGM also agreed to increase the Annual Subs to £12 per address per year. Looking ahead, the AGM supported the idea that the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the final lowering of the RAF Ensign and the closure of HQ FEAF should be marked with a gathering at the National Memorial Arboretum on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> October at 3pm. Some members have already booked – places are £6-00 per head to cover costs and provide tea and biscuits afterwards. If you would like to attend, please would you respond to the earlier e-mailing and letters sent out after the Reunion by mid-September? If you haven't received, or have mislaid the communication, please send a cheque to me for £6-00 per head, payable to 'RAF BPA', with your name and contact details; please don't leave it to the last minute.

Anne and I wish all members and readers the best for what's left of this years 'Summer!'

***Tony Parrini*** Chairman, RAF BPA



## From the Editor



Following the Dr Albert Albert McKern and Ralph Noel McKern stories from the Christmas 2010 issue of the newsletter the following e-mail was received by Association member Dr Napier Penlington:

*"Following the arrival of 'Eastward' I was going into Birmingham so decided to look up the Air Force Lists in the central library for some relevant dates."*

The results for R. N. McKern are as follows:

Jan 1937	Flt Lt, SSVAF (Straits Settlements Volunteer Air Force)	
April & July 1937	Flt Lt RAF Seletar 36 (Torpedo-Bomber) Squadron	
1941	Wg Cdr wef 1 Mar 1941	32049
1947	Wg Cdr wef 1 Oct 1946	32049
1955	Gp Capt wef 1 Jan 1952	psa (Graduate of RAF Staff College
General Duties Branch)		
1957	Gp Capt wef 1 Jan 1952	psa cfs (Qualified as instructor at Central
Flying School)		
1958	In index but couldn't find entry	
1960	Not in Serving or retired index.	

*Further to the above he is also on record as being posted to RAF Far East, Singapore on 4.10.37 and posted, as Flying Officer, to No. 7 Flying Training School at Peterborough on 16.12.35.*

As Napier continues 'Clearly the Flt Lt and Gp Capt are the same person, the question asked in the newsletter. The promotion from Flt Lt to Wg Cdr between presumably 1937 and 1941 must be a record! An instance of being in the right place at the right time!!

*To date we have not been able to find an appointments list for his promotion to Sqn Ldr. As also mentioned in the Christmas 2010 newsletter Wg Cdr R. N. McKern was briefed to navigate a 100 Squadron 'Q' Flight Beaufort to Australia on 19 December 1941, coinciding with Sqn Ldr Richard Markham (SSVAF) taking over 36 Squadron on the same date (ref: Rosemary Fell, issue 28, page 16).*



**Beauforts at Seletar 1941.  
Could the central figure be  
Wing Commander R. N.  
McKern?**

Further research into Ralph Noel McKern (32049) by Napier was continued over the bitterly cold period we experienced last winter. He sent the following summary of his findings:

1910	Born 29 November
1911	Sailed (at 9 months old) with parents and elder brother on a ship from Southampton to New York, destination Newhaven, Connecticut; father on his way to Yale)
1928	At Merchiston Castle School (Edinburgh)
1931	Granted short service commission as RAF Pilot Officer with effect from (and with seniority) 26 <sup>th</sup> June 1931
1932	Confirmed in rank 26 <sup>th</sup> June. Promoted to Flying Officer 26 <sup>th</sup> December
1933 - 1935	No. 1 Fighter Squadron, Tangmere
1935 - 1936	No. 7 Flying Training School, 23 Group, Peterborough
1936	Promoted Flt Lt 1 <sup>st</sup> April
1936	SSVAF RAF Seletar
1937	36 (Torpedo-Bomber) Squadron, RAF Seletar
1938	Promoted Sqn Ldr 1 <sup>st</sup> December
1940 - 1941	Royal Singapore Golf Club (clubhouse [accommodation], opened 1925)
1941	Promoted Wg Cdr (War substantive ) 1 <sup>st</sup> March
1941	Commanding Officer, No. 36 (TB) Squadron – 12 Vildebeests
1944	Mentioned in Despatches
1946	From 1 <sup>st</sup> October, Wg Cdr (substantive rank)
1949	Royal Singapore Golf Club
1951	Commanding Officer, RAF Changi, 21 <sup>st</sup> August
1952	Promoted Group Captain, 1 <sup>st</sup> January
1958	Retired 31 <sup>st</sup> March

*At least we now have a date for his promotion to Squadron Leader.*

In addition to Napier's meticulous research, R. N McKern attended Merchiston Castle School 1923-1929 (with his brother). The school is/was a boarding school for boys (especially children of ex-pats). Both he, and his brother, have remained on the 'missing' list for the Merchiston Club but recently, through the RAFBPA, the school/club records have been brought up to date.

Also, a Ralph Noel McKern, age 20, appears on the passenger list for the SS City of Mandalay boarding the vessel at Penang, 13<sup>th</sup> October 1930. His address in the UK is given as: c/o Rev J Harvey, 32 Royal Terrace, Edinburgh. R.N.'s occupation is given as being a banker.

Napier added to his communication on the subject: *'There were also entries (London Gazette) for Ronald Noel McKern (4232973) who must surely be his son?'*

At this point the story is taken up by Tony Parrini: *'R N McKern (Jnr) was commissioned as an Acting Pilot Officer in the General Duties Branch at Cranwell on 10<sup>th</sup> June 1966. He was a Cadet Pilot prior to this and would have completed at least 3 years (age 16-19) as a Cadet Officer at Cranwell. He would then have gone on to Flying Training School (FTS) for further flying training, possibly Linton-on-Ouse, and was promoted to Pilot Officer on 10<sup>th</sup> June 1967 on completion of the FTS course.*

*His promotion to Flying Officer came on 7<sup>th</sup> June 1968 and to Flight Lieutenant 12<sup>th</sup> June 1972. Prior to leaving the RAF on 13<sup>th</sup> December 1973 he transferred to the reserves'. His reason for leaving the service is unclear!*

Many thanks to both Napier and Tony, also Laurie Bean, for their contributions to what started out as the 'Dr Alfred McKern' mystery...much has been uncovered over the past months, with much success!

Following the previous information unearthed and sent in by Napier, the following (again from Napier) arrived on the 'editorial desk':

*"When I arrived at Butterworth in October 1955, mess nights were spectacular affairs. There were all the war medals worn by the older members (the war was only over 10 years before) and there was a profusion of DFCs, AFCs, DFMs and AFMs. (Sometimes one person had several of these). There were also DSO's, MC's and the odd naval medals etc. Of course everyone had the General Service Medal. It was a very colourful affair. But the purpose of writing this is that the Australians all had the two Korea medals (UK and UN), the RAF obviously hadn't heard of double-medalling at this time!*

*At SSQ there were 2 RAF MO's and the SMO was Australian S/L Jack Harrison, whom I knew very well and worked with every day so there was plenty of room for conversation. At Butterworth No. 2 ACS RAAF was commanded by W/C Ling who became a G/C when the RAF left and he took over the station from G/C Baxter (RAF), although he presumably left soon after when the runway became operational and a GD flying officer would take over?*

*No. 2 ACS returned to Australia on 29<sup>th</sup> July 1958, very shortly after I got a local release and went to work in Singapore."*

Note: Napier sent a brief history of the movements of No. 2 ACS from 1952 through to 1958. This is now in the Association archives.

He continues: *"Seletar opened in 1928 the year I was born (and also of the foundation of the Royal Singapore Flying Club). Kallang (the 'home' for the RSFC) didn't open until 1937, two years before the war, and the transfer to Paya Lebar from Kallang took place in 1957, which I remember well as I got my PPL there after I left the Air Force. My name, along with not so many others was on the board in the club house. By 1958 much of the former Kallang Airport had become a mass housing estate and my map of December 1958 already marks Old Airport Road, Old Kallang Airport Estate and Dakota Crescent, and Dakota Close, both the latter named after a crash!*

*Another crash I recall, if you can call it that, is when a member of the RSFC was returning home on the P&O ship Strathaird and two fellow members took a Tiger Moth up to say goodbye. One of them was a prison officer whom I knew quite well. Records show that on 24<sup>th</sup> June 1959, the ship rescued two crew of a Tiger Moth that had crashed into the sea off Singapore. Apparently the bolt holding the wing of the aircraft snapped, the wing angle dropped and the Tiger Moth made a slow graceful spiral into the sea where it floated for a considerable time. This must have been a noteworthy spectacle for the passengers on the liner! Our intrepid aviators were picked up by a boat from the Strathaird and returned home with the pilot boat. History does not record how they explained coming home wet without their aircraft, and I suppose there must have been an enquiry into the incident?*

*Nothing to do with Butterworth but this also happened to me when I was called to a ship to visit a patient and after a bit noticed some vibrations. On coming up I found the land was in the distance and the crew very amused at my predicament with the next landfall being about a week away. Eventually one of the kinder souls explained I could return with the pilot, and in fact did this several times afterwards. But the pilot boats were also working boats and not very comfortable!*

*I see the (now **Republic** of) **Singapore Flying Club** is based at Seletar. It would be interesting to see whether the PPL board (from the 50's) is still in existence and still with the club? I well remember a flight to Bayan Lepas to celebrate a big anniversary of the Penang Flying Club. I went up with my instructor, Hilton Price, in a Chipmunk on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1959. We had to land at Malacca and Ipoh to refuel and on leaving Ipoh we were unable to see the ground. The instructor had an instrument rating but I did wonder at the time what use that was when there were no instruments on the Chipmunk! In time a gap occurred in the cloud and a town could be seen."Where is that?" said Hilton. "Taiping" I replied. "Look at your chart and see where we pass over" Hilton said. I repeated my answer. "So where is that?" he again repeated.*

