



'EASTWARD'

The newsletter of the
RAF Butterworth & Penang Association



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

CHRISTMAS 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.



RAF Transport Command Outreach Service

Issue 31



'EASTWARD'

Association Officials



Chairman: Tony Parrini
Hamethwaite
Rockcliffe
Carlisle CA6 4AA
Tel: 01228-674553
e-mail: **tony@parrini.co.uk**

Treasurer: Len Wood
3 Fairfield Avenue
Grimsby
Lincs DN33 3DS
Tel: 01472-327886
e-mail: **len.wood@ntlworld.com**

Secretary: Rowly Christopher
7 Valingers Road
King's Lynn
Norfolk
PE30 5HD
Tel: 01553 774166
e-mail: **r2tc@aol.com**

Newsletter Editor and Archivist:
Dave Croft
West Lodge Cottage
3 Boynton, Bridlington
East Yorkshire YO16 4XJ
Tel: 01262-677520
e-mail: **dmcroft320@aol.com**

Association Website-

<http://raf-butterworth-penang-association.co.uk>

Webmaster - george.gault@ntlworld.com



453 Squadron RAAF 1941

CHAIRMAN'S CORNER



The sun shining down from a cloudless azure blue sky, the warm breeze gently rustling the leaves and lots of friendly familiar faces set the scene for the Commemoration of the 40th Anniversary of the disbandment of the Far East Air Force on 15th October 2011. But this wasn't on Penang Island, or Singapore, but at the National Memorial Arboretum, where around 60 members and partners from the three main FEAF associations met together for this historical occasion. It was a memorable event but one has to wonder whether there will still be enough of us in 10 years time to mark the 50th Anniversary!!!

Accompanied by members of the St John Ambulance Brass Band (Wilnecote), our service at the FEAF Memorial was led by Fr Brendan Carrick with members of each association sharing the Readings and Prayers for those who lost their lives whilst serving in Singapore and Malaysia under FEAF's jurisdiction.

But in my introduction I was able to remind everyone that we should equally give thanks for the Happy Days spent in the sun, enjoying all the facilities and advantages given to us by the Government of the day.

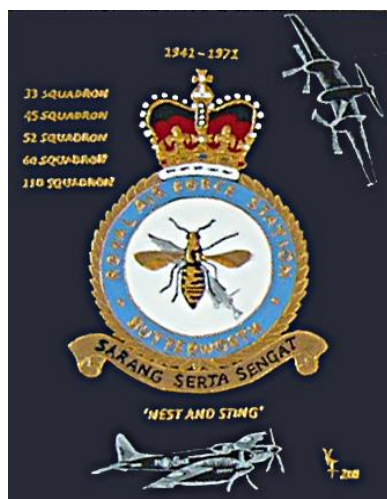
It was very rewarding to see Les and Violet Downey make their entrance to the NMA – he never misses an opportunity, but it was equally warming when Richard Harcourt arrived with Daphne still wanting to be part of the action! It is moments like this that makes Chairmanship so rewarding. For those that missed the event, be ready for something on a Saturday in October 2021!

You will see on the supplementary page to this issue, a picture of me holding a piece of artwork (*reproduced below*) showing the RAF Butterworth badge. This has been donated by the artist to the Association and I intend to hold a draw for this 'First Edition' in the next issue and through the RAFBPA Reunion next May. However if anyone wants a similar piece of artwork, with any crest or badge, on any background and any message to mark a special occasion, then please contact val_ferguson1953@hotmail.com or phone her on 07756 701758 or 01228 593760. Each item is £77 plus p&p, of which at least £7.00 will be donated to the Poppy Appeal.

Action is in hand regarding the 2012 Reunion and I hope our move back into the Midlands (Stratford upon Avon) will result in a larger than normal attendance. Please keep 27th to 29th May 2012 free in your new diaries and calendars.

Unbelievably it's time to start winding down another year! This gives me the opportunity to thank all members of the Committee for their continued good work to keep the RAF Butterworth and Penang Association in good fettle.

Anne and I wish everyone a Happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year and hope that we will see you all fit and well when we meet again in May.



Tony Parrini
Chairman RAFBPA



From the Editor

Seventy years ago, on the 8th December 1941, the Japanese Army entered Malaya and in the space of seventy days occupied both Malaya and Singapore. On the 16th February 1942 the Japanese held a victory parade and renamed Singapore as *Syonan-To*. Of other administrative changes that followed, Malaya became *Malai* (10 December 1942), Sumatra came under the political unit of Malaya and the four northern states of Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis and Trengganu were ceded to Thailand.

This issue of '*Eastward*' is timed to coincide with the start of the war in north Malaya and in particular how it relates to Butterworth and Penang. It is a story of bravery shown by both RAF pilots and inexperienced young Australian pilots flying aircraft not suited to the situation, and their losses! This issue also includes articles about the Empire Air Mail Scheme and the 'Double Sunrise' Catalina flights, a German submariners view of Malaya during the war, Butterworth in the late 1940's and for Christmas, the story of 3205 RAF Servicing Commando Unit in the Far East.



Relevant to this issue are a couple of 'pieces' I came across from the RAFBPA newsletters of Summer 1999 and Spring 2001. The 1999 issue raises the mystery



of the tomb of John Hoggan and his wife located among the airmen's accommodation. The question asked at the time, 'Why is the tomb placed where it is?' is perhaps answered in this issue in that both the pre-war and immediate post-war RAF Butterworth domestic site was not where the 1950's RAF Butterworth was constructed. Hence prior to the 'new' RAF Butterworth of the 1950's, the tomb would have rested on undisturbed land. A further thought relates to a possible reason for the site of the tomb. At one time a leper colony existed where RAF Butterworth was originally sited. Long gone by the time RAF Butterworth was constructed, it is possible that *John Hoggan & Wife* may have been missionaries involved with running the colony. The tomb is not far from where the colony would have been!

In the Spring 2001 issue Pete Mather, the Association Secretary and newsletter editor at the time, printed a letter received from a Ms Jane Wood who witnessed the aerial battles over Butterworth and Penang: *"When I happened upon the notice of the RAF Butterworth and Penang reunion in the British Legion Magazine it brought back very many memories. I was living with my parents in Penang at the time of Pearl Harbor. Our house was on the seafront overlooking the North Channel, between the E&O Hotel and town. We watched the dogfights over Butterworth and the Channel and often wondered what happened to the pilots who were shot down and prayed they survived. Later the Japanese had things very much as they wished and used to bomb regularly every morning. Our air raid shelter was composed of crates full of sand arranged round the base of a large casuarinas tree just behind the sea wall."*

The account of the air battles in this issue (drawn heavily from 'Buffaloes over Singapore') hopefully answers the question to what happened to the pilots who were shot down?

On behalf of the RAF Butterworth & Penang Association I wish you all a Merry Christmas, and all the very best for 2012.

In addition:

Kenneth Arthur Plant (KAP). The Association received the news of the death of member Ken Plant via his close friend, John Crooks.

For Ken's obituary John writes: *It was with great sadness to me when I heard that Ken had died on September 5th 2011. I first got to know Ken when I was posted to RAF Butterworth in May 1956 and it was the start of a long friendship that lasted 55 years.*



We certainly had some good times when we managed leave together, staying at the Toc H in Singapore. I remember on one occasion we were having a few (Tiger Tops) in a bar. We had one or two beers (Dutch courage) when we were seated alongside these small guys in fancy suits. As the night progressed they guessed we were having a go about their dress, which they did not appreciate! However, the situation was being monitored by a very nice waitress who we had got acquainted with during our visits to the bar. She very discretely informed us that these gentlemen were in fact Singapore gangsters and were not to be associated with. At this point, and after noticing the bulge in their jackets, KAP and I immediately sobered up very, very quickly and moved on. We often laughed at that for many months afterwards.

On returning to the UK we kept up the friendship with visits to our families on many occasions. Ken was one great guy you could never forget. Brenda and I will hope to continue to keep in touch with Ken's family in the future.

Rest in peace Ken.

John Crooks (Geordie), Butterworth Fire Section, 1956-1958.

The Association has also received news of the deaths of two other members:

Robert Saunders passed away on 11th July 2011. He was a corporal engine fitter on both 52 and 60 Squadrons at Butterworth, from January 1964 to June 1966.

Peter Wilkie was a Chief Technician MT Fitter on MTSS at Butterworth from July 1957 to November 1959.

Our condolences go to their families and friends from all members of the RAFBPA.

New members

Don Walton: 4179276 SAC Walton DAF, ASF/Electrical Section, RAF Butterworth 1956-58.

David Howard (The Devonian): SAC Storeman Mechanical, 110 Squadron, RAF Butterworth July 1958-November 1960.

Thanks are expressed to the following members:

Laurie Bean: Laurie proof-reads each issue of '*Eastward*' before sending to Len Wood for printing and distributing by post to members. Laurie is also active in adding to the archives and his input is much appreciated.

Don Brereton: Don has contributed much to newsletter over the years but his high point must surely be his persuading of non-member Tony Richardson to write of the story of Anthony Fisher Burcher DFM, an aircrew member of the 1943 Dams raid and who was stationed at Butterworth in the mid-1950's. Tony was acquainted with Anthony Burcher and is able to add to the story, again to feature in a later issue.

Rob Lewis : for prints of the Duke of Edinburgh's visit to Butterworth for the archives.

Bob Margolis: for guiding me through the nuances of the Malay language, also thanks are given to his friend **Awangku Merali** for his interpretations of words and phrases.

Sam Mold: Sam has sent in a mass of information of his service in FEAF and has added greatly to the archives. We have had a great time researching the 95 Squadron RAF (Malaya) Regiment motto with both the help of Bob Margolis and Awangku Marali. In this respect, as Jawi script is involved, **Yeo Kuan Joo**, my close friend from Singapore, and his friend **Billy**,

also became involved to the extent that a leading figure in a Singapore mosque was consulted and finally assisted with reading the script...no mean feat in today's world.

Don Walton: Don has submitted much about his time at both Butterworth and Tengah which will appear in '*Eastward*' at a later date.

Len Wood: Len takes each issue CD to the printers. They print the copy. So far, so good! Following that each 'postal' member's copy is packaged, transported to the PO, weighed and stamped and posted. It sounds straightforward and it is, but it also time consuming and requires effort in moving a fair number of newsletters each time.

As editor of the newsletter I wish to express my sincerest thanks to all the above and also those not mentioned but have been involved throughout the past year. Also, to those of you who have been complimentary about each issue of '*Eastward*', it does my artistic ego good!

A DVD entitled *The Malayan Emergency* has been received from **Laurie Bean**. This is a 90 minute documentary produced for the History Channel of Malaysia. Our thanks to Laurie for purchasing the last copy in the shop in Penang for the Association archives.

After the disappointment of the cancellation of the '*Legasee*' veterans interviews to be conducted at the 2010 Reunion, I was approached by a production company in Malaysia in respect of a documentary project covering the Japanese occupation in Penang. **Tony Parrini**, as Chairman of the Association, was contacted and asked for advice. Eventually, after sending copies of archive materials covering this period, arrangements were set up for interviews, via Skype, to go ahead with **Bill Bohannon** and **Les Downey**. Thanks go to Tony for his contacts regarding the Skype arrangements and both Bill and Les for agreeing to proceed with the interviews.

John Muter asks if any members who have approached the RAF Records Office for a copy of their service record have found them to be inaccurate? John has found this to be the case with his service record.

In respect of **Don Brereton's** story of the station Harvard at Butterworth in the Summer 2011 issue of '*Eastward*', **Laurie Bean** sent a service history for RAF Butterworth Station Flight Harvard IIB KF107. The aircraft was dispatched to the Far East in March 1947 and SOC 2.1.57. **Don Walton** comments: *"There was a Harvard at Station Flight during my time at Butterworth (56-58). I worked hard on its' restoration, including the stripping and polishing of the whole aircraft. It was gleaming and we got it ready for a test flight, but there were problems with the ignition system. I worked with others to discover what the problem was, we fixed it and started the engine but it was too late for a test flight so we were forced to abandon the idea of a flight as we did not have a pilot, just an engine fitter, who started the engine. After a basic test, all was well, so we packed up for the day. The next day the Senior Engineering Officer told us that after serious consideration the aircraft was too corroded for flying and the project was cancelled. We were very upset and there was no option but to scrap the aircraft. So to my memory this was the Harvard concerned that had sat for a few years outside the Station Flight building and was painted as a standard training aircraft at that time, with yellow wing and nose markings. I cannot remember further details except that it was a joint team effort with ASF and Station Flight personnel...that would have been in 1957."*

In conclusion, it would appear that Don's Harvard 'E' was KF107.

Also the Summer 2011 issue of the newsletter featured questions of Don Brereton's picture of an armoured vehicle and badge displayed on the front of the vehicle. **Laurie Bean** came to rescue with a picture and information about the *Bedford Pig*, a locally manufactured armoured troop carrier body mounted on a Bedford chassis. **Sam Mold** identified the badge as being that of the RAF (Malaya) Regiment having two crossed Kris's with a crown mounted above them.

MS Devonshire/Devonia

Ms Lyn Tofari has written in about her educational cruise on MS Devonia, previously HMT Devonshire: *"I was trawling the web looking for MS Devonia when I spotted a link to your 2007 Spring Newsletter [Issue 16, Spring 2007] which contained info on the Devonia. I believe my educational cruise was either the last one, or the penultimate one. She sailed from my home town of Liverpool the last week of October 1967 for two weeks, for the princely sum of £40. We visited Bordeaux, Tangier, Cadiz and Oporto. With hindsight the visit to the French vineyard and the Portugese (Sandemans) Lodge were unusual choices for young girls. I was 11 years old and proceeded to get thoroughly drunk at both ports!*

Tangiers was magical! We were all amused by a rather plump 5th former being pursued through the market place by men proposing marriage. We were tempted to sell her but didn't think we could take camels aboard the ship.

On the outward journey we made such good time that the ship anchored in the Bay of Biscay and we had an impromptu regatta. The lifeboats certainly look different today!

