



# 'EASTWARD'

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



Formed: 30<sup>th</sup> August 1996 at the Casuarina Hotel, Batu Ferringhi, Penang Island

## SUMMER 2013

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.



*Via Peter Gill 656 Squadron Association*

*Issue 36*



## 'EASTWARD'



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RAF RSL 1666 and RTTL 2747 at anchor off Bidan

## From the Chairman



It was a great pleasure to be able to greet new faces and a couple of guests to the Annual Reunion and AGM on 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> June. You will see photos and a resume of what occurred elsewhere in this newsletter but I wish to expand on a few points.

**NEXT YEAR'S REUNION AND AGM – Monday 19<sup>th</sup> and Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2014.** I feel it is important that we maintain the RAF Butterworth and Penang Association as an independent association for as long as possible, certainly until 2015 and our 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, and my 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday!

Much work goes on each year on your behalf to ensure that our annual gathering is as memorable as possible. So please reserve the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> May 2014 in your diaries for next year's Reunion and AGM being held again at the **Falcon Hotel in Stratford-on-Avon**. We already know the cost increase over this year's charge is marginal at £1.50, and this year's prices were unchanged from last year!

**THIS YEAR'S REUNION** - It was a particular pleasure to have as our Dinner Guest this year Mr **Chris French**, a member of the Guild of Aviation Artists, who presented us with a signed and framed print of his painting 'Butterworth Bruisers' which we raffled and raised £256 for service charities. Our thanks go to Chris for his kind gesture, a copy of the print appears on page 26. Copies of the print can be obtained via Hansen Fine Art on 0744 544 4671 or by e-mail at [info@hansenfineart.co.uk](mailto:info@hansenfineart.co.uk) Chris also spent a long time with various members looking at photos and hearing stories in a quest to translate his findings into another work of art.

We received from Richard Harcourt 50 wreath centres for use with RBL wreaths at future Remembrance ceremonies. These are laminated, with adhesive backs so that they can cover other emblems. The 'deal' is this - you purchase a British legion C-Type wreath without a badge at your own expense and I will send you a RAFBPA centre free of charge. We hope this will add an extra dimension to the various wreath laying opportunities and bring to public attention the debt we owe to those who served in our corner of the Far East.

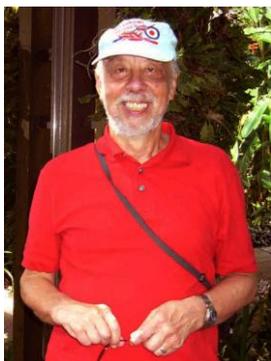
**REMEMBRANCE PARADE, LONDON – Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> November.** I'm expecting to be offered places for members in the Cenotaph Parade on Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> November. If it is your ambition to be in the parade, then please let me know and I'll add you to the list alongside the four members who came forward at the AGM.

**THE FEAF MEMORIAL** – I am grateful to the Association for taking the lead and voting to forward up to 20p annually from the subscription of each paid up member to the FEAF Grove Account to help towards the upkeep of the FEAF Memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum. I will now be able to ask for a similar gesture from our sister associations towards building up a fund to ensure the Memorial outlives us all and remains in good condition for many generations to come.

**RAFBPA ITEMS FOR SALE** – Among items suggested by members for purchase are car stickers and metal lapel badges, possibly based on the wreath centre design (Shown on the separate 'RAFBPA Items' poster). We will be investigating this further. Meanwhile, the Chairman holds a large stock of association ties. If you haven't one, or need to replace the old one, please send a cheque for £11, payable to the RAFBPA, including your name and address, and one will be sent to you. The design of the tie is also to be seen on the 'RAFBPA Items' poster mentioned above.

*Tony Parrini*

## From the Editor



The recent 2013 Reunion and AGM was a great success with everyone seemingly enjoying themselves. Special thanks go to Bob Margolis who ‘prowled’ with his camera amongst members to get some super pictures of the occasion. This was the easy bit as he then set about preparing them for both versions of the newsletter and good naturedly making any changes I thought necessary. I can be quite demanding at times! Not content with this following the reunion he transported two boxes of archive materials to the RAeS National Aerospace Library at Farnborough on behalf of the Association

The reunion also provides the opportunity for members to meet and exchange information and stories. Our table at the reunion dinner was made up of David and Pamela Bloomfield, Butterworth (1960’s), Les and Violet Downey, Les as most know is a veteran of the immediate post-war era and Napier Penlington, Medical Officer (1950’s) and his guest, Francis Arnold, who was a schoolboy at Glugor in the immediate pre-war period. Francis kindly cleared up one question that had ‘niggled’ me for some time, and that was who crewed the ferries used to take the evacuated European community to Singapore in December 1941. Answer: the survivors of the capital ships HMS Repulse and Prince of Wales (sunk 10 December 1941). In addition to the above Francis told me a little about the construction of the gun emplacements on the island prior to hostilities and also of his later service with the Brigade of Gurkhas in Borneo during Confrontation. I’m always after a story and hopefully I have persuaded him to write something about the gun sites at the very least.