*“Taiping” I said again. “What makes you say that?” I was asked. “Because I recognise the Lake Gardens” I replied. A minute’s pause and I heard “What action are you going to take?” “None” I replied mystified, to which came the response “What about a change of course?” A bit of quick thinking went on!*

*By the time we left the coast to reach Penang Island the clouds had lifted and I was relieved to find the island just where it ought to be! A very enjoyable dinner ensued and we returned next day landing at KL and Malacca.”*

Referring back to his Butterworth days, Napier has another couple of stories for us:

*“As mentioned previously the SMO was S/Ldr Jack Harrison, the other MO was F/Lt Dal Longford who emigrated to Port Colbourne, Canada long ago. The dentist was National Service, Neil Kerr, who disappeared from the directories ages ago and has, I believe, emigrated. There were some Australian (nursing) sisters in SSQ, Margot Maloney in charge with Olive, Harriet and Fay Woodvine, who I believe, married an English officer. Sgt Consadine was in charge of SSQ.*

*A story about the sisters was about the time the CO, G.C Baxter came over for coffee. The sisters had just arrived and I had to introduce them. At the vital moment I found I had forgotten all their surnames. Somewhat non-plussed, I was waiting for inspiration when the Malay boy, Aziz, dropped the coffee tray outside the room. We shot out and by the time order had been restored I had remembered them and everything went smoothly. Aziz must have wondered why he got away with this so lightly. I, for one, was very grateful.”*

*“The DGMS designate was making a world tour before taking over. He was scheduled to arrive at Butterworth on the same day the AOC Malaya was holding an inspection. So I was asked if I would take the future Air Marshall Sir Francis Lee Potter to the E and O Hotel in Penang. I agreed but was told there was a problem. There was no driver free and the station only had eight stars to put on cars. The AOC needed three at the front and three at the back, leaving only two for the present AVM. These were put on the plate at the front of the car. “Do not let him walk round the back of the car” I was told. That seemed no problem, so when he had done his inspection I drove him to Penang, parking the car with the back suitably concealed. Of course this was during the emergency when cars could not be parked on public streets! We had just come to a rest when an open military police vehicle pulled up close in front of us. Inside were a UK Army, RAF and RAAF sergeants, and a three chevron PO from the NZ Navy, who happened to be in port. Four bulky MPs grabbed the rail at the top of their transport, lifted their outside legs up in the air and planted them in unison on the ground. Very impressive! Then all four looked up, saw the stars, and without a word being said, lifted their feet up again in unison, put them onboard and drove off. “What was all that about?” asked the AVM with whom I had by now established a rapport. Seeing no alternative I asked if I could explain? Permission was given, the explanation followed, the AVM got out, looked at the back and split himself laughing. Lucky he did or my career might have taken a different turn.”*

Many thanks to Napier for his inputs to the newsletter, all made over the very chilly 2010 Christmas period when everything else was ‘grounded’. Also thanks to the other contributors writing for the newsletter, all members (and even non-members) contributions are welcome and every effort is made to include them in future issues. So please put pen to paper and write down your experiences for all to enjoy!

**Late news:** the 2012 Reunion/AGM of the RAFBPA has been booked 28<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> May. The venue is the Falcon Hotel, Stratford-upon-Avon. Further details are to be found in the ‘Stop Press’ attachment for members who receive the electronic copy.



**The ‘Astra’ story continues...**There has been some speculation in previous issues of the newsletter over the so-called ‘sentry box’ 1941 picture advertising the film ‘Zanzibar’ (*below*), originally submitted by Don Brereton. But I think I might have discovered the true identity of the ‘sentry box’ when looking over a picture of the RAF cinema, taken at Seletar in the late 1930’s. Outside the door to the cinema is the box office, showing a similarity to the structure seen in our 1941 picture. OK it’s a bit ‘posher’, but I think our ‘sentry box’ is the cinema box office! What do members think?



What was on at the Seletar cinema in 1938?



**Follow the Fleet** (1936) – Hollywood musical comedy film, with a nautical theme.

**Casino Murder Case** (1935) – Fictional detective Philo Vance in a murder investigation at a New York casino.

Following an answer to Peter Munson regarding the ‘Butterworth’ Lancaster now residing at East Kirkby, Peter replied (in part) with the following: *“I remember the 60 Squadron visit to the Butterworth NAAFI. In true Fighter Command style they danced on the tables and played ‘bottles’. I seem to remember the Orderly Sergeant (a Pom) was sensible enough to let the ‘troops’ slowly slope off to bed or more likely to the island, or BC (Butterworth Cafe). I still have the Chop Rimau Tiger sign from the NAAFI bar, looking for a suitable place to send it. The favourite at the moment is 138 Valiant Squadron as they seem to specialise in alternative memorabilia!”*



An interesting e-mail from a gentleman called Dave Merrett (ex-60 Squadron, 1942) has been received in response to the Christmas 2009 article 'Jet Provosts Trials Unit (Far East):

*"A few days ago I was browsing when I came across your web site and the above mentioned newsletter solved a problem which has been unanswered for more than 40 years. For this I owe a debt of gratitude to you and Laurie Bean for the intensely interesting article 'Jet Provost Trials Unit (Far East).'*

*Flt Lt Peter Loveday, the pilot of XS221 and killed when it crashed, was a family friend since the age of 9 years. His late father, Sid Loveday, was my best friend when we were RAF Senior NCO's and subsequent to leaving the service.*

*Peter Loveday was a Cranwell cadet from 1959-61. He served on a Hunter squadron in Aden and was at Chivenor when detailed for the Jet provost Trials Unit. I gave him driving tuition when he was at Cranwell and I lived in Grantham.*

*Until I read the article I only knew the bare facts of the crash, Peter's death and funeral.*

*Now I know exactly what transpired and am very grateful to you.*

*I would like to take this opportunity to send best wishes to you and members of the RAF Butterworth and Penang Association and to wish the Association continued success."*

As editor of the newsletter it was an absolute pleasure to receive the 'letter' and to be able to pass the message on to both Tam McCrorie and Laurie Bean; Tam whose photographs 'sparked off' the research and Laurie Bean for his research and writing the story of the Far East Jet Provost Trials Unit.

Copies of photographs of the headstone of Flt Lt P. S. Loveday's grave, taken at Western Road Cemetery in Penang, have been sent to Mr Merrett. Also the fact that we have an accessible website for both members and non-members is a valuable asset Thank you to all involved and thank you to Dave Merret for writing to the Association.



At the time of writing (January 2011) Bob Margolis has been working on both the RAFBPA archives website\* and RAFSA website. For the archives website, Bob has been sent a copy of the DVD of RAFBPA archive pictures originally put together for the RAeS Far East collection. On looking through the pictures he recognised a car in front of the Air Traffic Control building as that belonging to his father. He writes: *"The Vauxhall with the 'civvy' registration K2371 was built in 1947, in the UK, and was shipped out to Butterworth, probably by a plantation owner or manager seeing it had a Kedah registration. We bought it mid/late 1949 at Butterworth and shipped it back to the UK in 1952 and ran it until it expired! The figure in the doorway of the Met room (over the bonnet of the Vauxhall) could be my father. He*

*appears to have the right general build but can't see if he has a beard, or not!"*

The photograph Bob refers to is from the collection of late 1940's material sent to the Association by the family of the late Duncan Gray. Hopefully, when the archives website is launched we will get similar responses to pictures which in turn will give a little more 'history' to the appropriate photograph/scene.

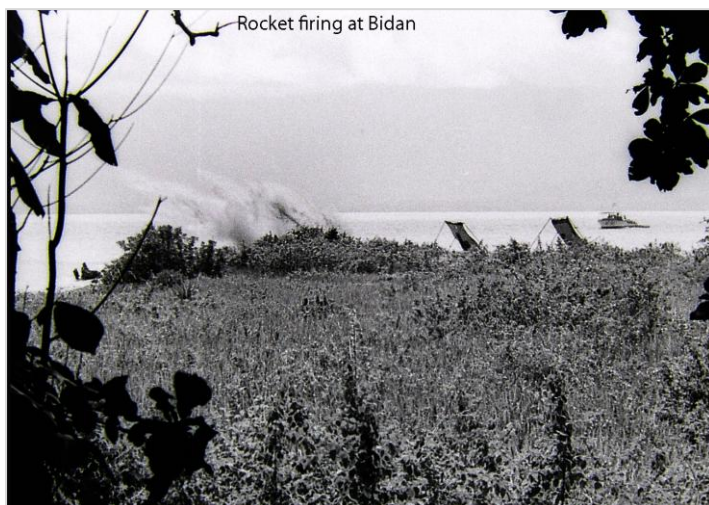
\*George Gault has been 'in charge' of the RAFBPA website for a number of years now, doing a great job as well as helping the editor out when he has been 'stuck' on a fair number of occasions. George will be continuing with the Association website as before, and no better thanks can be expressed to George than to refer to the letter (above) from Mr Merrett that emphasises the value of the website. The future archives website, suggested at the 2010 AGM, will be kept separate to George's RAFBPA website.