The return journey was much more eventful with terrific storms that kept us below deck. From the portholes we could see alternating sea and sky, with the metal cabinet (our wardrobes) doors swinging open and slamming shut with each roll of the ship. I thought it was really exciting, I suppose I was too young and/or ignorant to be scared?

Poor Devonia limped to Southern Ireland for the damage to be assessed before crawling home to Liverpool. Whether she made another trip after that I don't know but I suspect the damage probably sealed her fate to be scrapped.

Unfortunately I never did take any pictures. My mother gave me an old box camera and I couldn't even get the film in it so I consigned it to the bottom of my suitcase. The memories of 'Glenn' dormitory, sleeping in the upper bunk and the high jinks of boys and girls away from home for the first time was a truly special event in my life."

Lyn concludes with: *'I hope I haven't bored you too much and thank you for your time?'* Another side to the HMT Devonshire story which makes it all the more interesting.....

Rod 'Curly' Hartley mentions a possible ex-Butterworth contact: *"Some years ago I worked with a chap who was friendly with a John Ashworth. John's father was 'Kiwi', one time F/O Hornet pilot at Butterworth. I knew he went on to fly Canberra's, getting a Queen's Commendation for getting one down in the desert after a double engine failure* after take-off from El-Adem. Later he was flying (I think) VC10's from Lyneham to the Far East. The last I heard was that he was retired, living near Bournemouth. I think he may have finished as a Group Captain, or even A/C."*

A further e-mail from Rod goes further: *"I was told about this way back when on holiday in Guernsey. Staying in the same hotel was an officer from Guernsey and as you do, we got talking over a drink. He told me 'Kiwi' was flying transport aircraft out of Lyneham. My comment would have been on the lines of 'having seen what he did with Hornets I don't think I'd like to fly as a passenger with him! The chap replied that of course 'Kiwi' had mellowed with age."*

Rod asks that if we have any members living near Bournemouth, they may be able to trace him?

**Laurie researched this incident: '6 March 1958, Canberra B2, WK125 of 35 Squadron force landed in the desert after one engine failed and the second gave problems on an overshoot at El-Adem. The incident happened at night and the crew were listed as Flt Lt Ashworth, Fg Off Dockar and Fg Off Hyde.' All survived without serious injuries.*

National Service (RAF) Reunion Parade 3 July 2011, RAF Cosford: a report of this parade was forwarded by Don Brereton. As the Summer issue newsletter was with the printers at the time it was too late to be included in the printed copies but was sent out with the electronic copies. Members (and non-members) who attended the parade were: Don Brereton and

Brenda, John Crooks and Brenda, Norman Harvey and Lillian, Barry Jones and Sue (plus daughter and grandsons), Dave Martin, Tony Richardson, Roy Street and Mike Ward and Pam. Unfortunately Ken Plant (see p5) and Brian Wall did not attend due to ill health.

In dispute: the Association was informed by **Laurie Bean** regarding the use of RAF badges on non-official RAF websites after the RAF Forum website manager had been contacted by a MOD representative. Basically the RAF badge (crest) is Crown copyright and '*protected under intellectual property rights laws. It cannot be used unless a licence has been granted covering such use.*' Seeing that this ruling might easily affect the use of the RAF badges on the first page of each issue **Tony Parrini** made enquiries of the MOD and the upshot is that the RAFBPA is licensed to carry on as normal in this respect.....but just in case, a bit of artwork was produced to replace the badges should the Association have to remove them. The artwork comprised a betel nut palm (Penang) with a head-on view of a de Havilland Hornet, the spinners being in the colours of 33 and 45 Squadrons (not identifiable in the printed version).

70 years ago:

Geoffrey Fiskin DFC RNZAF died 12 June 2011, aged 95. He was one of the first of the new intake of New Zealand pilots who arrived in Singapore in 1941 to complete a fighter conversion course on 21 Squadron RAAF Wirraways and Brewster Buffaloes. On completion of the course he was posted to 67 Squadron RAF and then transferred to the newly formed 243 Squadron RAF at Kallang, his first job being to test and deliver Buffaloes from Seletar to the new squadrons. Sergeant Fiskin was the pilot of one of two Buffaloes from the squadron who arrived first on the scene after the devastating Japanese attack on the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* on the 10th December 1941.

His first success against the Japanese was on January 12th 1942 over Malaya when he accounted for a Ki-27 and then for his second success, another Ki-27 that exploded beneath him. He went on to achieve further successes against the Japanese in the Battle for Singapore before being seriously injured in an altercation with two Japanese fighters. With an arm and leg in plaster he was evacuated by sampan on February 11th and picked up by the Indian Navy sloop, HMIS *Indus*, to eventually to reach Australia.

Later recovered, and commissioned, Flying Officer Geoffrey Fiskin went on to become the highest scoring British Commonwealth ace in the Pacific theatre before being medically discharged from the RNZAF in 1943 due to increasing problems caused by his 'Singapore' injuries. He was awarded the DFC in September 1943.

Some future articles in line for 'Eastward'

Laurie Bean expedition in the jungle

Dam Buster FEAF aircrew story by Tony Richardson

Butterworth Chain Ferry

Reminiscences of Butterworth by Charlie Tagg

Far East Army Air Corp short stories from Barry Davies, ex-Sgt Pilot AAC

Don Walton's times at FEAF

Sam Mold's time with 95 Squadron RAF (Malaya) Regiment



(映)

TO-MORROW'S NOTABLE FILM EVENT!



THE CONDUCT OF WAR

NIPPON: FIGHT WE MUST AND FIGHT TO SURE VICTORY!
BRITAIN: FIGHT AND RETREAT—TOO BAD FOR HISTORY!
SUCH WAS THAT CONFLICT

"ON TO SINGAPORE"

(DAI-NIPPON EIGA'S HISTORIC MASTERPIECE)

Screening simultaneously

AT

KYO-EI

and

SYOWA

3 p.m.—6—8.30 p.m.

3.30 p.m.—6.30—9 p.m.

ADDED ATTRACTION AT THE KYO-EI

on 24-25-26-29 SEPT.

THE SYONAN HOSO CHAMBER'S ORCHESTRA will stage a CONCERT at 6 p.m. & 8.30 p.m.
Prior to Screening of the Film.

Mr. KREMPL will conduct a Programme of Popular NIPPON Marches & Songs to be sung
by talented Artistes. Song sheets of DAI NAMPO GUN NO UTA will be distributed to the
audience.

THE BUNKA EIGA GEKIJO

USHIHO

To-morrow's Change of Programme

3—5—7—9 p.m.

Premier General Tojo at Nanking.
International Settlement at Shanghai
returned to China.

Burma Independence Ceremony.
Industrial Enterprises in Nippon and
China, All Hands To The Task.

DAISEKAI (Great World)

3—6.45—8—9.10—10.20 p.m.

Physical Training of Police Recruits
in Djawa.

Interesting Marriage Customs in
Thailand.

See how the Burmese received news
of their Independence Grant.

See how subways are constructed.
Radio and what it means to convey.

INDO

opening TO-MORROW

3 and 6.30 p.m.

MYTHOLOGY—It is always
so absorbing!

"THIRUMANGAI

AIWAR"

(in Tamil)

—featuring—

K. T. RUKMANT & SEENU.

YAMATO

opening TO-MORROW

3—6—8.30 p.m.

The Famous 'Star'
CHEE LAU LAN
co-stars with
POO YUNG

— in —

"1939 TAI KWAN
YOON"

(in Chinese)

MALAI

Daily at 3 and 8.30 p.m.

NOW SHOWING!

"HOONG HUNG
CHUT CHEONG"

(in Mandarin)

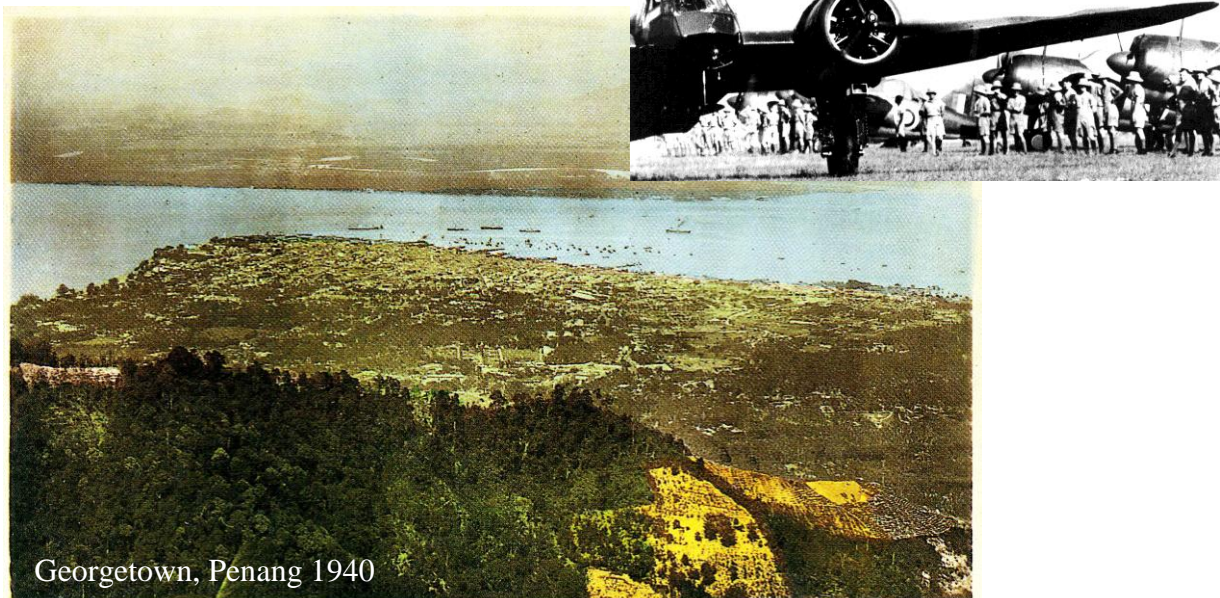
1st Chapters.

Ten days in the life of RAF Butterworth

In the year of 1941, the Japanese did come!

2011 is the 70th anniversary of the Japanese invasion of Malaya and the gallant actions made by British and Commonwealth Forces to prevent forced occupation of the country. This feature is a small part of the overall story and relates to the aerial battles fought over Malayan skies by RAF, RAAF and RNZAF pilots, although our story is that of RAAF and RAF pilots, and is mainly centred on RAF Butterworth during December 1941.

RAF Butterworth was captured by the Japanese 25th Army on Dec 20th 1941, and occupied by the Japanese Navy for the duration of the war.



Georgetown, Penang 1940

8th December 1941

The Japanese invasion of Malaya started with a landing just north of Kota Bharu. All available RAAF Hudson aircraft (from KB) were dispatched to intercept the Japanese, along with Vildebeest aircraft deployed from Seletar to Gong Kedah, also Blenheims based at Sungei Patani. Buffalo W8221 WP-X (from SP) of 21 Squadron RAAF on routine patrol encountered 9 Japanese Ki-21's (*right*) near Kota Bharu. This resulted in the Squadron being put on readiness when the airfield was hit by 5 Ki-21's, (*Ki = Kitai, meaning airframe*) resulting in 2 Buffaloes destroyed and 5 damaged. Also 2 Blenheims were destroyed and SHQ damaged, with fatalities!



The action against the Japanese was followed by the arrival over KB of 12 Hudsons and 8 Blenheims from Kuantan, followed by the Blenheims diverting to Alor Star to refuel and re-arm. Whilst on the ground there was a raid on AS by 27 Ki-21's resulting in 4 Blenheims destroyed and 5 made u/s. The petrol dump was set alight and raids on the air field continued all morning.

21 Squadron Buffaloes from SP, on perimeter patrol sighted KI-21's escorted by Zero's which in turn attacked the Buffaloes. The KI-21's overflew SP to visit another west coast airfield, possibly Butterworth. The Squadron dispatched 2 Buffaloes to Singora (Siam/Thailand) for reconnaissance purposes where they were attacked by Ki-27's fighters, but escaped!

Later in the morning a low level approach from the north by Ki-21's reduced SP to rubble and



27 Squadron Blenheims to 4 airworthy aircraft. Also, with only 4 aircraft serviceable, 21 Squadron was ordered to withdraw to RAF Butterworth!

In the meantime Butterworth (also Bayan Lepas) was at the receiving end of low level strafing carried out by Ki-43 aircraft (*left*). At the same time, as Japanese troops were rapidly approaching KB airfield, the

order to evacuate was given. All personnel from the airfield eventually reached Singapore by air, road or rail. Both 21 and 27 Squadron departed on the evening of 8th December for Butterworth.

9th December 1941

Efforts to make 21 Squadron operational on the morning of the 9th resulted in two Buffaloes being ready to escort a Blenheim raid on the enemy. The Blenheims were unable to participate in the planned raid so the Buffaloes carried out a reconnaissance in the north of the country. Later in the day two more Buffaloes were attacked by enemy fighters as they circled the airfield. The ensuing battle was chaotic and lack of fuel meant a return to Butterworth, just after a bombing and strafing attack on the airfield. A padlocked fuel bowser and an imminent attack meant a rushed take-off from the airfield where both Buffaloes tangled with the fighter escort resulting in one Buffalo bursting into flames and the pilot parachuting safely into the sea. The other Buffalo had jammed guns and made a high speed dash for the airfield hotly pursued by enemy fighters. A dead stick landing, followed by strafing finished the aircraft, but the pilot was safe! The downed pilot was rescued from a fish trap by launch, steered by an English naval reserve officer.

Two more Buffaloes also joined the fray and lost out to escort fighters: one pilot parachuted from his aircraft. Landing in a palm tree, he was able to borrow a bicycle and return to Butterworth. The fourth Buffalo was damaged but repairable and made a forced landing on Penang Island. The pilot made his way back to Butterworth via the ferry service.

At the end of the attack on Butterworth a MAAF Rapide, delivering supplies to the airfield, suddenly encountered the Buffalo making the dead stick landing just when gathering speed to take off. The Rapide made it, only to be fired upon by a twin engine aircraft that put the instrument panel and an engine out of action. The aircraft flew on one engine to Ipoh, pursued by Ki-43's.

