

## *November 11<sup>th</sup> 2012 - The Cenotaph Remembrance Parade*

*By Roger Hughes Jones RAFBPA*

Attendance at the Cenotaph Remembrance Parade in London is, I imagine, an honour that many ex-service personnel aspire to. Approximately 10,000 people from all walks of life, including the ex-Services and Associations, march in the parade with 230 groups being represented.

At the AGM this year our Chairman sought members living within relatively easy travelling distance from London to represent the RAF Butterworth and Penang Association at this year's ceremony - the first time in our history that places have been allocated to us. I was delighted to have the opportunity to put my name forward. Other willing volunteers were Peter Schnull, Donald Walton and David Bloomfield. It was particularly poignant this year as Remembrance Sunday actually fell on the 11<sup>th</sup> November.

London's taxis once again provided a free taxi service to Horse Guards Parade from the Victory Services Club, Union Jack Club and many main line railway stations with return after the ceremony from Westminster Bridge.

I arrived early at Horse Guards Parade, where the Ex-Service Columns form up, with the sky blue and the sun shining, a complete contrast to the previous day's rain. This gave me an opportunity to soak up some of the atmosphere as the day progressed. It was an emotional time, watching so many people arriving and congregating in groups in all manner of dress – civilian, Service uniform and everything in between but in the knowledge that we all had something in common.

Our small contingent met at our marker board provided so that colleagues can easily find their correct place in the Column. In addition to Peter, Donald and David we were joined by Mike Plumb who had asked Tony if he could join us to honour his father who had been based at RAF Changi in the Fifties but sadly passed away on Christmas Day last year. He had driven down overnight from Wrexham and then drove back after the parade. We were approached half a dozen times by personnel from other contingents telling us of their experiences at Butterworth – they were all directed to our website so perhaps our membership will increase! I was also pleased to be able to chat with others about my Service links to Aden, Germany and the RAF Regiment.

The day started in an almost carnival atmosphere, lots of laughter, joy at meeting old friends, the hum of conversation and the kaleidoscope of colour across Horse Guards Parade. Then, at the allotted time, we formed up and the contingents marched off through the archway towards Whitehall.

I must admit I wasn't expecting the sort of reception we were given when we emerged from the archway with all Contingents being applauded as they passed by. We were soon quietly standing easy and waiting for the Ceremonial to take place with a sea of faces lining the road on all side and cameras were clicking. It took about 40 minutes for everyone to be in position and waiting for the Ceremonial at the Cenotaph to take place. We were lucky to be positioned opposite a very large TV screen relaying the BBC output so, although we couldn't see the ceremony, we were able to follow the action. I've not marched since 1988 so it was a bit of a baptism by fire for me (but soon realised that after 25 years service it was a bit like riding a bike, not easily forgotten!) when after the Ceremony we marched past the Cenotaph into the sun and BBC cameras and on "around the block" back to Horse Guards Parade. By this time the problems of trying to keep in step were forgotten as the crowds lining the streets clapped the marchers as they passed by. It's something you rarely hear when watching on TV but it is a very uplifting sound and raised the mood after the serious business of remembering and honouring our fallen comrades.

The final highlight was when we marched past the saluting dais opposite the Guards Memorial where the salute was taken by HRH Prince Edward before we wheeled right at the Citadel back onto Horse Guards Parade and the parade ended. We British are the best in the world at organisation, pomp and ceremony and this is one of those occasions that I shall never forget.

To sum up, I really enjoyed the day. It was a truly wonderful experience to take part on behalf of the RAF Butterworth and Penang Association in one of the nation's most important ceremonies. I certainly hope, as we have been invited to attend this year, that we are able to continue next year in what could become a tradition of attendance for our Association. It is a social occasion, full of friendship and camaraderie, a real mix of formal and informal and a lot of fun. It must add that only four of our allocated tickets were taken up. We do need more members to come forward in future – use it or lose it! I guarantee you will enjoy the experience.