## Thanks Syd

Don Brereton has written in to the newsletter about a friend from the past: *"It started with the Christmas edition of 'Eastward'. In the new members section was a blast from the past in the person of Syd Rogers, 1957 to be exact.*

*Syd was first an armourer and second a hobby photographer. I got in touch with Syd through his fellow armourer, Norman Harvey.*

*I knew Syd had taken photographs at the APD at Bidan while taking part in an exercise. When asked he turned up trumps with this amazing photo taken in 1957. It was taken on the island of*



*Song-Song from outside the blockhouse where we were supposed to shelter. The picture shows two rockets exploding on the flat 9'x9' black canvas rocket targets. The two targets tied to the A-frames shown on the right of the photo were 12'x9' yellow and black targets for cannon fire.*

*The RAF pinnacle with dinghy astern, from RAF Glugor, was equipped with radio and was the instrument for communicating with the aircraft using the range.*

*It is a great photograph but for me it is a scene I saw many times and never thought I would again."*



Another one from Syd's excellent collection of Far East photographs.

Also a follow-up from a 'story' in the Christmas newsletter is this letter from member Trevor Coy: *"The correspondences from Rob Lewis and newspaper cutting by S/Ldr Jacobs have brought back some memories. I arrived at Butterworth and 45/33 Squadron as a newly qualified armourer at the time when the Hornets were being scrapped, in fact just a few days after the tragic mid air-collision of two that had just taken off on their last flight to Seletar. On my first full day I had an interview with S/Ldr Jacobs and then helped to change a set of guns, as far as I recall this was the only time I worked on a hornet but I did get to sit in the cockpit."*



*"I watched the S/Ldr take off in the last Hornet to Seletar and I assume this was the last ever flight of a Hornet. The u/s ones left at Butterworth were towed to the scrap dump and damaged beyond repair before being burned or sold for scrap, as were all the spares including wings and new engines still in their packing cases. What a pity not one of these great aeroplanes was saved!*

*I also remember the fiasco of W/Cdr Gundry-White making a wheels up landing. He had been with one of the Middle East Venom squadrons for a few weeks to get some experience and it did not go down very well with any of the squadron aircrew, or ground crew, when he came back and bent our first venom.*

*I got to know W/Cdr Gundry-White quite well. I later started working in the squadron armoury servicing and arming the belt feed mechanisms for the 20mm Hispano guns and keeping a check on the ready use 20mm ammunition. This was a good job as I was my own boss and it was some way from the rest of the squadron, but it was close to Gundry-Whites office and he started to come in to my workshops with papers etc, for me to take to the Squadron Leader "the next time you go to the squadron on your bike," and he came in sometimes just to have a chat for a few minutes. I assume he just wanted to get out of his office occasionally.*

*Although it seems from Rob Lewis's letter that the Squadron Leader and the Wing Commander did not always see eye to eye, from my point of view as a National Service SAC, S/Ldr Jacobs was a very capable and well liked CO and W/Cdr Gundry-White was a very likeable and sociable man."*



Following the identification of VIP Hastings WJ324 that flew Prince Philip from Butterworth to KL, as featured in the Easter 2011 issue of '**Eastward**', Don Brerton has kindly provided copies of two photographs for the archives of the occasion (one is shown here) with, as Don notes, '*the Duke of Edinburgh inspecting the personnel lined up by the aircraft*'.

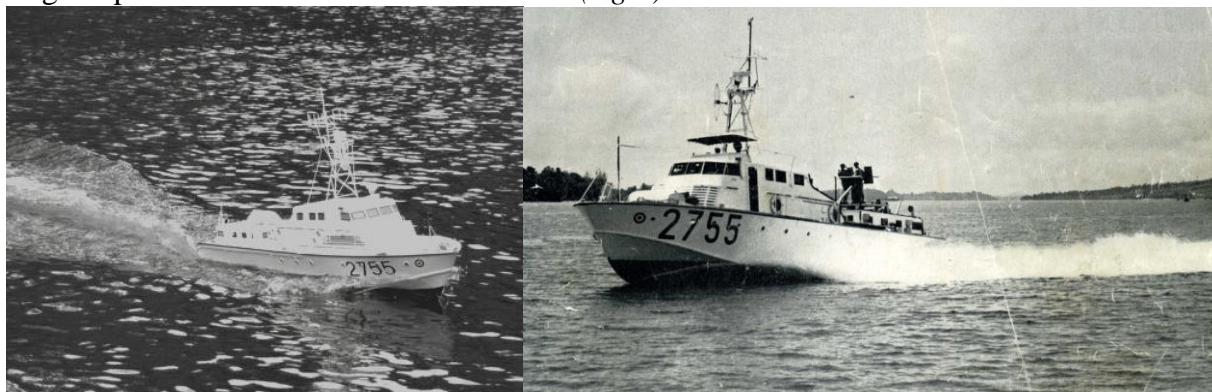
A further communication, via Don, was from a contact who recalled the aircraft (WJ324) call-sign as being '**Mike Oscar Golf Oscar Golf**'. As Don remarked "Someone might be interested?" Many thanks Don for your continuing interest in provided information for the newsletter.

A request for photographs of RAF HSL 2755 from Mick Perkins, as mentioned in the Easter issue of the newsletter, to help with building a model of this marine craft resulted in photographs being sent of the finished article....with further trials to be conducted at the start of April. Truly a fine piece of modelling.





Following the progress of 2755 from the previous page, the April launch was postponed due to a component failure, with a new date in May being set. This was a great success and Mick has kindly sent a CD of photographs of the vessel, and first run, for the archives. The photograph of the 'new' 2755 on its high speed run has been adapted to match as much as possible to the original picture of HSL 2755 in the Far East (right).



### Philip Forde



A recent letter from Don Brereton informed the RAFBPA of the death of member Philip Forde. In his letter Don says "I received a phone call on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2011 from Philip's son, Steven, to tell me his father had passed away on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2010 after a short illness.

*"We (Don's local RAFBPA group) got in touch with Philip about five years ago and after many telephone conversations he finally joined us at the RAF National Service parade at RAF Cosford in 2009 and for a meal and a chat afterwards. Philip was a J/T Instrument Fitter with 45 Squadron (Venoms) during 1956 – 1957. He was an active member of the station yacht club and in fact wrote an article for the newsletter\* about one of his voyages. We will miss him."*

*Don Brereton*

*\*Issue 20, Easter 2008*

**Christmas 2011 issue of 'Eastward':** This include a 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary article about the Japanese invasion of Malaya in December 1941 and the battle for air supremacy over Butterworth and Penang, during a ten day period, by both RAAF and RAF pilots. Linked to the story of Japanese occupation of strategic countries in the Indian Ocean and initial severance of air routes to Australia, the pre-war initiated Empire Air Mail service and wartime Secret Order of the Double Sunrise are also featured in this issue.

A previous issue of the newsletter (Winter 2005, but it wasn't called '**Eastward**' then) mentioned the liason between German U-boats and Japanese submarines at Penang. The Christmas issue takes this further giving a more detailed perspective of occupied Georgetown from the German point of view.

The present day Butterworth site that most of us are familiar with wasn't the original site of RAF Butterworth. In 1941 and post-war, RAF Butterworth was sited much nearer to Butterworth itself. The original site is discussed in respect of the death of Sgt Ron Oelrich, RAAF, shot down over Butterworth and having no known grave.

For Christmas reading the story of 3205 RAF Servicing Commando Unit's travels (and antics) through India, Burma and Malaya in late 1944 and 1945 with probably bring forth, to some members, haunting memories of SWO Preston from the 1950's.

Finally the famous 'egg banjo', how to get one made, how to successfully eat it and why it so named! All in the next issue of '**Eastward**'.

## Members Stories

In gathering resources for this issue of *'Eastward'* materials seemed to revolve around the operations of the late 1950's, so we start with some pieces by Don Brereton, followed with a newspaper report sent in by John Crooks and a couple of articles from 656 Association. We complete this issue with an article from Les Downey on his progress from the UK through to the Far East during 1944-45, followed by a short piece on the pre-war 230 Squadron Sunderlands paid for by Malayan Sultans.

## Where is our Harvard? By Don Brereton.

During 1956 and 1957 there was a Harvard on the station flight at Butterworth. It had a large letter 'E' painted in black just before the cockpit.

Various officers on the station used it to get their flying hours in to enable them to get their flying pay. The SATCO, Flt Lt Stephenson used to take a passenger with him and would go on

[illegible]

operations. Both he and the favoured one would head for the nearest 'Black' area and carry out a leaflet drop (*above*). And before you ask, no I was never one of the favoured ones!



I'm guessing 'E' for Echo was scrapped at FEAF, but does anyone know for sure? Also from Don is the following picture of an armoured vehicle! Taken at Butterworth. Can anyone throw some light on it?

Unfortunately the badge on front of the vehicle doesn't show clearly (above left) but appears to display two crossed rifles below a crown, similar to the official RAF Regiment badge.



### **One of our aircraft isn't missing** by Don Brereton

The Pembroke is an aeroplane you wouldn't notice unless you were looking for it, and I was, one in particular.

The Percival Pembroke was a reliable and popular aircraft. Forty odd served with the RAF, another six in the PR role in Malaya. They were also used by the Royal Navy and the Belgium, Swedish, West German, Royal Rhodesian and Zambian Air Forces.

There are fourteen RAF or RN Pembrokes preserved in museums in the UK. The one I was interested in was XK885 at the Gatwick Aviation Museum as it had served with the Far East Air Force. I must have seen it during its service life as Pembrokes were in and out of RAF Butterworth almost every day in the fifties.