Note: DH Rapide VR-SAV 'Governor Raffles' was one of two Rapides operated by Wearne's Air Services of Singapore that flew this route. This aircraft was destroyed 18th December 1941, by enemy action, at Ipoh.

This was the day when two Blenheims succeeded in getting airborne from Butterworth. One flew alone to Singora and was attacked by fighters seriously wounding the pilot who, with the aid of his crew made it to Alor Star. The pilot was Squadron Leader Arthur Scarf, posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross.

By the evening of the 9th December, Butterworth was in ruins and all non-essential personnel were ordered to evacuate to Ipoh. Within a space of two days the Blenheim force of northern Malaya was down to 10 aircraft with only two being operational, and the Buffaloes hadn't fared much better.



10th December - 20th December 1941

During this period Penang island became the main target for the JAAF, with a raid made on the island on 11th December by a large number of Ki-21's, escorted by Ki-43's. The Ki-21's bombed both Georgetown and ships in the harbor. Casualties were high and the fire station took a direct hit. On the return flight three Ki-43's landed at captured Kota Bharu to refuel from the fuel tanks of abandoned aircraft.

Further attacks on Penang continued on 12th December with



the Japanese using Ki-48's (left) and Ki-51's (right) with an escort of Ki-43's.



The attacks were directed at shipping, mainly auxiliary patrol vessels.

Reinforcements for 21 Squadron came in the form of 4 Buffaloes from 243 Squadron. Two of these carried out a reconnaissance of Penang, Alor Star, Singora and Butterworth before returning to Ipoh. The other two Buffaloes visited Kuantan to assess the damage caused by the Japanese. On the same day a PRU Buffalo (based in Singapore) attempted to reach Singora and was attacked by enemy aircraft, German Bf 109's and Bf 110's according to the pilot! *These aircraft might have been Ki-43's and G3M's (right), the latter playing a major role in the sinking of HMS Prince of Wales and HMS Repulse on 10th December 1941.*



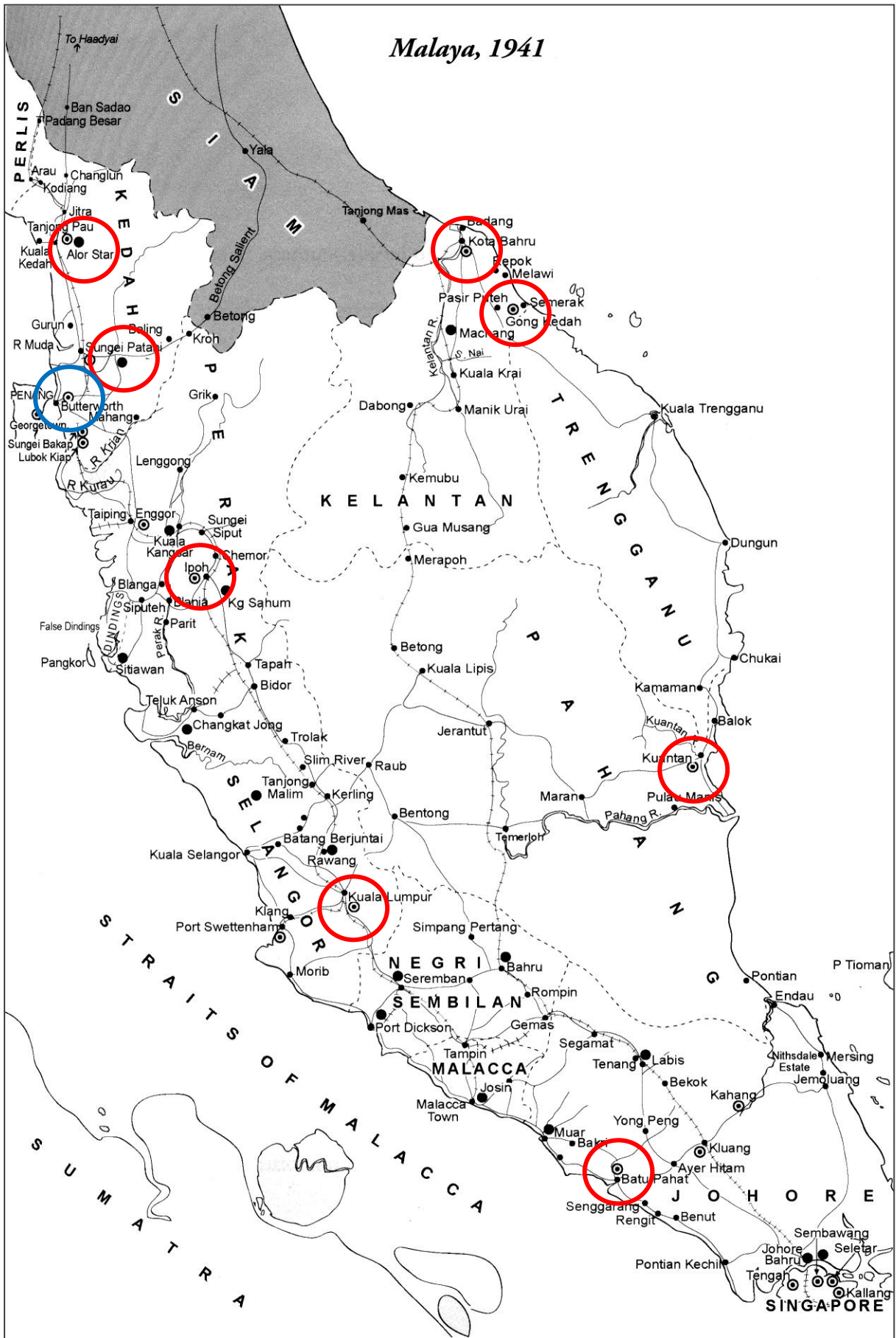
The PRU Buffalo dropped in to Butterworth to refuel before returning to Singapore.

Penang was attacked again on the 13th December by a force of Ki-48's and Ki-51's with vessels in the harbour being targeted. A call for air support resulted in 16 buffaloes of 453 Squadron moving up from their base in Singapore to Ipoh. The first flight then moved on to Butterworth to refuel before taking off to intercept yet another raid on Penang. The action that followed the interception was fast and fierce with losses among the Japanese: one (unserviceable) Buffalo (AN185) flew back to Ipoh, the other two landed at Butterworth. A strafing raid followed the landing.



After refuelling the two remaining aircraft attacked Japanese Army transport held up at the Alor Star river bridge before returning to Ipoh. During the previous action over Penang, other bombers were attacked over Ipoh by the remaining 243 Squadron aircraft.

The following flight of five Buffaloes flown up from Singapore to relieve 21 Squadron at Ipoh were followed by another five who on arrival performed a low level 'shoot up' of the airfield. After landing six aircraft proceeded to Butterworth (one returned to Ipoh as u/s) when a large number of Ki-27's suddenly appeared just after the Buffaloes landed for refuelling. An immediate take-off was ordered and all five were straight into action: two fought the enemy over Penang, the flight leader was shot down, his 'wingman's' aircraft damaged resulting in a forced landing at Kuala Kangsar whilst another Buffalo, damaged as well, returned to Ipoh. The remaining two aircraft were attacked on take-off, one force landing in a padi field where the pilot was rescued by a (local) Malay and returned, by bicycle, to Butterworth airfield. The other aircraft was shot down in flames, the pilot being killed. (*Note: a further account of this action is given separately in this issue.*)



The 14th December saw the arrival at Ipoh of three 21 Squadron Buffaloes (previously u/s) from Butterworth....hard pressed ground crews had made the aircraft flyable and volunteer pilots from 62 Squadron had driven up from Taiping to fly the aircraft to Ipoh. Unfortunately the aircraft remained operationally unserviceable until the 15th, despite valiant efforts being made by the ground crew. A raid on the 15th December by Ki-48's resulted in three Buffaloes from Ipoh intercepting them with one Ki-48 shot down despite the Buffaloes experiencing gun stoppages. The aircraft returned to Singapore and then returned to Ipoh as part of a formation of ten (453 Squadron) Buffaloes.

By the 17th December, due to heavy losses, offensive sorties were cancelled and the Buffaloes roles changed to airfield defence and tactical reconnaissance flights. Meanwhile the Japanese continued to attack the northern airfields, Butterworth was strafed by a large number of Ki-43's, with seven Blenheims claimed as destroyed on the ground! An attack on Ipoh on the 17th was intercepted by a standing patrol of three Buffaloes. Later, eight aircraft were 'scrambled' to intercept 'decoy' aircraft resulting in a separate attack on the airfield by bombers. Buildings and aircraft were destroyed in this raid. Two more raids were made on Ipoh on the 18th, the second following the emergency landing of MVAF Rapide VR-SAV '*Governor Raffles*' carrying spare parts and ammunition that had been attacked, in error, by two Buffaloes. During the attack by Ki-43's and Ki-48's, further Buffaloes were damaged, or destroyed, on the ground and '*Governor Raffles*' received a direct hit with fatalities.

Six Buffaloes of 453 Squadron, and one of 21 Squadron, were made flyable by the morning of the 19th December and flown back to Singapore, with nine serviceable aircraft and five pilots left at Ipoh. Another raid left two aircraft unusable with a following raid leaving minor damage. 453 Squadron moved to Kuala Lumpur that evening! Butterworth had by now been evacuated and personnel were proceeding by road to KL.

Butterworth was captured by the Japanese on the 20th December 1941.

RAF Butterworth's Pilot Casualties

The story of Squadron Leader Arthur Scarf VC has already been told in 'Eastward'. This account deals with another two casualties, this time from the fierce 13th December action.

Flight Lieutenant T A Vigors DFC RAF was acting CO of 453 Squadron RAAF. On the date given he led four other Buffaloes to Butterworth (the fifth had to return u/s to Ipoh). Landing at Butterworth Flt Lt Vigors was informed by the early warning system in use, an airman waving a red flag before going to ground in a monsoon drain, that Japanese aircraft were heading towards the airfield. A mad scramble to get all aircraft off the ground ensued with Flt Lt Vigors and Sgt O'Mara RAAF pairing up as they climbed towards Penang where they attacked a large number of Ki-27's (*above right*) a highly manoeuvrable aircraft as Flt Lt Vigors (a Battle of Britain veteran) was to find out...he received a direct hit in his fuel tank which was situated under his feet! He bailed out, was attacked by the Japanese as he descended, to eventually to land on top of the Penang mountains.



His wounds comprised severe burns to the hands, arms and legs, also his face. Also a bullet had passed through his left thigh leaving him with a flesh wound. He was rescued by a Malay father and his son who applied a tourniquet to the wound and then stretchered him, all day and through a thunderstorm, down the mountain where he was taken to hospital. He was evacuated that evening when it was decided to evacuate Europeans civilians and hospital patients from Penang to Singapore. Fl Lt Vigors eventually escaped from Singapore and made it to India.

Sergeant R R Oelrich MiD of 453 Squadron, RAAF was killed as he took off from Butterworth airstrip on the 13th. According to Pilot Officer G L Angus RAAF, Sgt Oelrich was set upon immediately by the Japanese aircraft, crashing from treetop height with his aircraft burning furiously. His body was later recovered by a RAAF Chaplin and taken to the airfield for burial. That evening the remaining pilots, shaken by the experience, went into town (Penang) visiting the 'Station Hotel' (believed to be the *FMR Railway building*, below left) for a meal and drinks and then onto the *Majestic Theatre* (below right), probably with a trishaw race taking place between the two buildings!

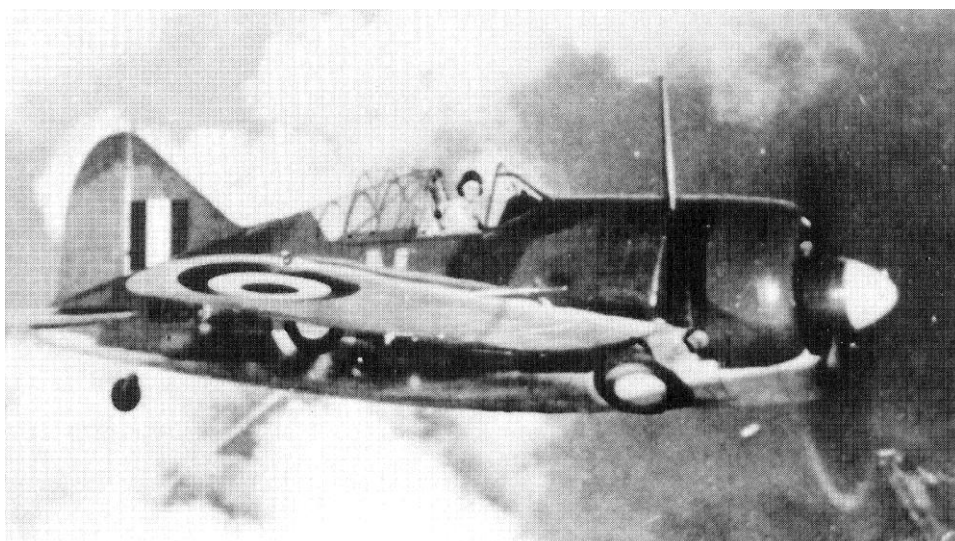


That Sgt Oelrich was taken to Butterworth airfield for burial raises the question of where was he buried? His name appears on the Singapore Memorial but with no military grave.