Also at dinner Napier told of an outstanding doctor from the Penang General Hospital that he met on occasions when in the Far East. Hugh Alistair Reid OBE MD was a recognised authority on snake poisoning; he founded the Penang Institute of Snake and Venom Research, becoming the first Honorary Director in 1961. In 1964 he left Malaysia and joined the staff at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine furthering his work relating to snake venom and antivenoms.

The talk at the table also included mention of a forthcoming series about the Emergency taken from copies of Reville newspaper articles (1957) written by Dennis Holman and sent by Don Brereton. The name of the anthropologist, Pat Noone, missing in the depths of Malaya since 1942 was also mentioned and in this context Napier recalled a piece from the book *Noone of the Ulu* where a search party (Force 136, 1943) went to search for him. A signal from the search party reached Colombo which read “HAVE CONTACTED NOONE” which had been wrongly deciphered and should have read “HAVE CONTACTED NO ONE”. The story of the missing anthropologist is to be included in ‘Eastward’ at a later date as reference to him and the circumstances surrounding his death are the subject of *Noone of the Ulu*, by Dennis Holman and the involvement of one Busu Jamin in the war time murder of him in Roy Follows book *The Jungle Beat; Fighting Terrorists in Malaya 1952-1961*.

Following the reunion I received my own copy of the out of print book *Noone of the Ulu* and found a mention of one **Anker Rentse**, a pre-war planter and friend of Pat Noone who as a member of Force 136 had searched for him in 1943. This sounds very much like the Anker Rentse who, as a Danish Civil Affairs Officer, died in the RAF Dakota (KN630) crash of 25 August 1950 – ref: Issue 33, Summer 2012 and page 18 of this issue.

For the AGM the meeting room was connected, via Skype, to Laurie Bean (in Penang) giving Laurie the opportunity to be a part of the meeting but also for members to communicate directly to him, and vice versa. Thanks are given to those members who made this event possible and I would also like to thank Laurie for agreeing to proof read every issue of ‘*Eastward*’ before I send it out to members. As I am altogether aware from my days in AP publications, proof reading is only matched by watching paint dry so I appreciate Laurie’s help (and dedication to the job).

**Dave Croft**

## RAFBPA Reunion Song for 2013

By Tony Parrini

IN PENANG'S FAIR CITY – to the tune of *Cockles and Mussels*

*In Penang's fair city,  
The girls were so pretty  
I first set my eyes on sweet Suzi Lai Mi.  
With her long hair and ringlets  
While we in our singlets  
Cried "When can we see you,  
Sweet Suzi Lai Mi?"*

*Chorus: Oh Suzi Lai Mi,  
Oh Suzi Lai Mi  
Oh when will I see my sweet Suzi Lai Mi"*

*On Fridays quite merry,  
We took the brown ferry  
To see for ourselves, sweet Suzi Lai Mi.  
As she flashed a tanned ankle,  
The troops used to rankle  
Crying "When can we see you,  
Sweet Suzi Lai Mi?"*

*Chorus: As she got in position,  
There was great competition  
To grab the first dance with sweet Suzi Lai Mi.  
But most were the losers,  
So we went to the boozers  
Crying "When can we see you,  
Sweet Suzi Lai Mi?"*



*Chorus: At long last a posting,  
We all start boasting  
Of our encounters with sweet Suzi Lai Mi.  
But now the faint memories,  
Are heard on the sea breeze  
Crying "When can we see you  
Sweet Suzi Lai Mi?"*

*Chorus:*



## **New Member(s)**

Peter Alan 'Dinky' Toy, 4090781 SAC Clerk Accounts RAF Butterworth 1953-1955.

### **Members (and non-members) correspondence**

Prior to 'signing on' as a member of the Association, **Peter Toy** sent the following letter: *My son-in-law recently drew my attention to details of the RAF Butterworth Association and printed me out a copy of the Easter 2011 newsletter in which you are named as Secretary (Rowly Christopher, Hon Sec at the time).*

*Since I served a tour at the station in 1953-55 I am interested in the matter and am keen to obtain more information etc. For the record, I was 4090781 SAC Peter Alan Toy and was known as 'Dinky' to most. I was reputed to be a Clerk accounts but for the most part I dealt with the civilian staff on the base.*

*The C.O. at the time was Wing Commander Wilson and 2<sup>1/2</sup> was Squadron Leader Potter. My boss was Flight Lieutenant L. E. Leak and then Flt Lt Woods. The SWO was Warrant Officer Parris.*