I rang up the museums owner and fixed up a visit. Peter Vallance, the owner and inspiration behind the museum, met me as arranged. He was one of those people you admire because they have done it before.

A number of planes in the museum were in service when I was in the Forces, Avro Shackleton, DH Venom, EE Canberra, Fairey Gannet and Gloster Meteor. XK885 was in good condition considering it was over fifty years old. There were a lot more aircraft on the site and indoors a vast collection of aero engines for the more technical enthusiast.

Gatwick Aviation Museum is well worth a visit if you are in the area. Check the website for visiting hours. Oh yes, Peter Vallance says if anyone out there has any spare cash they would like to submit to the museum, he would be very grateful.



*Left clockwise: XK885 at Gatwick, 81 Sqn PR Pembroke XF796 at Butterworth, XF796 at Seletar and XF796 taking off from Butterworth.*





## Canberra's of 101 Squadron over the jungle

John Crooks sent in this periodical report of a Canberra operation against terrorists from the Malayan Monthly of September 1956. The original layout is shown below for those interested but as the print is small it has been reproduced overleaf in larger print.



MM continues its series on the aircraft hitting the Reds in Malaya with the —

LAST MINUTE CHECK: Ground crew, standing to the waist, complete their work on an engine and the heavy cowling is replaced.

# CANBERRAS

RUSSELL SPURR REPORTS from BUTTERWORTH

THE Canberras levelled off at 6,000 feet—elegant silver cigars crimped into arrow-head formation over the Malayan jungle. Shrinking away behind them: the long jet runway of Butterworth air base. Ahead: great fists of cumulus cloud, hazardous as flak. Below: in some secret clearing, sickly Ah Swee and his terrorist gang.

The Canberras carried bombs for Ah Swee. They were already making the run-up on his hideout, directed by a low flying spotter plane.

In exactly nine minutes a (censored) weight of high explosive would be whining down through the 200 foot trees, the shrub and fern and gaudy bracken that concealed the hilltop camp of Number 13 Independent Communist Platoon.

In exactly nine minutes—if all the IFs worked out. IF the platoon and its malaria-ridden leader were actually in the camp. They were reported there some days ago, but intelligence reports can be maddeningly vague in Malaya. IF the bombers could beat the

rain storm now spreading in across the target. And IF the bombardiers already crouched in each perspex nose could successfully conclude the calculations that would scatter accurate death among the rain sodden trees.

"Eight minutes to go..."

The voice of Squadron Leader Bernard Moorcroft crackling over the radio. A quiet competent man that; not one to talk about the DSO and DFC he won Pathfinding during the war.

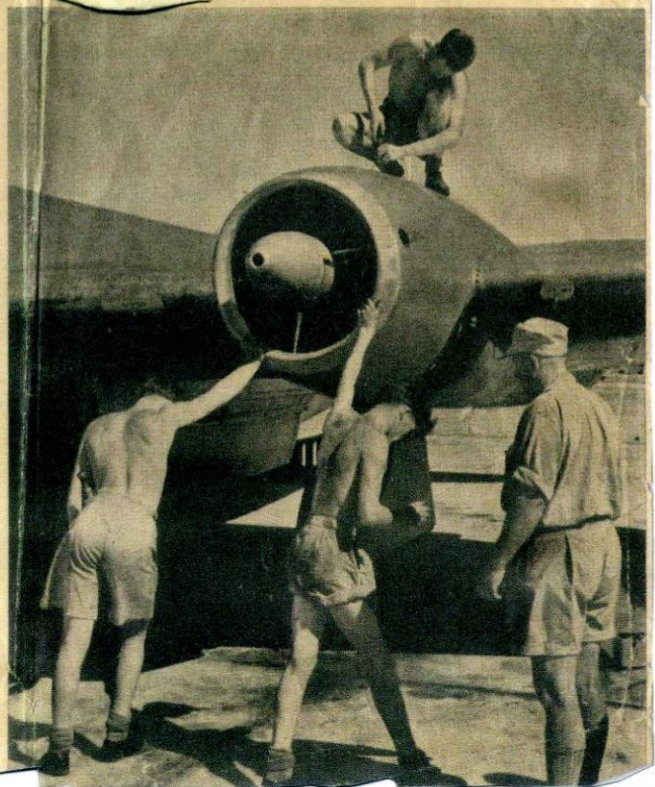
The spotter pilot came on the air: "Rain covering target. Can't see a thing."

"Damn," said Moorcroft over the R/T.

The storm restored the impression of speed. The Canberras travelled so smoothly, so effortlessly they seemed to be floating in space. Now the tattered wall of misty cloud hurtled upon them. They were engulfed and obliterated in a blink.

The wing commander at Butterworth had warned of the mild dangers of "Big Cu." The peculiarly tropical clouds that mushroom off the heated

Continued overleaf.





## Canberras.

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DE-BRIEFING: Squadron Leader Moorcroft, DSO, DFC, a former Pathfinder, right, is de-briefed at Butterworth after the raid.

### BOMBS WERE 'SMACK ON' BUT THE JUNGLE KEPT ITS SECRET

Hills contain fierce air draughts spiralling up inside at speeds of over 200 miles an hour. Enough to flip a speeding plane over on its back.

The Canberras bucked and shuddered in the racing mist. I clung onto the "rumble seat" beside the pilot waiting for some gust to hurl us into collision. But Pilot Officer Eric Dunham rode out the bumps with less trouble than a motorist on a broken road.

"Five minutes to go...."

The spotter plane came on again. The pilot was packing up. He didn't want to risk crashing in the murk. We'd have to try bombing on our own.

"Make it a Datum run," said Moorcroft. That meant picking up a series of fixed navigational points leading up to the target, then putting the bombs down a number of seconds later.

But first we'd have to see where we were....

The Canberras burst breathlessly into blinding sunlight. Sickly green vegetation, a knobbly row of hills, a river, a winding road and a patchwork of flooded ricefields wheeled around below. Then a curve of muddy coast, the windruffled sea.

"Two minutes to go...."

A new approach now through the columns of cloud. A time of tense calculations by navigators crouched in magicians' caves of instruments behind the pilots. Of slide-rule chatter with the bombardiers peering prone through the bomb-sights, conducted throughout in the unintelligible talk of the jet age.

"Number three upcoming now, plonk...."

"Fine chum. Now Number four...."

It was more like the impersonal patter of surgeons at a minor operation, than the technicalities of men

preparing to kill. The bombardier picked up the river, Navigation Point Number Four.

"Here we are, got it fine, upcoming.... plonk."

Ah Swee would be flattered to know the attention he was attracting. He wasn't an aggressive terrorist. His weary gang had been lying low in a north Malayan forest reserve for the past two years. Yet here was a highly expensive combination of aircraft, crews and bombs stalking him by stop watch through rain and treacherous cloud.

"Ninety seconds to go...."

This free and fairly easy flying couldn't possibly be tailored to liquidate 30 hungry, ragged rebels. Wise-cracks and irrelevant comment punctuated each technical exchange. Someone said "Whoops" when plane Number Two swept in from starboard, a little too close for comfort. Laughter cackled out of headphones.

But there ahead was the target—a dome-shaped hillock still glistening from the rain. Rapid course checks passed between the navigators. A terse gabble began among each crew.

"Datum. Twenty seconds to go.... open bomb doors...."

"Ten seconds to go, safety switches on. Five seconds, four, three, two, one, DROP—"

The bombs stuttered reluctantly out towards the treetops. Down, down, in slowest motion, as the Canberras wheeled clear. We were well away when they hit, seconds later, but the grumble of explosion set us shaking in the clouds.

"Smack on," shouted a bombardier. The formation circled, searching for results. Not a sign, not even smoke. The jungle kept its secret. It would be months, if ever, before we knew what had happened to Ah Swee.

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*Many thanks to John Crooks for this report from the 'Malayan Monthly', and also John's son, David, for co-ordinating the sending of the report via e-mail.*

Of the two Canberra's shown in the main photograph:

**WJ758** was operating with 12 Squadron in 1957 and made an emergency landing at Malta on 12 December 1957. In 1959 it went to the Royal Rhodesian Air Force as RRAF 169, then to become RRAF 210, then R2510. It was written off in 1971.

**WJ759** was written off 24 November 1960 at Tathuna, Iraq. There were three fatalities. It was operating with 9 Squadron at the time.



In this issue of '*Eastward*' we feature a few more stories from 656 Squadron (Army Air Corps) Association in action during the Emergency in Malaya. Our grateful thanks to John Heyes of 656 Squadron Association, and the Association itself for permission to use these articles, originally published in the Association newsletter 'The Chinthe'

## On Operations with 656 by Bernard '*Dusty*' Redshaw



As a subaltern in RNZ Sigs, I was seconded to 1NZ Regt (infantry) as a Regimental Signals Officer and posted to Malaya in November 1957. After our Jungle Warfare Training at FTC Kota Tinggi, the battalion moved up-country to Taiping to commence anti-terrorist operations in January 1958 as part of 28 Commonwealth Brigade Group.

We located a company each at Tannah Hitam and Tanjong Rambutan and two more at Sungei Siput. We also established a Tac HQ in the Police Station at Ipoh.

As RSO, I spent most of my time at in the Ops Centre working shifts with our IO. In due course, since my 2ic and two sergeants could cover all the signals requirements, I became a peripatetic second IO. It was during this phase that I was a regular passenger of both 2 Recce Flight in Ipoh and 7 Recce Flight in Taiping.