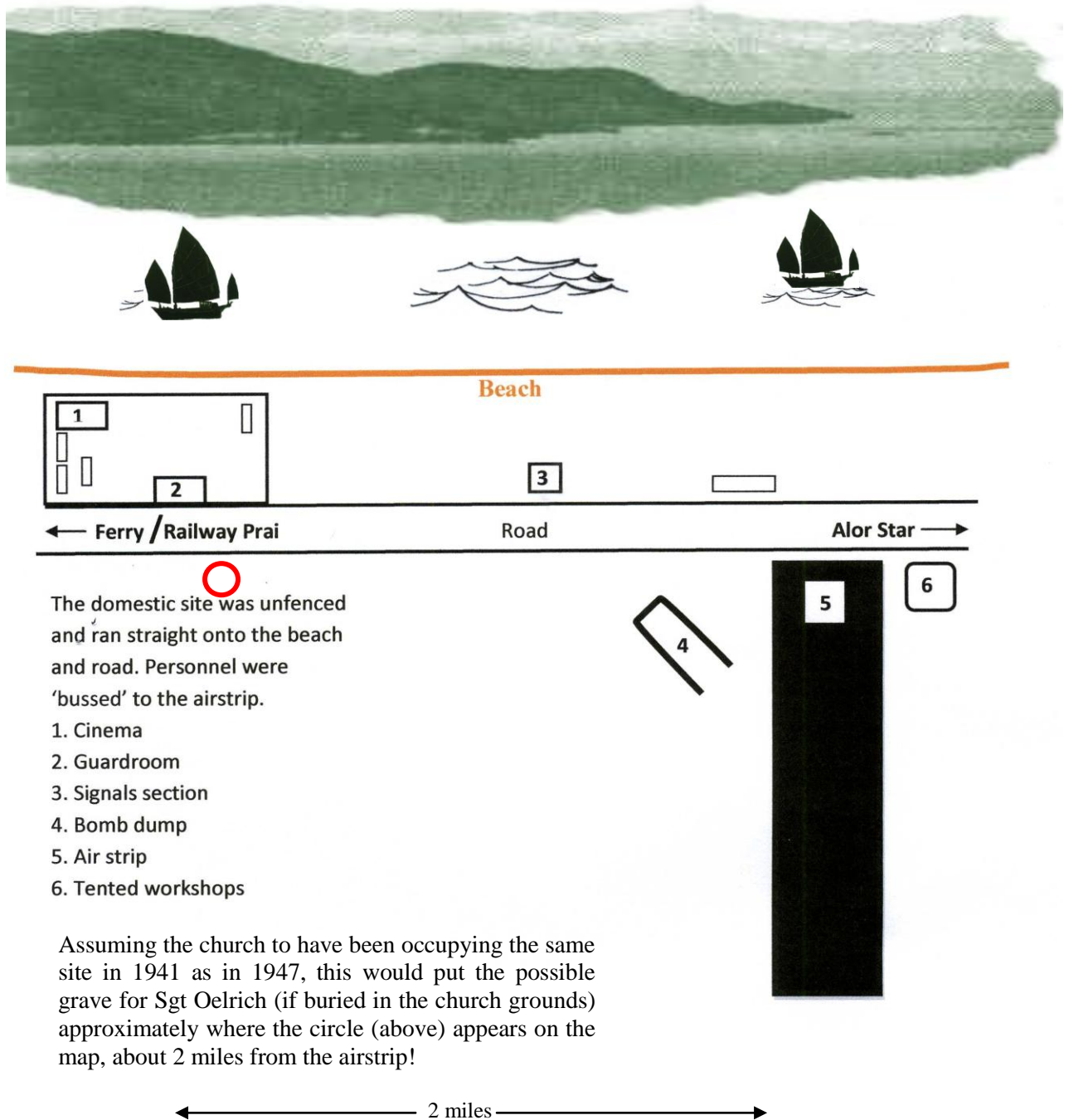
This resulted in a little bit of detective work using maps drawn from memory by colleagues of previous member Duncan Gray. Duncan and colleagues served at Butterworth in the late 1940's and the hand drawn site maps indicated that RAF Butterworth was at a different location to the base as shown in 1950's, and later, photographs. This is confirmed by the map drawn by member Les Downey showing the position of the 1946 domestic site in relation to the air strip.

Going back to one of the other maps c1947, a multi-faith church is marked on an outline drawing of the domestic site. Perhaps this was where Sgt Ronald Oelrich was buried?



The above photograph shows Sgt Oelrich in TD-N W8158 over Singapore. Coincidentally Pilot Officer D Brown RNZAF was killed in this aircraft on the same day, 13th December 1941, as Sgt Oelrich was killed at Butterworth.

RAF Butterworth 1946, adapted from a sketch map by Les Downey.



To Australia and back against the odds by Dave Croft

Speaking often with Pete Masters, a RAF serviceman based in Singapore during the Japanese offensive against Malaya and Singapore who managed to escape the Japanese and get to Colombo, he told me of a weekly Catalina flight carrying microfilm letters and VIP passengers that he used to watch during off-duty times. The aircraft, taking off from the lake at Koggola in Ceylon, made a perilous long distance non-stop flight to Australia, and vice versa, effectively linking the broken Empire Air Mail Scheme that was successfully flown until the fall of Singapore.

Intrigued I decided to find out more and thought I might share my findings with members in this wartime anniversary issue, as it is a story of courage and endurance at all stages when up against the odds.

The Empire Air Mail Routes

The story starts with the introduction, by Imperial Airways, of the Short S23 Empire flying boat in 1938 to extend the Empire Air Mail Scheme to Malaya. The first flight, on 17th February of the new four engine flying boat was by Empire flying boat *Centurion*, flying from the UK, across India then to Singapore. *Centurion* was accompanied by *Coolangatta*, flying direct to Singapore and arriving 2nd March.

Meanwhile QANTAS was preparing for the flying boat service in Singapore, but not with the help of the RAF and RAAF; they had other commitments!

Instead the Royal Singapore Flying Club gave QANTAS use of their float plane DH 86.

The proving connection to Australia from Singapore departed 18th March arriving at Brisbane early April. The UK-Australia return air mail and passenger route had shown it to be a feasible venture, using local air line services to take the mail and passengers to different off-route destinations on the Indian sub-continent, with QANTAS DH 86 biplanes (right) doing the same from Singapore to Hong Kong via Bangkok.

The service started with two aircraft, *Camilla* and *Cordelia*, taking off from Southampton on 26th June 1938. The destination was Singapore with a refuelling stop (among many) at Glugor Bay in Penang. On the regular service: 'The alighting area at Glugor was 6 nm from Bayan Lepas airport. Depending on the service, the alighting was often at midnight, departing again at 0300 to arrive at Singapore for breakfast at the Raffles Hotel.' At Singapore passengers for Australia would transfer to QANTAS aircraft *Challenger* for this part of the route. From

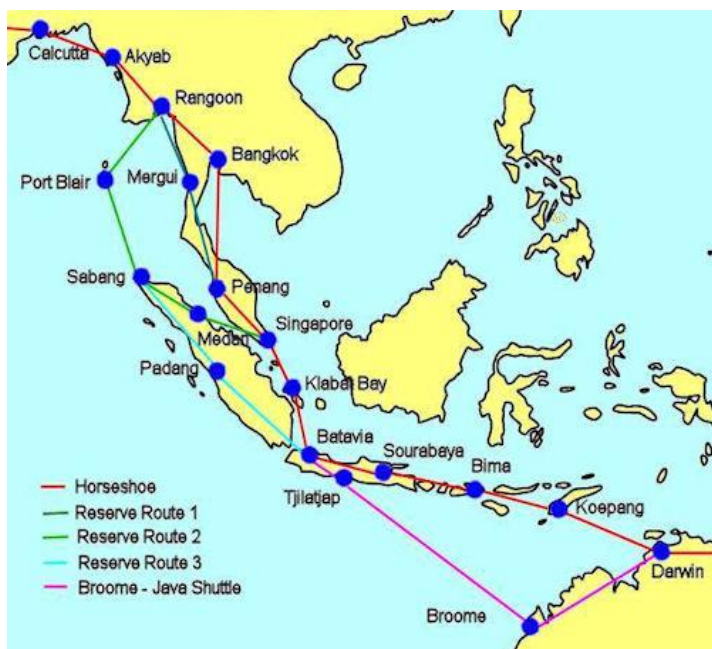


August 1939 the S23 flying boats ordered by TEAL were to be flown to New Zealand using the same established route. The first aircraft, *Australia*, bound for New Zealand sank after a channel collision at Basra. The aircraft was salvaged then repaired on site



and returned to the UK in 1940, only to be scrapped later. The next aircraft flown out was *Aotearoa* with *Awarua* to follow. *Awarua* left for NZ in March 1940, and in accordance with wartime regulations was painted with red, white and blue national insignia stripes. Also the passenger windows were white washed for reasons of international security!

Wartime restrictions, and the enemy, meant the need for contingency plans to be made with



different routes becoming a necessity. The closure of the Mediterranean for civil flights early in the war led to major changes although the Far Eastern route was unaffected until the Japanese started to show aggressive tendencies towards Siam (Thailand) and Malaya. However the closeness of the Japanese forces led to the reserve routes, or phases, being implemented as the situation worsened. Of the four phases planned, phase III staged through the Andaman Islands and Sabang before turning to Penang, phase IV steered clear of the Malay Peninsula, directing the aircraft down the west coast of Sumatra and

Batavia from where a shuttle service to Singapore operated.

As the situation worsened the Empire flying boats were used to ferry ammunition, fuel, wounded and also to evacuate personnel, sometimes large numbers of 40 – 50, and in one case 60 passengers in one airlift!

There were losses among the flying boats! At the fall of Singapore on 15th February 1942 and the advance of the Japanese towards New Guinea and Australia the losses were heavy until, finally, only two flying boats, *Camilla* and *Coriolanus* were still in operational use.

The loss of Singapore had finally split the UK – Australia Empire Air Mail link!



The Secret Order of the Double Sunrise

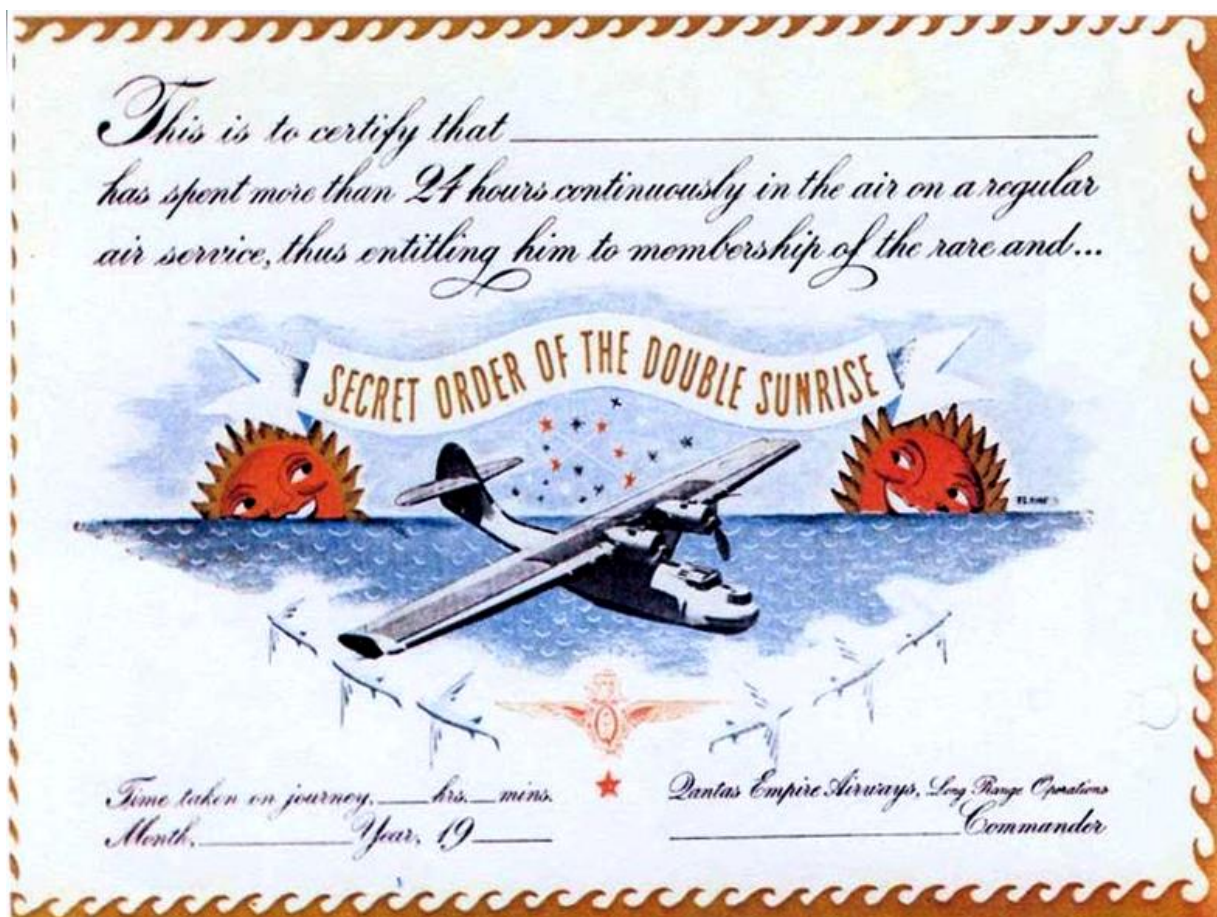
A suggestion that a new air route to Australia might be possible despite the strong Japanese presence in the Indian Ocean developed into reality in 1943 when five Catalina's were supplied by the (British) Air Ministry to QANTAS Empire Airways to start a route between the RAF base at Koggala, Ceylon and Swan River in Western Australia. The route envisaged covered 3580 nautical miles, the flight time would be around 28 hours and every opportunity to reduce weight and improve 'mileage' throughout the journey was planned for, including the fitting of extra internal fuel cells and an emergency fuel dump on the Cocos Islands. Because of the extra fuel taken on board, a long take-off run was needed and calm inland waters a necessity. Koggala Lake was ideal, being the base for RAF Catalinas and Sunderlands and associated engineering workshops. Nedlands, as the QANTAS base on the



Swan River, was built up from scratch within a few months. Planning and proving the route was carried out by the RAF before handing over to QANTAS personnel with the first QANTAS flight using Catalina *Altair Star* taking off 29th June 1943. On this first flight from Nedlands the passengers were the aircraft RAF delivery crew. Radio silence was maintained throughout the flight (as in all subsequent flights) and at night total blackout was observed, except smoking was allowed!