In 1959 the focus of our operations moved northwards to the Thai border and I moved up to Grik to establish a forward Tac HQ in the Police Station there. 656 Squadron established a forward presence with two Auster 9's on the local airstrip at Grik. Very soon after, one of the Squadron's pilots (as I recall a Staff Sergeant with the nick name of '*Hawk Eye*' - I can't remember his name, but I'm sure that he does!) sighted a very large deep jungle CT camp in the Betong Salient (Thailand).

The camp was so large that it was considered almost certain to be that of the Secretary General of the MCP, Chin Peng! And so an operation was immediately set up to take it. Not permitted to cross into Thailand, the operation provided for a combined Malay and Thai Police Field Force company to attack the camp, whilst 28 Brigade forces maintained a large network of ambushes on the border. I moved up to Kroh to set up a further forward Tac HQ and the 656 Squadron detachment moved up with me. Also on the strip at Kroh, the RAF positioned a Whirlwind helicopter, which it later replaced with a smaller Sycamore.

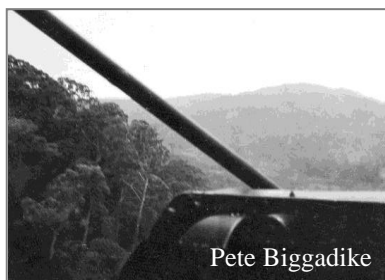
The tension and excitement mounted as Police, Special Branch, Army and RAF personnel converged on Kroh to confer, plan and monitor the operation. A high level contingent of Police, Army and other officials came in from Thailand. And from Alor Star came John Davis (*left*), who, as one of Freddy Spencer Chapman's Force 136 colleagues during WW2 and had known Chin Peng personally when he was fighting for our side against the Japanese. Davis's knowledge of Chin Peng's make-up and likely actions was to play an important part in the operation.



During this time I made a number of discreet observation flights (as a passenger of 656 Squadron) over 28 Brigade positions. The Auster 9 that we flew in most frequently was suffering a number of minor problems, which should possibly have warned me of what was to come. On one occasion, as we were coming in to land, the pall securing the sprocket for the HF antenna came adrift, the antenna unwound violently and we lost it. On another, just as we were taking off (on half flap) the hydraulic flap actuating pump failed and we lost our flaps, losing height and narrowly avoiding the tin-mining lake at the end of the strip. On yet another flight, whilst returning in failing light, I noticed that my right side was getting wet with what seemed to be oil (we flew with the doors off). On landing, we discovered that it was indeed oil, coming from a leaking engine gasket.

Two days before the attack was due to go in, a CT courier, travelling north towards the camp, was ambushed and killed by a patrol of 3 RAR. The body was carried back in relays to a 1 NZ Regt position that was considered to be sufficiently far enough away from the CT camp area so as not to compromise the operation. The patrol cleared an LZ for an RAF helicopter to bring out the body. However, at this particular moment the Sycamores were grounded and the one remaining Whirlwind unserviceable. It was decided to parachute in a camera and fingerprinting equipment by the 656 Squadron detachment. The same Auster 9 was tasked, with Captain Nigel Budd, 10th Hussars as pilot, and myself as dispatcher. We were to drop the equipment into the same DZ that had been prepared for the helicopter, which was sited on a ridge. We swooped in and, on Nigel's signal, I dispatched our load. As we circled, the parachute developed and started to descend perfectly into the clearing. Then an up-draft from the ridge lifted the parachute upwards and sideways, depositing it into the top of a tall tree on the edge of the DZ. It soon became obvious that the patrol could not recover the parachute and it was very likely that another parachute would also suffer the same fate.

We returned to Kroh to collect another set of equipment prepared for a free drop on a streamer. So back we went, and into the clearing we dived. As I threw the bundle out, Nigel pulled the



Pete Biggadike

Auster tightly up and out. Whilst I was looking downwards and backwards, focussing on the streamer, I felt a bump and heard a loud thumping, ripping noise on Nigel's side of the aircraft. I then saw that we were now flying very low almost skimming the jungle canopy. "Oh Christ!" came Nigel's voice over the intercom, "I've never done that before." When I looked out to his side, I saw that we had lost a sizeable piece of our port wing, loose canvas was flapping and that we were

carrying about six feet of branch. We had clipped the same tree that had claimed the parachute! But we were still flying. As we recovered and gained height, Nigel turned to me and said that he had to do a stall check to be certain of his ASI before we could land. Today, with more knowledge about flying than I had then, I have often wondered whether or not this was really necessary, given our circumstances. He explained everything to me, and after gaining more height, we did a stall check. This frightened me much more than hitting the tree!

On our way back home to Kroh, we were surprised to be joined firstly by the "grounded" Sycamore, then by the "unserviceable" Whirlwind and finally by an Otter (*probably a RAF single Pioneer*) that had been in the vicinity. Apparently the 1 NZ Regt patrol on the ground were sure that we had gone in and had put up a Mayday. And so this mixed convoy slowly made its way above the ocean of the jungle canopy - rather like the final procession in Peter and the Wolf.



We eventually made a perfect landing on Kroh strip with a large audience of worried looking military personnel looking on. When the aircraft was duly inspected, it was discovered that we had lost about 30 inches of our port wing and that the fuselage was twisted out of alignment. As a result, the airframe was written off.

The attack on the CT camp duly went in two days later, with Captain John Chandler, Royal Irish Fusiliers, flying the other Auster. The CT's sophisticated warning system allowed the occupants of the camp to escape before the PFF company fought their way in, and some 7 PFF personnel were badly wounded in the action.

Evidence recovered from the camp showed that it was not that of Chin Peng, but it was still a substantial HQ of the MCP, and taking it out was a major step forward in the Malayan Operation.







## AUSTER MK9 WZ 706 RECOVERY IN THAILAND by Frank Penfold

Recently (1957) a recovery team drawn from 656 Light Aircraft Squadron workshops took part in a most interesting and instructive venture to Thailand to recover by air, and road, an Auster MK9 aircraft (WZ706) that had made an exceptionally good landing on a newly laid track beside padi fields.

Unaware to the difficulties that might be encountered and the information of the landing being somewhat brief the O.C. workshops, Major W.H. Storey decided on a team of experienced aircraft technicians led by Sgt. McLeod. Past experience of aircraft recovery had taught us that no two incidences were of the same nature and the round trip would involve some 750 miles, of which 100 would be inside Thailand so off we went with everything, so we thought, to meet any eventuality.



Unfortunately, we were only permitted to take one vehicle and that had to be a 3 ton type, so we rigged it up with our own patented recovery rig to take the fuselage, special frames to take the mainplanes, and an undercarriage bogey so that the fuselage would fit into the vehicle. Then came ropes and slings, special tools, 24 hour ration packs, extra fuel and water, and off we went.

That evening we made Taiping, had a couple of hours sleep and then journeyed to Kroh a township situated on the Malaya/Thailand border, where we were to meet the O.C. and A.S.M. Penfold at midday. They had the chance to journey by air!

At Kroh we all were briefed on Thailand, had to remove all signs, badges and rank, even our light blue berets, so it was back to jungle hats!

Because of extensive communist terrorist activities in the Betong Salient area we were provided with an armed Malayan Police force party of eight in their own Landrover and off we travelled, through the Malayan border post for 5 miles where we came across the Thai border post and immediately had another police party of 4 who joined our vehicle. At first these four policemen treated us with suspicion but it didn't take us long to make friends when cigarettes, chocolate and biscuits were given them. When it commenced to rain and the vehicle was open, we shared our ponchos with them, which really bonded the alliance.

We had previously been warned that the road left much to be desired and it didn't take us long to realize it. Anyway we covered the 50 miles in four hours, which we thought was fast moving in the circumstances. When we arrived at the village nearest the aircraft, the whole village turned out to see us and stare. After a while we soon knew why, we were the first party of Britishers they had seen.

At this stage the main problem was making anyone understand us, so after being put in the police compound, through the British soldiers sign language, we got a certain amount of understanding. The O.C. had given instructions for the remainder of the team to get shelter for a sleep and commence preparing a meal, whilst he and A.S.M. Penfold, with the police escort and usual camp followers, commenced the journey by foot to the site of the downed aircraft. When they got to a wide fast flowing river it was obvious with the type of small ferry available that they wouldn't get the aircraft out by using the river. Evidently it was an exciting experience crossing the river!

The pilot of the Auster had made an exceptionally good precautionary landing with no apparent damage to the aircraft. Coming to greet the party as if he was Doctor Livingstone was S/Sgt Boam, he had been helicoptered in the previous afternoon with a couple of Malayan police guards and had never been so pleased to see an English speaking person in all his life.

Having assessed the cause of the precautionary landing, (loss of oil pressure due to a loose union), and decided on the best method of recovery the party made tracks back to the police compound. By this time Sgt McLeod and Cpls Davison and Burns had prepared a curry and rice meal and by candlelight everyone got his first meal of that day. That evening everyone paid the one street village a visit and the local cinema operator invited us all in free to see a Thai film.

The next morning everyone was up early, maybe the wooden floor boards had 'knots' in them, had a light breakfast and with everyone carrying some item of recovery gear made tracks to the aircraft. Evidently word had got around the village and surrounding areas that we were about to work on the aircraft. The locals set up eating and drinking stalls and for miles around parties of local folk were streaming in. Their side of it resembled a carnival with village headman, police and army officers and inevitably the hundreds of children. They all sat intent whilst we proceeded to completely strip down the empennage, remove the engine and mainplanes and by 0930 hours we were ready for the helicopters to airlift the components out and across the river to the school compound, which we had previously marked out as a L.Z. Unfortunately, the two sycamores did not arrive until midday!

This type of operation was a new venture, as indeed it was for us, so the Sycamore squadron commander and his senior technical officer plus our squadron commander, Lt Colonel Creswell OBE, and 2 i/c Major Pritchard-Davies, arrived to watch and suggest ideas on the most practical way of doing this "Sky-recovery".

The engine was no problem and with it slung under the helicopter it went away beautifully. Unfortunately, the mainplanes were a problem and to such an extent that eventually they were manhandled out after numerous abortive attempts to get them fixed under the helicopter. After a few experiments, and that meant removing the complete undercarriage, we got the fuselage away and that was a very imposing sight slung under the helicopter. Several more airlifts across the river with the empennage and our own equipment and the first part of the recovery was completed. A final wave from the helicopter crew and we were on our own again.

At the school compound we then proceeded to put the bogey wheels on the fuselage, replace the engine and then, with local help, place the whole airframe into the 3 ton vehicle.

Next came the mainplanes fitted onto the frames, then the rest of the aircraft, the tie down and we were ready for the road. By this time it was dark so off back to eat and our hard wooden boards.

Early next morning we all boarded the 3 ton vehicle and this time room was very restricted, but nevertheless we made Kroh five hours later, a meal at Kroh and we eventually made Kuala Lumpur the next day, having staged at Taiping that evening. The O.C. workshops and the A.S.M., who left us at Kroh to fly back to Kuala Lumpur, had a further experience when due to very bad weather they had to land on an oil palm estate and spend another night away from base. Plenty was learnt of this our first long distance recovery exercise with the assistance of helicopters, and now we are considering making a lightweight cradle to fix the mainplanes under a helicopter as only these caused the biggest problem.

*AAC Auster WZ706 was introduced to readers in the Christmas 2009 issue 25 of 'Eastward'. After the time spent on 'holiday' in Thailand WZ706 was rebuilt and returned to operational duties, much, much later to be registered as G-BURR in civilian guise, and is believed to be kept in flying condition at Eggesford Airfield in Devon.*

This article was originally printed in 'The Chinthe', the magazine of 656 Squadron, AAC and is reproduced here with permission.

## **‘Curly’ Hartley’s Lost Auster**

The Christmas 2010 issue of ‘Eastward’ briefly mentioned the 1960’s sighting, by an Australian Army patrol, of a ‘small’ aircraft in high trees somewhere near the Thai border in Perak. Rod ‘Curly’ Hartley writes: ‘Some months ago I gave a presentation to the Military History group of Pewsey U3A on “The Malayan Emergency” and one of our members mentioned that in the early 60’s he has been attached to an Australian battalion based in northern Perak. While on patrol with them one day they saw the remains of an aircraft lodged in the jungle canopy above them (probably about 100 feet up). This led me to contacting the Association archivist to see if anything could be found out about the aircraft and following a prolonged search by him (and Laurie Bean) there was a possible identification of the aircraft, helped by it having landed in the forest canopy in the first place.’

Taking up the story from Rod, from the description given it was thought the aircraft might have been an Auster, being small and light, so the search began from this point. Using maps and information from various resources, and bouncing ideas off Laurie, we came to the conclusion the aircraft was 656 Squadron Auster VF602.

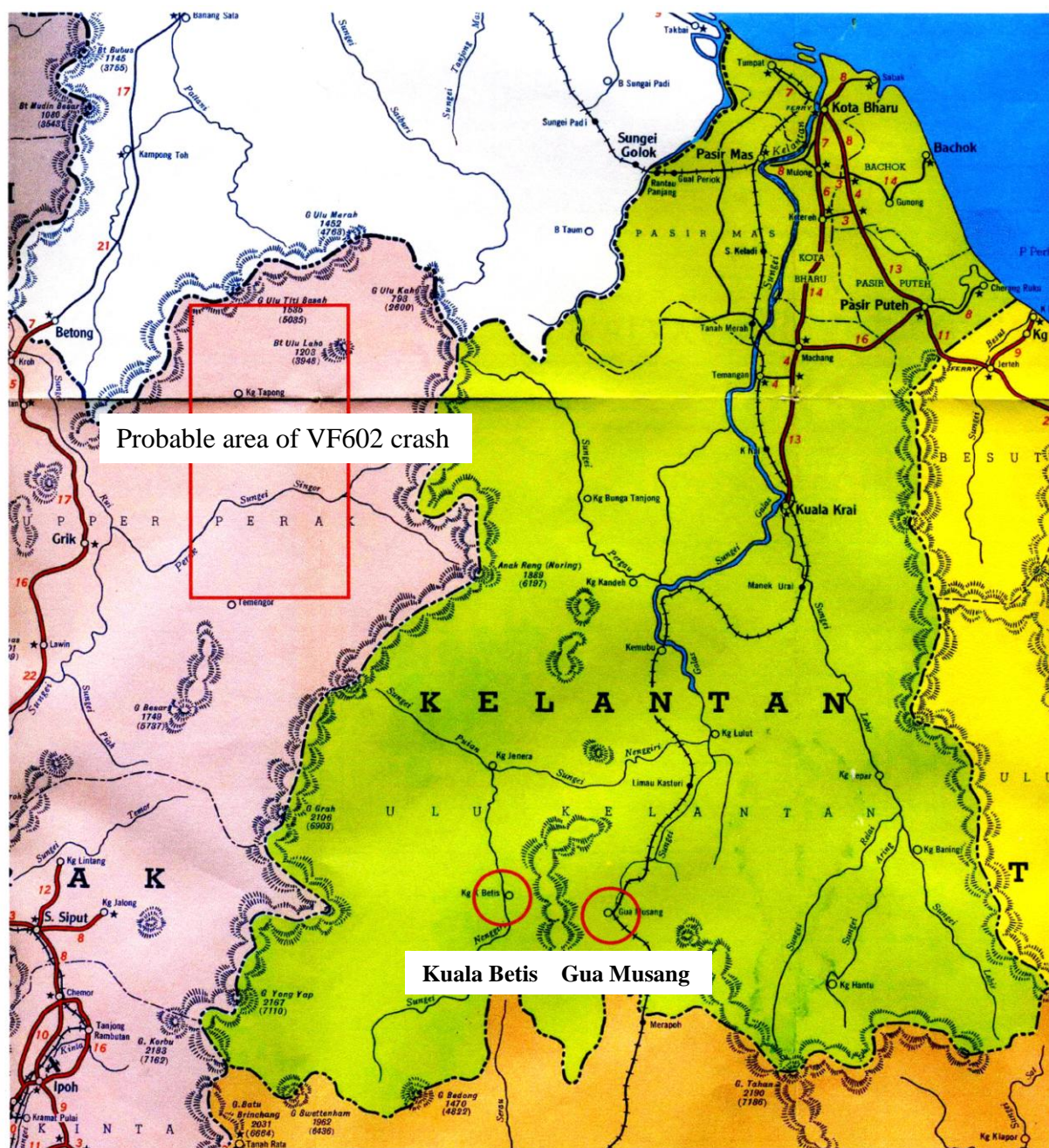
From details of Auster crashes in north Malaya, we ruled out VF551 which crashed somewhere in the vicinity of Kampong Betis police post, with the crew walking twenty five miles to Gua Musang, as this aircraft appears to have ‘landed’ on the forest floor. Records for another aircraft, VH602, state it ‘crash landed in trees whilst avoiding (a) hill, Malaya 3.6.52.’ From this ‘landing’ the pilot and passenger climbed down from the trees and walked out of the jungle over the next twelve days. Walking out from a landing in Perak seems to present a better option over a twelve day period for the eventual rescue than one of coming down in Keletan. As Laurie replied in favour of the aircraft being VF602, ‘None of the other jungle crashes seem to fit. There was an airstrip at Kroh, which was used for ops. All my references just state *location unspecified* for this crash....the Gua Musang accident was too far south of the Thai border!’



Another one down!

Pete Biggadike





### Following the Reunion/AGM

Don Brereton's article 'Where is our Harvard?' featured in this issue is answered by Laurie Bean. Laurie has produced the following aircraft history for RAF Butterworth Station Flight Harvard IIB KF107: 42 Sqn, Thorney Island, despatched Far East March 1947, 27 APC Butterworth, 60 Sqn KL/Tengah March 1950-June 1950, 27 APC Butterworth June 1950-September 1950, Station Flight Butterworth September 1950-September 1954, MAAF (Penang) October 1954-March 1955, SF Butterworth March 1955, SOC March 1957.

Our Mystery Member featured on page 6 of the Easter 2011 issue was John Muter and as no one guessed correctly, Tony Parrini has donated the 'prize' of a bottle of wine to John.

Harry Holloway drew attention to Wing Commander R. G. Churcher DSO MVO DFC as being the interim CO at RAF Butterworth between the departure of Group Captain R. E. Baxter DFC MA and arrival of Air Commodore K. R. Parsons CBE DSO DFC AFC RAAF in June 1958.