On subsequent flights VIP passengers (up to 3) were carried, diplomatic mail and airmail as microfilm 'air graph' letters made up the freight, to be printed out in full at the destination bases and forwarded by normal air/sea routes. One 'Double Sunrise' VIP passenger familiar to readers of '*Eastward*' was Major Tom Harrisson, the leader of a 'Z' Force special unit in Borneo in 1945. In his book *World Within: A Borneo Story* he writes 'It was quite something to fly to Australia early in 1944. One did the journey in two-engine Dakotas, pleasantly reliable, unpleasantly seated on aluminium benches. There were interludes in North Africa, five days' breakdown in Palestine, three weeks wait in Ceylon. From Ceylon, the Japanese lay in a deep belt eastwards. The only way of getting on was in a Catalina two-engine seaplane, specially equipped with extra tanks and therefore ordinarily capable of taking only two (3) passengers. As we took off before dawn from Galle in the south of Ceylon, we saw the sun rise over the Indian Ocean. We saw the sun rise again as we came towards Swan Lake in Western Australia, after more than a day non-stop without seeing land anywhere on the way.'

What Tom Harrisson failed to mention was that each passenger who flew the route non-stop received a certificate from the aircraft captain, the *Secret Order of the Double Sunrise*, a much sought after memento!



The QANTAS *Double Sunrise* 'airline', using Catalina's, made 271 journeys from 1943 to 1945 when the route was taken over by Liberators and Lancastrians. The Catalina safety record was excellent and only on one occasion was the aircraft fired upon by the enemy. This was when a *Double Sunrise* aircraft landed at the Cocos Islands to collect a naval officer and

transport him to Koggala. As the crew refuelled the aircraft from 4 gallon cans the 'weekly Japanese bomber' spotted them and attacked but missed them and flew on. No casualties and no damage!



Remote island Supply Caches

Interestingly, fuel caches on remote islands such as the Cocos Islands were taken there by small merchant vessels part manned by RAF volunteers, primarily for refuelling the RAF Catalina's patrolling the Indian Ocean. Pete Masters, mentioned at the beginning of this story, volunteered as a wireless 'sparks' tradesman for this job after escaping Singapore and eventually reaching Ceylon. He served aboard the RAFA SS *Shengking* and says *'I am sitting cross legged on the far right of the front row. Second from the left on the front is Sgt W. Birch, the other 'sparks'.*



Not unusual for those days I was the only regular on board. These wartime service lads never ceased to amaze me with their cheerful acceptance of their lot, but also of the courage they showed in difficult situations. The extremely dangerous nature of the cargo, mainly high octane petrol and explosives in many forms, offered little hope of survival should the vessel take a hit. This was further emphasised when the sister ship to the Shengking, also leased to the RAF, blew up with no survivors!

A look from the other side; a German's submariners view of Malaya

As mentioned in a previous newsletter the Kriegsmarine, in the form of submarines, and submarine supply ships, maintained a presence in the Indian Ocean in the latter part of WW II. Penang was the main base for them and our story is of the German crews in Penang and also the experiences of a U-boat officer who made the war supplies trip to the Far East but whose vessel had to turn back on the return run, becoming a 'prisoner' of the Japanese, followed by being a 'captive' of the returning British in 1945.

During February 1942 the Japanese made Penang their submarine base for the Far East. Late in 1943 the Kriegsmarine established Penang as their principal base for the Far Eastern U-boat Fleet where they could repair and resupply the proposed 'monsoon boats' operations in the Indian Ocean. Although Penang was to be the U-boat base it was inadequate for major repairs and these were to be carried out at Keppel Harbour in Singapore (the Germans were denied entry to Naval Dockyard on the island by the Japanese).

In April 1943 U-178 was sent to Penang to establish the base for operations although U-511 arrived before U-178, on 15th July. U-511 was presented to the Japanese for design copying and from Penang sailed to Kobe, a city port in Japan.

4 'monsoon boats' arrived at Penang during October/November and berthed at Swettenham Pier (*below*). Apart from the U-boats the Kriegsmarine also 'hosted' 3 Italian FE submarines now under German orders following the Italian capitulation in Europe, also at the Imperial Airways base (as it was still known to the Germans) at Glugor there were two Arado 196 seaplanes and a Japanese JE13A floatplane.

By late 1943 U-boat combat missions were being changed to the transport of essential war



supplies between Japan and Germany. Among the transport of materials such as mercury, tungsten, tin, rubber and quinine the U-boats also carried replacement U-boat parts and torpedoes for the 'monsoon boats', essential as the parts were not available in the Far East. Also use was made of innovative local expertise such as that found in the Swettenham Pier workshops where some complex parts were able to be manufactured locally.

Four more 'monsoon boats' arrived at Penang between August and September 1944 but the situation had now become more dangerous as allied bombing and submarine minelaying was intensifying. Leaving and entering Penang Harbour was not a safe proposition!

The Germans U-boat administration was based in Northam Road in Georgetown, with additional offices and accommodation in the Elysee Hotel and at a requisitioned villa on Bell Road. For rest and recuperation leave the crews were able to go swimming at the Springtide Hotel, Penang Swimming Club and Mount Pleasure. They also had use of the Penang Hill resort and also stayed at Fraser's Hill and the Cameron Highlands. An introductory information booklet was also issued to new arrivals: *'Dress within Penang city is always civilian clothes. A special walking out uniform (white) is issued from the German Service Department. To make yourself recognizable to the Police Department, each German must carry a pin of the black, white and yellow cockade'*. Advice on behaviour towards the Japanese was also issued.

The Shanghi Hotel (demolished 1964) had been requisitioned by the Japanese at a German request for somewhere to relax for off-duty officers; it was used as a dance hall and bordello (in RAF parlance, a 'knocking shop').

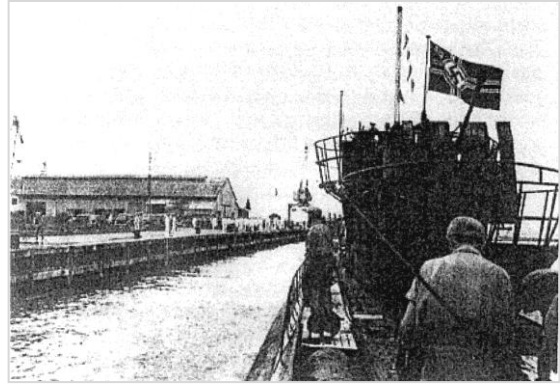
Regarding food rations for the German crews, the general food shortages experienced by the civilian population of Georgetown, and to a degree by the Japanese as well, did not seem to effect the Germans; they received ryebread from a specialist bakery, meat from a pre-war German immigrant butcher and had plenty of vegetables. In addition they had another source of food, the refrigerator ship *SS Nanking* was travelling between Australia and Burma throughout May 1942 when it was captured by a German raider. The *Nanking* carried vast quantities of canned and frozen meat, also bacon, butter, flour, fruit and vegetables. The ship was escorted to Penang and tied up at Swettenham Pier for the rest of the war for feeding and supplying the U-boat crews.

Crews were forbidden to eat and drink at roadside stalls although the Asahi beer was allowed and seemed to be popular!

The adventures of U-181

U-181 left Bordeaux Harbour on 16th March 1944, destination Penang, then Singapore followed by replenishment at Djarkata before departing for Europe. The vessel was carrying 85 tonnes of mercury in steel bottles in place of the standard ballast iron in the keel to Singapore.

After a long journey around the Cape of Good Hope and into the Indian Ocean, via a circuitous route to arrive at Swettenham Pier on 8th August 1944 (*right*). A few days away from the U-boat, relaxing, swimming and drinking Asahi beer refreshed the crew before starting routine servicing and some repairs before going to Singapore. Two months of servicing, repair and preparation for the homeward journey, with the added delivery of mercury to Singapore, followed. Surplus torpedoes were offloaded at Penang for the 'monsoon boats' and the diesel engines, compressors etc were overhauled by both crew and local dockyard engineers, perhaps to a degree of accuracy not really required! Cracked bearings of the trimming pump were handed over to the workshop for copying: the work done was excellent and the cracks faithfully reproduced on the new bearings! New bearings were speedily made!



At Keppell Harbour dry dock in Singapore, the 85 tonnes of mercury were rapidly off-loaded by the dockside labour force, watched over by armed Japanese guards. The mercury 'ballast' was replaced by powdered tungsten packed in cast iron boxes. Also Molybdenum and rubber was taken onboard. Repair facilities were better in Singapore than at Penang, and damage from an altercation with a Beaufighter (off the coast of India) was speedily repaired and an external coat of paint applied. Refuelling followed, using Asian diesel oil from Borneo, with a different viscosity to the diesel fuel the crew was familiar with but the engines coped with it. The Asian lubricating oil was a different matter and the low viscosity was to cause serious problems later on.

By the end of September 1944, U-181 was moved to Djarkata to take on food supplies for the long voyage back to Europe. The crew spent the next 10 days on leave at the Dutch colonial resort of Buitenzorg before departing for the long voyage home.

1st November, U-181, after a long chase attacked and sank the *USS Fort Lee* but paid the price when the bearings of the main diesels failed, the Asian lubricating fuel being a contributory factor. Running, slowly, on one diesel engine, the vessel returned to Djarkata, reaching the harbour on 3rd January 1945. U-181 then moved to Singapore to enlist (!) the help of FIAT diesel engineers stranded in Singapore when Italy capitulated. The FIAT engineers were in Singapore as support engineers to the previous Italian FE submarine fleet and now 'guests' of the Japanese Navy! U-181 was still in Keppell Harbour when Germany surrendered in Europe and on 9th May the Japanese took over the vessel. Apart from specialists who volunteered to advise the Japanese on the operation of the U-boat, all other German officers and crewmen, from both Singapore and Penang, were moved to Batu Pahat (map, page 13) on mainland Malaya. The 'volunteers' preferred to work for the Japanese Navy rather than be 'guests' of the Japanese Army!

Organisation of the U-boats was certainly different with the Japanese. Communication between Germans and Japanese was in a form of English! Additional sleeping accommodation was installed as each Japanese crewman required his own bunk, no sharing on different watches! For various tasks, where one German crewman sufficed, 3-4 Japanese was the norm. The crew numbers doubled and chaos reigned; the Japanese were noisy, shouting commands with plenty of hectic activity all around, but despite the chaos U-181, now I-501 of the Japanese Imperial Navy, was ready for action by the end of July 1945. It didn't happen, and following Japan's surrender, all German personnel were returned to Singapore. Following the arrival of the British, the Germans were marched to Changi where they were accommodated in the former prison guards 'bungalows' outside the forbidding walls of the prison. They helped to set Singapore get back on its feet after the long Japanese occupation and in June 1946 all German ex-Navy personnel were repatriated to Europe.

Memories of Butterworth in the late 40's by RB

Relatives of the late Duncan Gray passed his Butterworth file to the Association following his death. Among the contents were a number of letters etc from colleagues who were at Butterworth in the late 40's/early 50's. The following is from Duncan's file.

'Eventually we passed out and were sent to Burtonwood for kitting out with tropical gear and await overseas postings, For three weeks we languished here, with the odd excursion into Warrington while super postings like British Embassy, Washington and, perhaps, Tokyo passed us by. Those of us who were left of classes TL 32a/b were given Malaya. Relief showed as the suspense ended. A few more days were spent kicking our heels in the large, mostly empty, huts marveling at the U.S. toilet arrangements – row upon row of shining porcelain seating, neither one separated from another – before we were bundled off in the early autumn rain to Liverpool docks where we embarked on HMT Geordic. Other passengers included Army and RN personnel, WAAF's, ATS and officers wives and families.

Within hours we cast off to the strains of Auld Lang Syne from a pipe and drum band, marching and countermarching along the dockside below us. Virtually my last sight of 'Blighty' was the Liver Bird on its high perch.

After three weeks of fairly uneventful sailing with a stop at Port Said, with the usual entertainment, and one at Colombo, we arrived in Singapore. On disembarkation our lot had increased by one mosquito net and two blankets. Final postings were then issued. Most of the troops and all female (service) passengers were then allocated to the various bases on the island.

After a few days in Changi the remaining few RAF men were taken by 3-ton gharries to Tebrau, the staging post in Johore Bahru, our final destination still uncertain.

A few days later, perhaps a fortnight, in which time we had seen our first giant praying mantis and lines of marching ants and experiencing living in a rubber plantation, awful food and a water shortage, vehicles arrived and we were transported back to Singapore, this time to the railway station where we were re-united with some of the other troops from the ship. Here we embarked into the narrow gauge carriages, the army completing the 'payload'. Twelve hours later, with wood ash in our hair and eyes, the troop train pulled in to Kuala Lumpur and those of us who were left were ushered on to our night train, complete with 'sleepers'. A further twelve hours spent intermittently sleeping, eating and playing cards saw us at Prai, the northernmost point of that branch of the railway. From here the remaining RAF personnel were taken by 3-tonner to Butterworth camp. Our billets were ex-Japanese



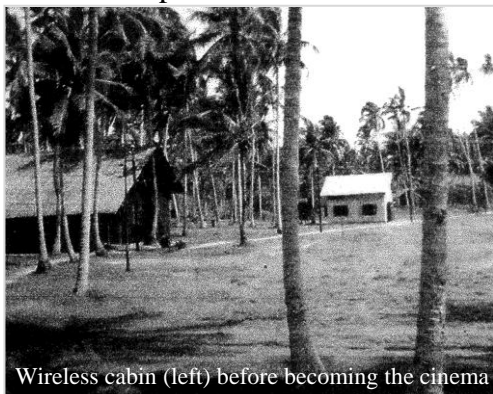
bashas with sleeping ledges on either side of a wide central gangway, terminating at either end with large, double barn doors. Windows were openings in the wooden wall with barbed-wire nailed across them, vertically and horizontally to form a wide lattice. The whole was roofed with attap. The huts were interspersed among the trees in a coconut grove.

The RAF Station was in two parts, the living accommodation and administration about one

mile north of Butterworth kampong and the airfield two miles further north. The sea, where it flowed between the mainland and Penang Island, was easily accessible from the camp through a badly maintained barbed-wire fence.