## 91 SP in the Far East by Les Downey

I was serving in the station workshop at Stoke Orchard No. 3 Glider Training School in April 1944. A posting arrived for me to have an overseas medical and report to 202 M.U at Longparish near Andover. This turned out to be a very tedious train journey, it would have been quicker by road and I arrived very late and slept on the floor of the barbers shop with some more late arrivals. We asked each other what our trades were and found out that we were a mixed bunch; a corporal Fitter 2e, an AC 1 Electrician and two AC 1's Fitters General. The question raised was 'what are we doing here at a bomb dump?'

The next day we were billeted with another motley bunch until two Flight Sergeants and two Sergeants, Fitter 2e arrived and took us all into the bomb dump and confronted us with the new No. 1 Transportable Oxygen Cylinder Filling Plant. This was built on a fourteen wheel tank trailer towed by an A.E.C. Matador which carried a diesel/electric generating set.

We were informed that another unit was under construction at the British Oxygen Company, based at Edmonton in London, and when ready the present 26 of us would be split into two 13-man crews, one to stay at 202 MU and the other to go to London. Our crew went to London where we were lodged for two/three nights with members of the workforce while the plant was being completed. We also assisted by fixing the roll-up canvas side curtains and learning more about purity and moisture testing equipment. When the plant has been handed over to the RAF, Sgt Downie (no relation) and Cpl Stewart drove the plant to Holmsley South, a wartime fighter airfield in the New Forest. The rest of us followed by train and saw all the preparations for the invasion.

We had exchanged a tunic for a battle dress blouse among other things and had been given an identity card complete with photo as it was the intention that when the port of Cherbourg was captured we were going to be shipped to France and supplies of liquid oxygen would be sent by landing craft as needed. This was cancelled! Instead we were sent to 100 MU at South Witham, mid-way between Stamford and Grantham to supply British and American airfields in that area with cylinders of oxygen.

Sgt Downie, Cpl Stewart and myself made the journey. When we reached Hendon in London we stopped at a pub for a pie and a pint before setting off along the A1. While we were enjoying the drink we heard what sounded like a misfiring engine, which suddenly stopped. To our amazement all the customers in the pub dived under the tables. A moment later there was an enormous explosion and we realised that what we had heard was in fact a buzz bomb or V1. As they say in the north we 'supped up' and left a bit sharpish. Apart from the steep hill and double corner at Stamford we made good time and reached the Ram Jam Inn before closing time for liquid refreshment before driving the last three/four miles to our destination.

The rest of the crew were waiting for us having travelled by train to Grantham and were able to unload all our kitbags that we had brought with us. They had also arranged for us to have sole use of a hut so that the night shift would be able to sleep in peace during the day. The next day was the start of a hectic time to get the plant up and running. As well as finding a suitable level place to park we had to arrange a blackout, transport and loading/filling arrangement. So a 'scrounging' party was sent out to gather wood, tarpaulins etc. In the end we made a very good job of a lean to arrangement with well shielded lights because we operated a three shift system, 8 to 4, 4 to 12 and 12 to 8. We were also very near to the pyrotechnics dump!

In a short time we were up and running and filling three/four large transport cylinders per hour. These had a number that we had to log and it was not unknown for us to fill the same one twice in a shift when there was a big push on!

In December 1944 an Engineering officer arrived and gave a trade test for the non-NCO airmen. We all managed to make LAC!

Early in 1945 we had another visit to tell us about the plans for one of the plants to go to India. In due course No. 1 plant would be taken out of service to be altered and the crew would come and join us at South Witham. A new crew with the highest demob numbers was formed with Sgt Downie in charge. Cpl Stewart remained but the other two Cpl's were replaced as was one Fitter General and the three GD's. Off we went to Wittering for a medical exam and an armful



of jabs. Not long after that we were off to Cardington to see what had been done to the plant and to prepare it for overseas service.

VE day occurred and we all spent the day in Bedford. Then about three days later Sgt Downie and Cpl Stewart set off with the plant to Southampton and that was the last time the rest of us saw it. We went off to Morecombe to be kitted out like 1930's extras in a carry on film. Two days later we were on a train to Gourock and boarding a troop ship which was part of a convoy. Not all U-boats had arrived back in Germany so at night no lights were shown just in case of trouble.

When the convoy reached Gibraltar our vessel had to dock so that 'Gremlin' who had developed appendicitis could be taken to hospital. He met up with us later at Karagpur. When the ship reached Port Said the Supplies Officer went ashore and bought a load of water melons which were put in the ships cold store and everyone had a slice with their evening meal.

The rest of the journey was uneventful and we transferred to Worli camp on reaching Bombay where our solar topees ended up on the cookhouse fire when everyone was issued with a bush hat and a piece of carpet (duree?) for use one ones charpoy (bed).

After a short stay in Bombay we boarded a troop train for a two night journey to Calcutta where our ten strong party were given a meal and then put back on the train for Karagpur and 91SP. This was to be the final destination of our plant if all went according to plan. There was a Crossley pre-war mobile plant there that could produce oxygen but it's output of three cylinders a day could not match ours of three to four an hour. We joined the 'Crossley' crew while waiting for ours to come...it never did!

Sergeant Downie and Cpl Stewart arrived on the day that the end of Japanese war was announced, having left their plant in Calcutta. 91 SP was a storage unit so the next big job was packing all the equipment into railway wagons for shipment to Calcutta. Everyone was roped in to do this but it was also the time of a religious 'Tuja' so that as a truck was going to, or returning from the railway sidings, a group of followers would appear at road junctions to carry out a 'ceremony' and other delaying tactics!

All the unit personnel travelled to Calcutta by road using the units' transport and crossing rivers by using railway bridges. At one point crossing was effected by the use of a small landing craft operated by the Bengal Nagpur Railway Co. The journey took about ten hours to cover the 96 miles to Calcutta and then to park up and go on to the transit camp. This was only a tram ride from the city centre, with its' shops, cinemas and cafes etc. Apart from having to walk back through knee deep flood water once and having a brand new Parker pen pinched out of my breast pocket while standing in a crowded tram another time, I found the city to be very interesting. I think we were there about four weeks when the order came to take the units transport to the docks to be loaded on to a freighter and a few days later it was our turn to board a troop ship bound for Singapore.

This vessel called in at Madras and word came around that another 500 troops were going to be embarked. This did not meet with approval by the passengers already on board and a 'walk off' took place. Eventually the order to embark the 500 extra bodies was cancelled, the grumblers returned on board and the voyage to Singapore was resumed.

On arrival at Singapore, I think all 91 SP's personnel were accommodated in six man tents erected on the grass semi-circle on RAF Seletar's Mornington Crescent, with use of the facilities of the pre-war married quarters. The CO of 91 SP arranged a picnic outing to the beach at Johore across the causeway and a visit to the outside of the Sultan's Palace.

Soon after the strike at Seletar our small group was no longer needed and we were broken up. I did hear from 'Gremlin', he had been sent to Kure in Japan but I lost his return address. Another went home on compassionate leave and a trainload of 'erks' set off northward where on arrival at Kuala Lumpur the rail union called a strike. Michael Phelan was a volunteer from Southern Ireland and we had worked the same shift for eighteen months. He was posted to RAF KL.

Those of us who were going to Butterworth were billeted in a school until enough transport had been collected to complete the journey to Butterworth. The trip was broken over night at the railway station at Ipoh and we arrived early afternoon at Butterworth to find a brand new camp waiting for us.



The Royal Palace at Johore: the b/w pictures were taken by Les in 1945. The colour picture is recent (2010).

In addition to the above by Les, both Les and Violet celebrated their 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary on the 24<sup>th</sup> March. Congratulations to a super couple from all at the Association.

### Late snippets

From Peter Fowle, dated 20 April 2011: *"Pam and I were in Dublin last week at a Rotary conference. We went for a meal in the evening and sitting on the table behind was Tony (Parrini). During the evening we were taking photographs and Tony said he would take one of us all. He stood on a chair to take the photo which he followed by a rendering of 'Just one Cornetto'."*

Gerry Hayley writes regarding the Changkat picture of the three 'well armed' airmen featured on page 9 of the Christmas 2010 issue of *'Eastward'*: *"I knew Bill Staff who wrote the RAF Changkat article. I was at Changkat until the very last day and watched as they took the radar down the hill and away. I then moved back to Butterworth and 114 MCRU. When Western Hill was up and running I only had 2 months to go before returning to the UK. The photograph of the 3 airmen wearing sarongs with our .303 rifles is interesting because I am the one in the middle. Great days on a super unit. I was at Bukit Gombak, 114MCRU, Changkat from 1964-1966"*.



Bob Margolis adds a bit more to the story by Bill Bohannon of the late Howard Stirling (Easter 2011 issue of *'Eastward'*): *"The story that my father dined out on for years was that Howard opened the throttle too quickly one day and fell off when the craft accelerated hard. Having scrounged a throttle lever from an aircraft, there was no spring return. Result; the hydroplane headed out into the Andaman Sea, never to be seen again."*

*"I'm sure that there were many (particularly top brass) who heaved a sigh of relief when his tour of duty was over. I understand that his day job was Search and Rescue. A little exuberance (ok, a lot of exuberance) to relieve the pressures of that is surely understandable? I remember him as a very kind to and tolerant of a young boy and he taught me some useful skills, even if his methods were unorthodox. He may have taught me to shoot (0.22 rifle) using hangar bulkhead lights as a target, but he was scrupulous about safety in handling the gun"*.