Across a short stretch of sandy grass from the billet lay another wood and attap-roofed building. This was HQ and Admin, at the billet end of which the signals cabin was located. The Signals Officer, Flt.Lt. Power's office occupied part of a small building slightly to the

side of the pathway between the two buildings. Flt.Sgt. Flowerdew was in charge of the cabin and Cpl. Ron Coleman was i/c telephone exchange.



the edge of the airfield and, of course, the Section moved too. These buildings were constructed with wood and asbestos sheet, with corrugated asbestos for roofing but still no glass in the window frames! The ARSS's moved with us but the teleprinter did not!

After a period of time, I became part of the HF/DF crew. The DF cabin was located on the northern side of and about 600 yards from the main runway. VHF/DF was about 300 yards to the south of this. The HF/DF cabin used a *Marconi-Adcock* system with a central 'sensing' aerial. *'One of my fellow operators was able to give a Class A bearing to an aircraft which then informed the operator that he was over the English Channel.'*

Our 'customers' included many service and civilian aircraft from Negombo to Singapore. We also sometimes heard from a clandestine French station somewhere in French Indo-China as well as the odd bod in Djakarta. We had all the nasties and as we were surrounded by ditches, were regularly visited by the DDT wallah. During the day we usually had a herd of goats for company. Most of the time we worked on a 3-watch system that occasionally became 2-watch. Whilst on duty we were self sufficient bringing with us packed sandwiches, loose tea, tinned milk, rich cake and whatever else could be inveigled out of the cookhouse staff. We also carried a casket of water.

After the declaration of the Emergency we also carried a rifle and five rounds of ammunition. The method of heating the water for a brew was in a billycan suspended over a diesel fuel induced fire between bricks just outside the hut, with a sheet of bent tin acting as a wind shield. After making the final brew one night I was rather alarmed to receive a telephone call from the Control Tower asking if I had seen or heard any signs of a tiger? I hadn't but made sure both doors of the hut were firmly bolted. A little later I heard a crash from outside and curious to know the reason, grabbed a torch and cautiously opened the door nearest the fireplace, only to see that what I suspected was the wind, had blown the fire's wind shield over. Breathing a sigh of relief I went back into the warmth of the hut, sat down and awaited possible calls from passing aircraft. It was a quiet night!

At about 6 am, I opened the door to make my early morning cuppa and there, just in front of the door in the loose sand which I had smoothed over the night before, lay a pug mark about four inches across. I left this untouched to impress on my relief that it wasn't the cushy job that everyone suspected.

A few nights later we had a report that a black panther-like animal had been shot by one of the RAF Regiment (Malaya) guards occupying a post on the outskirts of the airfield.

Our equipment consisted of three AR88's, one field telephone, a slightly decrepit Creed teleprinter (which was rarely active) and an even more decrepit signals typewriter.

A few days after my arrival I celebrated my 19th birthday with a freshly crushed orange drink, a doughnut and a slice of coconut burfii in the NAAFI, another larger hut, on stilts, which was situated between the officer's and sergeant's messes.

In the name of progress, headquarters and admin, were removed to more civilised buildings located on





A Story for Christmas

3205 RAF Servicing Commando Unit in the Far East from R. E. Davis

This is the Far East story of 3205 RAF Servicing Commando featuring the escapades of RAF servicemen re-occupying Japanese held territory towards, and at the end, of WW II. R. E. Davis, was a member of 3205 and later served in Singapore.

29th September 1944: 3205 RAF Servicing Commando Unit was reformed after being temporarily disbanded. The two corporals who had 'won' the Champagne at Beny-Sur-Mer had managed to keep together and were now the first personnel to be posted to a new R & SU forming at Merston. They learned that 3205 SC were moving out from Bognor early on the 30th and somehow it was 'arranged' that the old CO would be driving around the perimeter road at Merston, at 0530 on the 30th, where they would be picked up, complete with kit and spent the following weeks wondering, but not really worrying, if they were officially AWOL.

RAF Old Sarum was the new destination. We had three days to pack all unit equipment, except personal arms and ammo, for shipment overseas. Some personnel left the unit, being of very low 'demob' group numbers, and were replaced by personnel from other SC's, mainly 3209



and 3210. On 2nd October all were given 14 days embarkation leave with orders to report back to N0.1 PDC at West Kirby. Here we were 'processed' for the Far East. Khaki drill of unbelievable antiquity was issued including enormous topees of, we guessed, 1800 vintage! As these were never worn, but replaced as soon as we reached Bombay with bush hats it is difficult to understand the thinking process in

issuing them at all. There was only one disturbance at WK; the unit paraded for FFI (Free From Infection) inspection and almost mutinied when it was found the MO was a woman doctor and they had, in the immortal words, 'to drop them, lift 'em and cough'.

On 2nd November we sailed from Liverpool on the *SS Otranto* (right) having an uneventful month long voyage to Bombay, landing on 4th December.



A journey by train, that took 8 days, from Bombay to Chittagong in Eastern Bengal, was interesting, if painfully slow. We saw many aspects of Indian life en-route and learned of one of the useful side advantages of Indian Railways locomotives was the ability to supply boiling water for char brewing, washing, shaving and laundry to 175 men at practically any time of the day or night. It only required a few minutes stop but the demand on steam may have contributed to the slow journey! We arrived at RAF Petanga, a few miles outside Chittagong, on the 19th December and learned that by crossing the Bramaputra River en-route we had officially entered South East Asia Command (SEAC). Actually the unit was reformed officially by Formation Order No.299, dated 6th December 1944, under HQ 224 Group (through HQ 902 Wing) which also formed No. 3207 SC under 221 Group. The Unit's base, eventually, was to be at 'Double Moorings' on the coast about 3 miles out from Chittagong.

The next few days were spent urgently drawing vehicles (very old and tattered), tents, cooking equipment etc. and personal issues of 'jungle greens', i.e. dark green denim battledress, shorts, puttees, bush hats, kukris and dyeing our UK issue underwear, handkerchiefs etc in vile smelling green dye. We drew technical equipment and aircraft spares from 92 ASP Petanga and from 67 Squadron, breaking off for a few hours for Christmas Dinner, 1944.

2 January 1945: We moved out, carrying 50 tons of aircraft fuel, 10 tons of 20mm and .303 ammo plus oxygen, oils, glycol etc, for the invasion of Akyab island off the coast of Burma some 250 miles south. The first 100 miles was on roads, rough, but recognizable as such but gradually deteriorating to tracks cut by bulldozers through virgin bush until we broke out onto the coastal strip on the western side of the Arakan mountain range. Here we found the most marvelous firm wide sands on which we could travel as fast as the poor transport could manage. This part of the trip was a revelation to us mainly city bred chaps!

The heat, with no shelter of course, was really something but resulted in quite fantastic mirages when we could clearly see our own vehicles heading towards us, but of course getting no nearer. We also saw an unheard of sight, the whole beach for miles ahead turned brilliant red, but we never reached this red sand as it appeared to roll up and move away as we approached. By travelling flat out in the CO's Jeep we eventually made out that the colour came from literally millions of tiny red crabs that buried beneath the sands in seconds as we approached. The only break from the heat came at the obligatory 'brew up' stops when everyone just dropped all clothing off and ran into the nearby sea of the Bay of Bengal, Even this was a doubtful pleasure as we found ourselves attacked by hordes of tiny needle like fish in the shallows and the deeper water a few feet out was alive with huge jelly fish and worse, the deadly blanket fish! *(The deadly 'blanket fish' would appear to be the Manta Ray, a common inhabitant of the Bay of Bengal).*

The trip was broken periodically by deep chaungs, inlets from the sea that ran miles inland, appearing like the mouths of rivers. Most were very deep at high tide and we had no option but to sit and wait until the dropping tide permitted a sometimes precarious crossing, the flow out in some cases being like a raging river.

4th January 1945: We reached 'Foul Point', our take-off point for Akyab Island a few miles off-shore. Here we had to manhandle all our gear down from a high headland to a small beach where we embarked into quite small LCM's. We now learned, very much to every ones relief, that the Japs had evacuated the island and we walked ashore unopposed onto North Beach from which we marched several miles humping as much equipment as possible to the main airstrip, which in fact was a pre-war Imperial Airways aerodrome with a red brick built runway and several bombed out hangars.

The next few days were spent ferrying all our supplies from the beach to the airstrip in 5 very old 5 tonners and were ready by the 8th January.

The first aircraft in were 8 Spitfire Mk 8's of 67 Squadron under their CO, S/Ldr Day. Several sorties were flown and a few shocks experienced...the first 'scramble' Verey light to be fired set fire to the long, very dry 'elephant' grass surrounding the strip. In no time at all we had a full scale bush fire on our hands and it took many hours and help from hundreds of natives to finally beat it out. Everyone was completely dehydrated and whacked out!

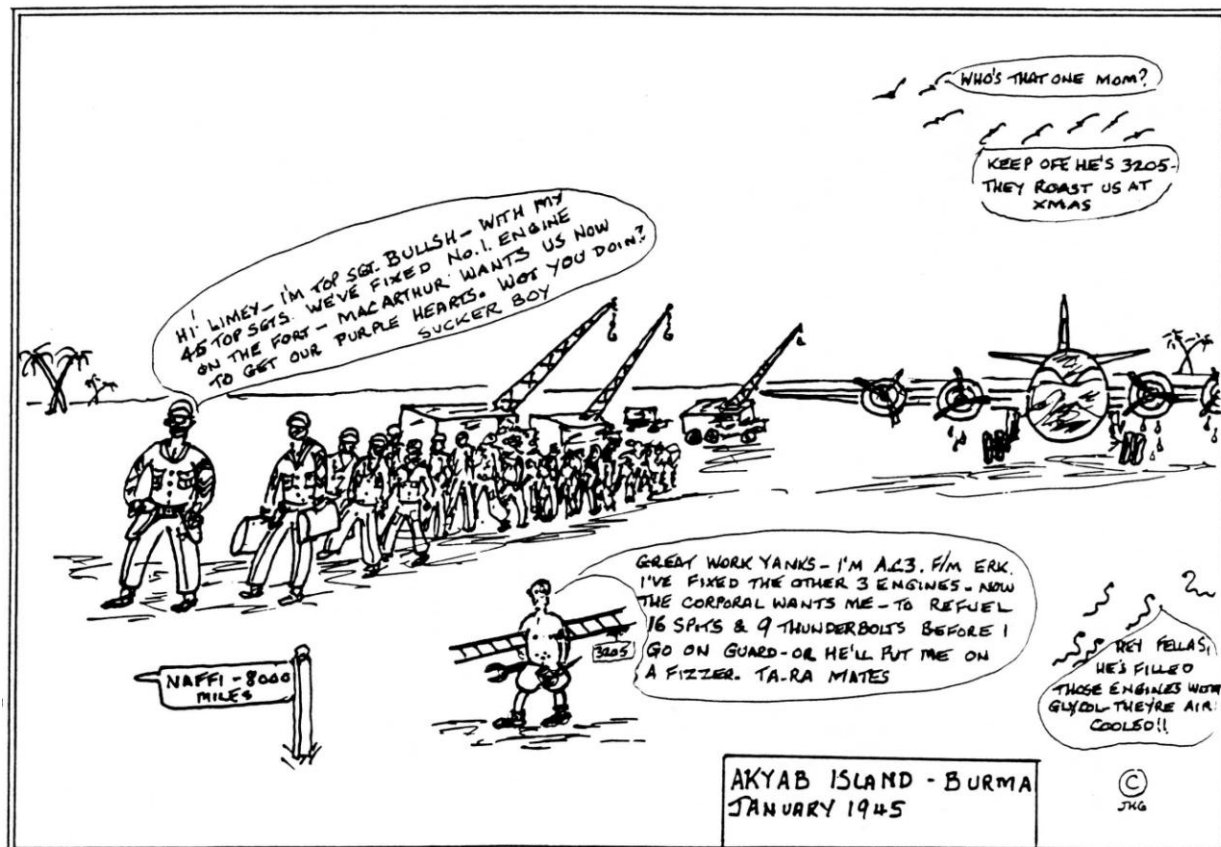
We also found that the brick surface of the runway broke up very quickly under the weight of aircraft and a lot of minor damage was done to tailplanes and rudders by flying chips of bricks. But it kept it the riggers in practice with their canvas and dope for days.

9th January 1945: Several air raids today. Six Spitfires from 67 Squadron shot down 6 Japanese Oscars with only 1 Spitfire damaged. This bucked us all up, except the AA gunners of the Indian Army around the strip almost off-set the victory by hitting an incoming Dakota and shooting most of its tail away. This was completely rebuilt by our own men using local materials and was able to fly back to its base at Calcutta earning high praise for the unit.

During the following weeks we settled to a regular programme of Spitfire sorties, interspersed with the occasional visitors of Dakotas, US Vengeance bombers, Hudsons, Curtiss Commandos, Catalinas, even down to a single Tiger Moth. A US Super Fortress made an emergency landing having lost two engines over Rangoon. They 'parked' near to the main dispersal area and being clad in shining aluminium made an excellent 'marker' in the sunlight for Jap raiders. They were asked to move some distance off the main strip but refused. However they changed their minds when the CO offered to fire the grass around them. We

were impressed and somewhat amused to observe the USAAF in action when several Dakotas and Commandos brought in swarms of technicians. Everyone appeared to be a Top Sergeant or higher. Rows of tents went up, an ice cream making plant being a priority in the erection programme. Shower, baths and a cinema also went up, all to fit two new engines and they were still there when we left weeks later.

18th January 1945: Lord Louis Mountbatten, Supreme Commander SEA arrived at the strip, most impressive! First a HQ Dakota, sprouting radio equipment in all directions, landed



followed by another that disgorged troops who ran out to form a large circle. They comprised squads of three men, British and Indian OR's and a Gurka. From each squad there was one with rifle and bayonet standing, another with a Tommy gun knelt in front of him and the third with a Bren gun lay down in front of them, all facing outwards. No one was allowed inside this circle of soldiers!

Following was a third Dakota carrying the 'Supremo' that taxied into the centre. The CO and a few other officers were called in and then the whole show fell apart when the 'Chief' walked across and shouted "Gather round chaps" and gave us an impromptu address (*bottom left*). Pure theatre but the lads loved it. We were also visited and addressed by the Earl of Bandon AOC 224 Group and on 28th January by Air Marshal Sir Guy Garrod KCB OBE MC DFC Allied Air Commander in Chief SEAC (*right*).



Interest, followed by amazement and deep concern, was expressed at HQ Calcutta following receipt of a signal from the unit calling for an urgent supply of sanitary towels **‘S.T. Airwomen, for the use of’**. It might have been more tactful to have accompanied this signal with an explanation that there were no instrument filters to be had anywhere in the Arakan Theatre and that we were in danger of all flying of Spitfires cease. The fine gauze in the ‘towels’ made an excellent substitute, but it was thought that without an explanation our signal might have a greater impact at HQ. We got our towels!

Among aircraft new to us, we now regularly received Beaufighters of 89, 176 and 292 Squadrons, Liberators of 99 Squadron and some Thunderbolts that some units in the Group were converting to from the Spitfires.

By the 10th February our task was finished, the regular squadrons having arrived and settled in. We were moved by local transport to North Beach, embarking in LCM’s again for Foul Point where transport supplied by No. 57 Transport Company met us for return to Chittagong. The number of aircraft movements handled by the unit at Akyab was approximately 1400.

On the 13th we collected our own vehicles and moved to the airstrip at Double Moorings which was to be our permanent base.

We settled into a routine which although useful was not particularly exciting. Detachments were sent off to a number of other strips including Ramree Island, also to close down the large wartime base at Cox’s Bazaar. Out time was spent in collecting new 4 wheel drive 3 tonners, water tankers and Jeeps etc. Our own equipment also started arriving from Calcutta so we soon felt properly established again. What we had been using had been pretty rough compared to our standards but it made us appreciate what the ‘Forgotten Army’ had been putting up with for years compared to the first class equipment we had enjoyed in the UK.

We made an excellent swimming pool from a nearby ‘tank’, a mini water reservoir with high built up banks. Several hand grenades cleared the wildlife and a few cwts of chloride of lime took care of the smaller bugs. A large plank ‘won’ at Chittagong docks made an excellent diving board and in no time the unit had six water polo teams...the pool was our greatest enjoyment!

During this period it was discovered that a mobile generator had been left at Akyab and two of us were sent in a Jeep to recover it. On reaching Foul Point we discovered all sea transport had ceased, in fact the whole area was deserted and the jungle was already moving back. We stayed overnight on the headland and during the night received attention from a gang of local ‘bandits’ who probably thought we were fair game. Fortunately we had a Bren gun with us and the locals took off with great enthusiasm when a burst or two, including tracer, was put over their heads.

To help pass the time at ‘Double Moorings’ it was decided to organise a concert party which it was soon realised could also be used to celebrate ‘VE’ (in the Far East) day. It was designed on the basis of a bar with blankets and palm fronds forming a back-cloth. Crates covered with sheets made tables and the bar and the cast were intended to sit around at the tables, stepping to the centre to do their individual ‘bits’ when appropriate. Drinks would be in the form of local lime juice or orange juice served by the Unit Discip. WO, a SWO of the old school acting as a waiter. Fortunately, or unfortunately, depending on one’s point of reference, the units liquor ration for three months past caught up with us just before the night of the show, so the bar became ‘live’ on the day! The result was probably predictable but also inevitable with the cast slowly becoming more and more drunk as the evening wore on and the ‘turns’ took much longer to perform. ‘Chiefy’, a Welshman with an excellent voice, was intended to sing a couple of ‘serious’ songs. Instead he went through a repertoire based on many years of service life and then tried to go round again. The SWO’s years of ‘bull’ simply could not stand the strain of being called ‘garçon’ or worse and he started threatening the cast with ‘252’s’. In particular a very funny ‘awkward squad’ act became so hilarious when the SWO played the part of a drill instructor and genuinely became more and more annoyed at the by no means all

acted antics of the squad. The curtain just had to be called down at last when some members of the cast tried to get 'Chiefy' off a third song routine by using him as the ball in a scrum.

We never did find out whether the CO really did appreciate the concert party being named 'Fenton's Follies' but years later he still turns a funny colour when it is mentioned.

Whilst we were doing some useful tasks on the unit it was not really our scene and we were relieved when in June we were told we were returning to Bombay to start preparing for the projected Invasion of Malaya!

By early July we were based at RAF Santa Cruz, a large RAF and Indian Air Force base some 18 miles outside Bombay. Here we were soon engaged in overhauling all equipment, getting new vehicles, having rushed instructional courses on additional aircraft types, including Seafires, Hellcats (Navy) and Mosquito XIX's of 89 PR Squadron.

27th August 1945: We embarked on *SS Orduna* at Bombay and sailed on the 31st August for Malaya, entering the Malacca Straits 7th September and heading for our landing area at Morib beach between Port Swettenham and Port Dickson. We were much relieved to wake up to find ourselves sandwiched between *HMS Nelson* and the French battleship *Richlieu*. If you have to have protective support you can't do much better than that but our relief was even greater to learn that on the 8th September the Japs had surrendered (at least in Japan) and we did in fact make an unopposed landing as planned on the 9th September. The landing zone was terrible. Large rocks prevented the landing craft getting close in and we dropped into water 4 to 5 feet deep some 100 yards from the shore which when well loaded with equipment was no joke. Also if the Japs had not surrendered when they did few of us would have completed this walk!

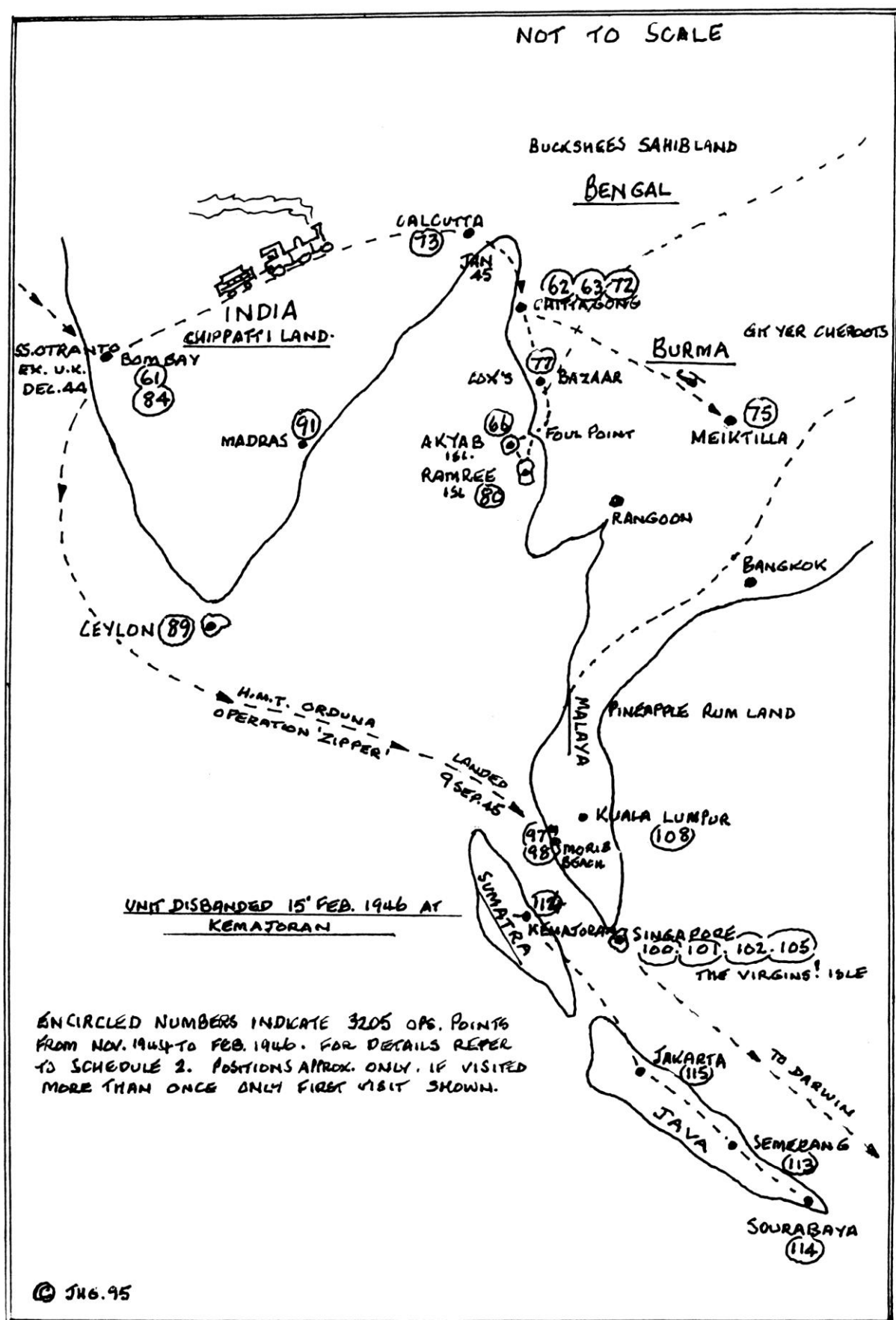
The operation for the invasion of Malaya was code named 'Zipper'. The unkind ones suggested this was because nothing was 'buttoned up' and certainly the organization did not compare with Overload and Normandy.

Our target was a Jap airfield some 4 or 5 miles inland, and having no transport we marched to it being received at the entrance by the Jap Air Force with 'presented arms'. Almost immediately aircraft started arriving and during the next two or three days 20 Spitfire Mk XIV's, 5 L5's and 4 Dakota's took up residence.

We were visited and addressed by Lord Louis Mountbatten and the AOC in charge, Sir Keith Park followed on the 11th by General Slim, one of the most highly regarded of all 'Top Brass'.

We also had the unpleasant task of searching and disarming Jap troops, unpleasant because it was learned that under the Jap Army disciplinary system any soldier who contracted VD was punished by being obliged to 'keep it'. No treatment was given and some were in a bad way. It also amazed us as to how subservient they were. German POW's (the unit has been a part of the Normandy landings prior to embarking to the Far East) remained truculent and helped each other to avoid or disobey orders or work tasks. The Japanese positively 'fawned' on us, their officers could be put in charge of a work party and then drive them like hell, and if an individual tried to slack off their officers or NCO's would 'shop' them. If they were left to deal with the 'offender' then he was beaten to a recognised code. Bearing in mind their fanatical resistance before the surrender it was incredible how they could mentally turn around once the Emperor said 'pack in'.

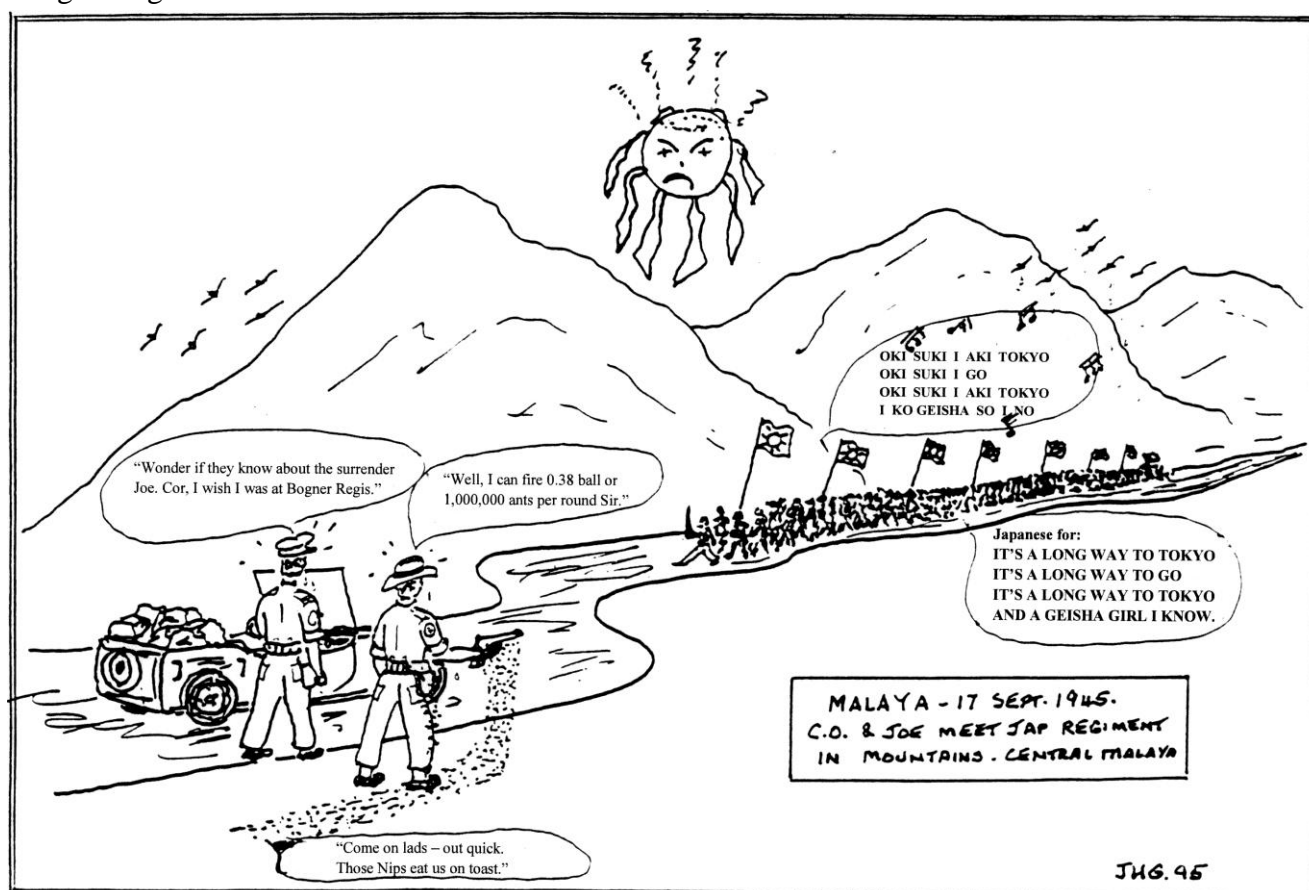




On the 14th, 15th and 16th September parties left by air for Singapore leaving behind a small holding party to await the Units transport, which was followed by freighters and the CO, who with one driver and a corporal travelled by road to check out the route to Singapore. Whilst en-route they had a couple of interesting experiences, the first being 'invited' to act as escort to

a high ranking civil government official carrying gold to a Malayan Sultan in the mountains south of Kuala Lumpur. Then, while on route through the mountains, on a narrow winding road, meeting a whole Jap infantry regiment on the march. It was still uncertain if all Jap units, especially those in the 'bush', knew of the surrender so we pulled in and waited with some trepidation (*but appearing brave we hoped!*) for their approach. The CO marked the occasion by hurriedly digging his 'cheesecutter' out from the tangle of gear in the back of the Jeep and the corporal prepared for *possible action* by unbuttoning the flap of his holster and releasing the safety catch of his revolver. He then found that the revolver, which he had only cleaned the night before, was the centre of an ant colony, attracted no doubt by the oil on the weapon. They filled the holster and covered the gun and there was no time to clean it up, so wondering how the Japs would react to being shot at with ants instead of .38 ball? He put it back and hoped the ants would stay indoors whilst the Japs were around.