Bob continues *"I wonder if Bill (Bohannon) knows about Howard's project to make a helicopter? This was to be powered by a 'liberated' jet engine exhausting through jets at the tips of the rotor blades. Hero's steam turbine taken to extremes! Little matters such as the 'available' rotor blades not being hollow or able to stand the 700°C or so of the jet exhaust (that's over the melting point of most aluminium alloys) didn't trouble Howard!"*

*Probably, fortunately, the project didn't get beyond the planning and preliminary scrounging stage."*



## The Sultan's Sunderlands by Dave Croft

Glugor had an association with seaplanes from at least 1931 when the Singapore Flying Club Saro A.17 Cutty Sark fastened up to the RAF buoy in the November of that year, through to the days of the pre-war Imperial Airways Empire Air Mail scheme when Glugor was a refuelling stop for the S23 Empire flying boats. The loss of Malaya and Singapore to the Japanese interrupted the Imperial Airways /Qantas service but Glugor went on to play host to two German Arado 196 and one Japanese Aichi E13A seaplanes during the war years and after the war to visiting RAF Sunderlands.

Glugor almost certainly would have played 'host' to the new Sunderlands of 230 Squadron, based at Seletar in 1938. Imperial Airways had built new refueling facilities on site which would also accommodate the Sunderlands. Four of these 'new' aircraft were paid for by a gift of £300,000 from the Sultans of the Federated Malay States and ceremonially named in Malaya's honour before embarking on goodwill tours throughout the Far East.

The Sunderlands were named *Negri Sembilan*, *Pahang*, *Perak* and *Selangor* with L2160 being the first named (*Selangor*) at a ceremony held at Port Swettenham in October 1938. Following each ceremony the flag of the state was applied to the respective fin of the named aircraft.



Negri Sembilan



Pahang



Perak



Selangor



Perak over Colombo 1938



Selangor, Colombo 1938

The naming ceremony of *Negri Sembilan* was reported in the *Straits Times*: 'Saturday was the most important day in the recent history of Port Dickson. From shop houses along both sides of the main street, the gold, black and red flag of the State hung side by side with the red, white and blue of England. From the top of the aircraft moored a few yards from the jetty, Yam Tuan released a State flag from the bow and revealed the name 'Negri Sebilan' in Jawi characters. Hundreds of people, including a large proportion of Malays in their brightly coloured Hari Raya clothes, watched from the jetty and the waterfront, and cheered as the great aircraft took off and roared above them. His Highness was in the aircraft and it was his second flight, his earlier experience being in an open plane....The success of the aircraft was toasted in champagne at a reception in the Railway Station...'

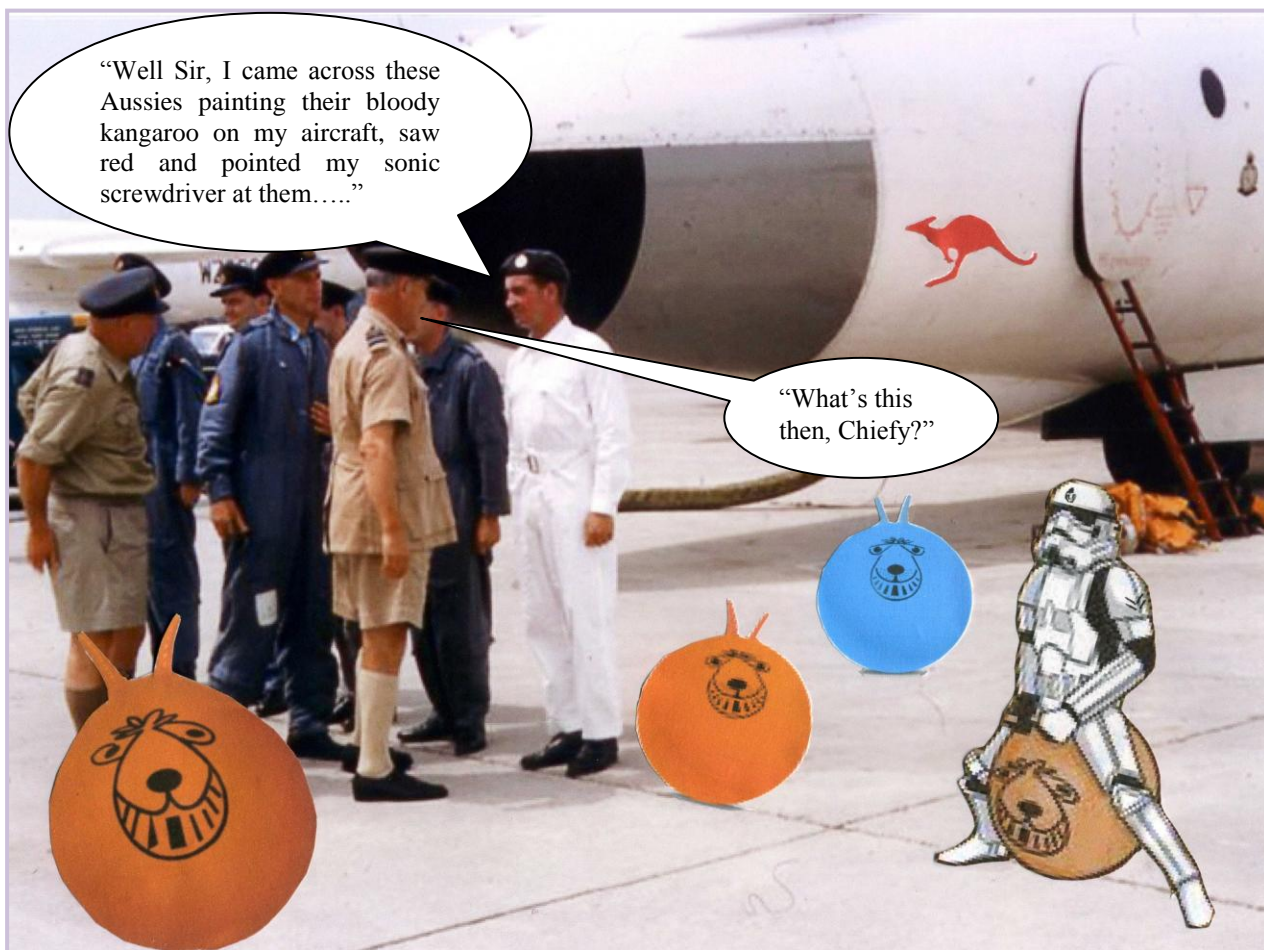


**Sunderland *Negri Sembilan* on a goodwill visit to Colombo 1938**



**Sunderland photographs: Arnold Hutchinson via Dave Croft**





Extra note: this newsletter comes with a supplement of photographs taken of the 2011 annual reunion. The bottom right photograph on page 3 is from Gordon Shores, the rest are from Bob Margolis. Many thanks to both members.

## *The Very Late Page*

The following reports arrived too late for inclusion in this issue's printed copies, but will/should appear with the Christmas issue printed copies.

### **8<sup>th</sup> National Service (RAF) Reunion Parade, RAF Cosford, Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2011**

As Don (Brereton) reports: 'It was a warm and sunny day for the parade. There were about 1500 veterans on parade and a similar number of family and friends. We were led by the RAF Central Band and reviewing the parade was AVM Mike Lloyd and the Station CO, Group Captain J B Johnston, and also Gerald Howarth MP from the Ministry of Defence. The DI's said we were the best squads they had seen, which is great as most of us are in our seventies now.'

In the afternoon a National Service exhibition was opened by AVM Mike Lloyd in the RAF Museum (Cosford), a superb world class aviation museum. Fifteen ex-Butterworth personnel (who served in the mid-fifties) and families

attended and met up after the parade. Among the numbers were: Norman Harvey (Armoury) and Lilian, Mike Ward (SHQ) and Pam, John Crooks (Fireman) and Brenda, Barry Jones (Oxygen Plant) and Sue, daughter and grandsons, Tony Richardson (Signals, Roy Street (Air Movements), Dave Martin (Station Flight) and myself, Don Brereton (ATC), accompanied by Brenda. Sadly absent due to ill health were Ken Plant (Fireman) and Brian Wall (Stores).

We all agreed that if we were able to, we would be back again next year'.

*Photo: Pam Ward*



*Don Brereton*

### **Whistle Blowing within the RAFBPA**

In the present climate of the News of the World phone hacking scandal it was thought that 'Eastward' should make members clearly aware of Association before it is picked up by the brings our attention to the following the recent reunion: "First of all I would members, for making the reunion the occasion. Now I hope our Chairman has myself on a 'court martial', or even enjoyable gala meal and speeches, not which everyone joined in the chorus, standing unsteadily on a chair) and with noticed on a couple of occasions our to return with a glass in his hand (full I decided to investigate and was surprised high prices for our liquid refreshment, own brew!!! I think he had tried to label letters of his 'private' brew and by us (RAFBPA members) off the scent by all know the Chairman has Italian connections and no further proof was needed as seen from a bottle recovered from the empties bin the following morning."

Forgive me Tony, for I had no choice.....



any reported 'goings on' within the national press. Therefore, Bill Bohannon suspicious action of one member observed at like to thank all board members, plus core success it was, and also the venue for the got a good sense of humour or I might find excommunicated? Anyway after the very forgetting the song written by TP himself of plus of course his 'Just one Cornetto' (while members chatting and intermingling, I Chairman disappearing towards the bar and might add). The next time it happened I to find out that while we were all paying the the gentleman concerned had brought his disguise the fact by changing a few of the leaving it with the bar staff in order to throw pretending to pay for it at the bar! Now we

*Bill Bohannon*

*Many thanks for reporting this Bill.*