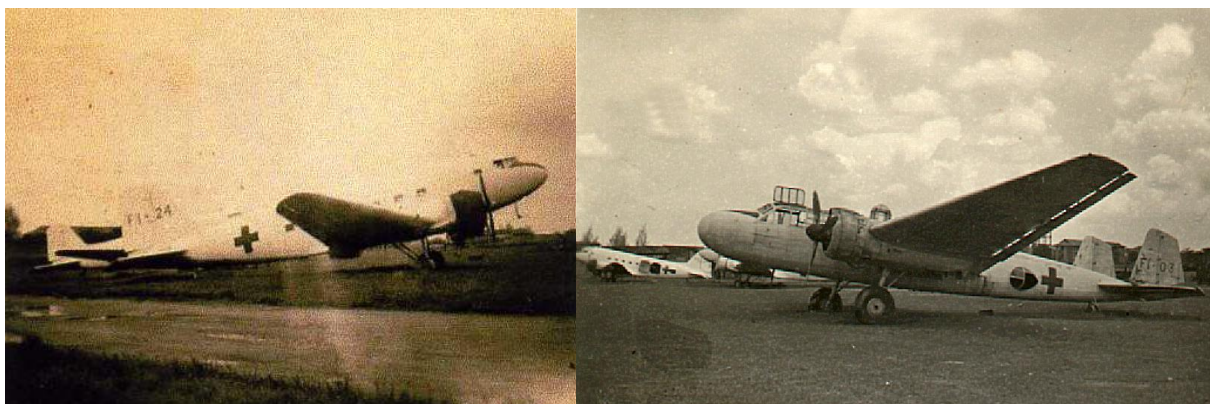
The regiment halted, much kowtowing on the part of their CO and other officers, and an explanation in broken English that they wanted our instructions for surrender. The CO told them to head for Malacca and give themselves up to the first Allied military unit they met there. With a few more 'bows and hisses' they stomped away happily with the columns of heavy wheeled machine guns bringing up their rear making us wonder how effective our 'ant' gun might have been.



At Singapore the Unit was initially based at RAF Tengah, living in proper barrack blocks for the first time in years, and putting much enthusiasm into getting the swimming pool filled and operative than taking up the 'bull' that the SWO was ready and willing to reintroduce now he had a parade ground to play with. For two years he had suffered in relative silence the indignity of having no parade of note and having to live and accept what to him was a sloppy and dirty lot of ways. Our normal working wear had been everything he detested. In the European Theatre it was usually denim battledress with leather jerkin and cap comforter and out east almost anything from shorts (always turned up to be shorter) to creased green denims and bush hats that had been 'conditioned' by soaking in water then pulling on at a rakish angle, quite unlike anything intended by the 'book'. After a few days the Unit moved to RAF Seletar

and the CO's driver and the corporal returned north to lead the unit transport down to Singapore and soon the whole unit was together again.

Our work was quite varied, little in the way of operations by the Spitfire squadrons, but a lot of activities on transport aircraft now arriving to commence the job of lifting the ex-POW's out on the first leg of their journey home. Some Jap built Dakota's were pressed into service for this work intended, to be flown by Jap air crews with a RAF guard aboard ferrying POW's up to Rangoon and Calcutta, but had to be withdrawn because of the upset to the POW's when they became aware of who was flying them.



Some operational flying commenced again. The troubles experienced by the Dutch in Java and Indonesia required assistance from us, mainly photographic reconnaissance by the Mosquito's of 84 and 110 squadrons and some patrolling by the Spitfires of 11 and 17 Squadrons. The CO was now appointed Chief Technical Officer of the station.

In mid October a large detachment moved up to Kuala Lumpur to service 2 squadrons of Thunderbolts of 905 Wing that were operating over Indonesia. This detachment also had the task of rebuilding the main runway at KL with Sommerfield tracking, the job being made easier by the 'loan' of over 3000 Japanese POW's.

Following this was a slowing down of activities with the Unit moving steadily towards disbandment which followed in February 1946 after a move to Batavia in December 1945.

The Return!

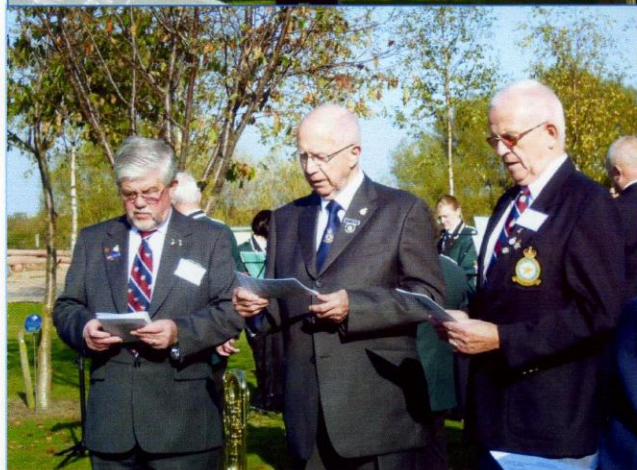
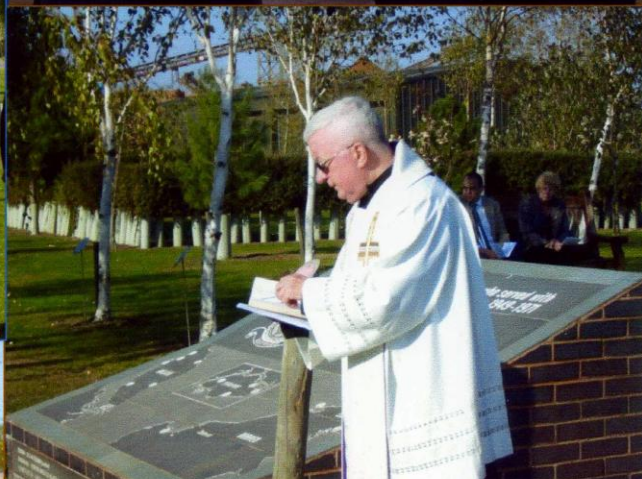


Johore 1945

Les Downey

Recently, members of the RAFBPA, along with colleagues of the RAF Changi and RAF Seletar Associations attended a service at the NMA to mark the disbandment of the Far East Air Force.

National Memorial Arboretum 15th October 2011

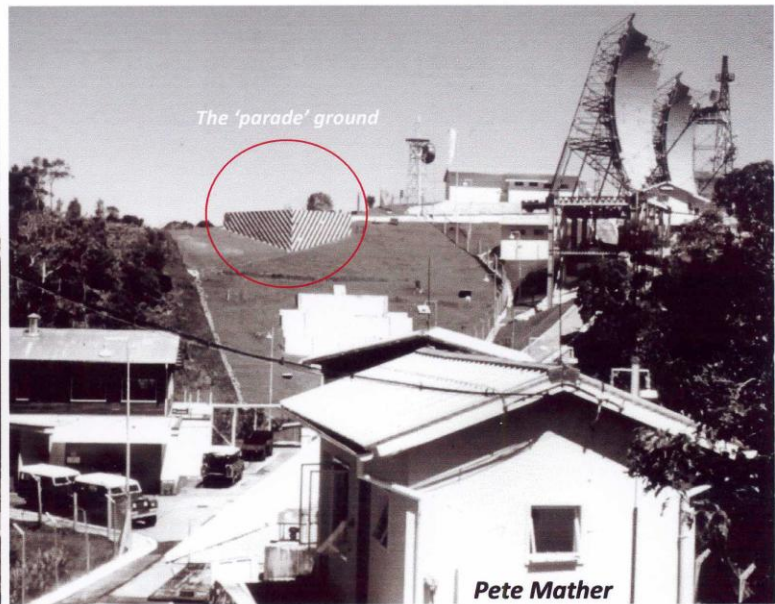
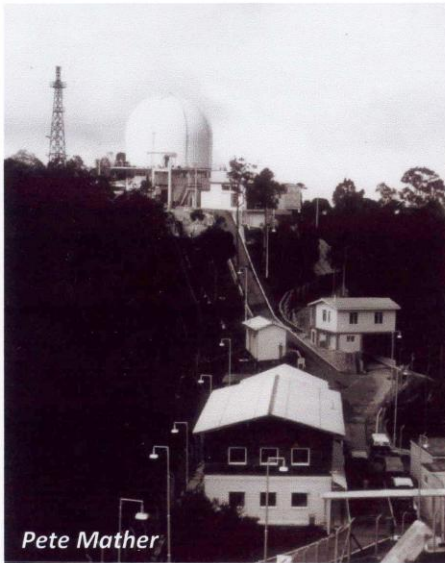


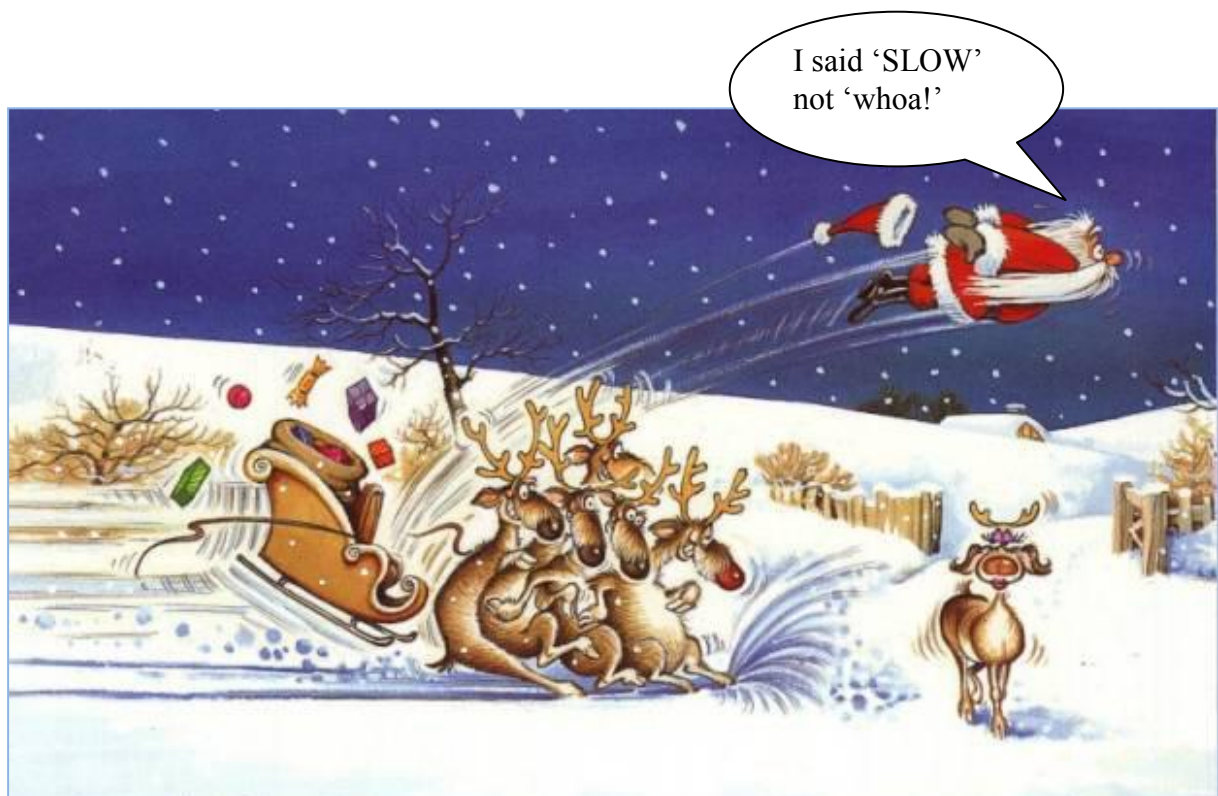
*SERVICE TO MARK
THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE
DISBANDMENT OF THE
FAREAST AIR FORCE
IN
OCTOBER 1971*

Disbandment of FEAF 1971 – RAF Western Hill, Penang.



From Barry Woodgett: Western Hill closure parade held on the helipad, September 1971. Barry remarks, "After the parade the site was handed over to the Malaysian military, note the bare radar equipment pad in the background. The (above) photograph was taken by the RAF photographer."





Relive the Memory

Throughout the days of Christmas family get togethers why not liven up the meetings by demonstrating what an egg banjo is? This can be a real hit with the family, especially at breakfast, or supper time after partaking in a few beers, preferably *Tiger*!

Firstly persuade some innocent female to make a runny fried egg sandwich. Then using both hands take the sandwich off the plate and follow with sandwich, the bigger for the runny yolk to your shirt. Then with the bitten sandwich body whilst, with the brush the yolk off rapid 'strumming' of someone playing there you have an eat one but never proper name was for sandwich. By the way, mine is always eaten at breakfast time when sober, and held over a very large plate! Give it a try, just once. Be popular with the family!



Dave

Late news: A new member joining the RAFBPA. Details arrived after printing of the hard copies.

Ken Cole, also known as '*Swishey/Coley*', SAC Engine Mech, ASF, RAF Butterworth, August 1954 – August 1955.