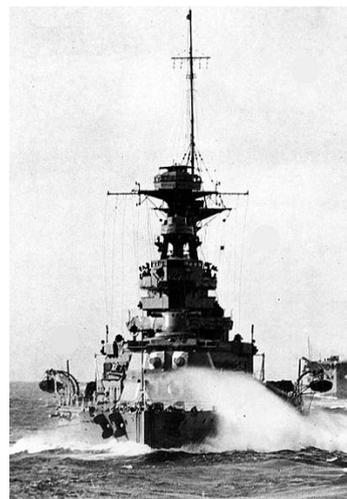
*I can recall many details of things I was involved in, including 'Ops' with the Army, and various other activities, and once a stopover by Ava Gardner whose Constellation aircraft was diverted overnight to Butterworth.*

*I feel I could relate a great many details of the life and times of a RAF Admin Wing 'erk' at that time. Since I am nearly 80 years of age it would be nice to know (that) they can be on record.*

The Association extends a warm welcome to Peter and if he writes his RAF memoirs they will find a place in the archives.

### **To Penang via India and Burma by Dennis Pateman (1945-46)**

A number of years ago, when I was newly appointed as archivist/newsletter editor, member **Dennis Pateman** sent in a handwritten copy of his 'potted' service history. This history has languished in the archives over the years and it is time it was given an airing, so here is the Far East experiences as provided by 1723539 LAC Dennis E. T. Pateman: *Like many other servicemen I volunteered for the RAF on my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and was accepted but deferred until February '42. Refused for aircrew duties at the medical through blast damage to the ears and instead trained for airframes at Blackpool and did well. I was offered an instructors job and making up to sergeant but told the C.O. I hadn't joined up to be stuck at Blackpool! Posted for a short time on RSU and then packed off to India on the Christiaan Huygens Troopship, E deck, below the waterline. Left Greenock February '43 and sailed straight into a force 12 for three days. The battleship HMS Malaya (right) alongside us had seas coming over the second gun turret. This was the largest convoy of the war and it travelled NW for five days, part of the convoy then going on to America and we turned to reinforce the North Africa landings. Another section went to Malta and after North Africa, we then went to Freetown for supplies. The engines failed off Freetown 24 hours out; the temperature was 104 °F on the mess deck with condensation running down the side. After three days we eventually caught up with the convoy. Ran out of water south of Ascension but we were given beer from the stores instead!*



*Made it to Durban and then onto Bombay and Worlie on the troopship Strathmore.*

*I was posted to the training airfield at Poona, on Harvards being there for nearly 12 months and could not get away until I obtained a Fitter II A course, which I passed again as LAC. Weeks were spent in transit camps after leaving Quetta, first Calcutta, then near to Bangalor followed by fourteen days leave with cousins in Adyar, Madras. It was during the great famine*

where 3,000,000 died; my cousin was Commissioner for Civil Supplies, Madras State, so I didn't see much of him. Back to the transit camp and was so fed up that I volunteered for escort duty on a single rail track bound for Lahore. The journey should have taken ten days; it took nearly four weeks, we were shunted into sidings for days – I got used to Indian curries.



There was hell to play when I got back to camp, I went on the eastern route to Lahore and came back via the western route, and in the meantime my pals had all left for Calcutta. I followed them, got there and found they had left, so another spell in transit before being posted to Cox's Bazaar on RSU. I stayed there a few weeks then on down the Arakan to the forward airstrip at Ratnap working on Thunderbolts (Left). The site was a padi field grass strip, with two man tents at the edge of the jungle

and temperatures of 100 to 120 °F – and English spanners for American planes!

After two months a supply plane came in with a four month old newspaper, miners threaten to go on strike! Also the pilot came with the news that my pals had run into the Japs at Imphal and all were murdered...so that was why I didn't follow them from Calcutta earlier.

As the monsoons threatened, the squadron left and a DC3 later came for us as the rains started. We took off with water on the 'runway' that slowed us up with the aircraft going between trees at the end of the strip. Fortunately the ground fell away a little and we just brushed the second lot of trees. The pilot came back looking green and swearing we were half a ton overweight! We landed at Akyab with a hell of a bump on the felt runway!

Akyab was where we serviced DC3's on army supply drops; with the monsoon season upon us the cloud base was often down to ground level, resulting in the loss of several planes.

**Then the big bomb! Hoorah!**

We then to be bound for Penang as an invasion forward party but instead were flown to Mingaladon to find new tents, and plenty of them. We also watched all the brass hats sign up from the edge of the runway! Following that we boarded a small troopship at Rangoon and I spent the next ten days sick as a dog in my hammock, watching rats as big as cats running along the pipes above my head.

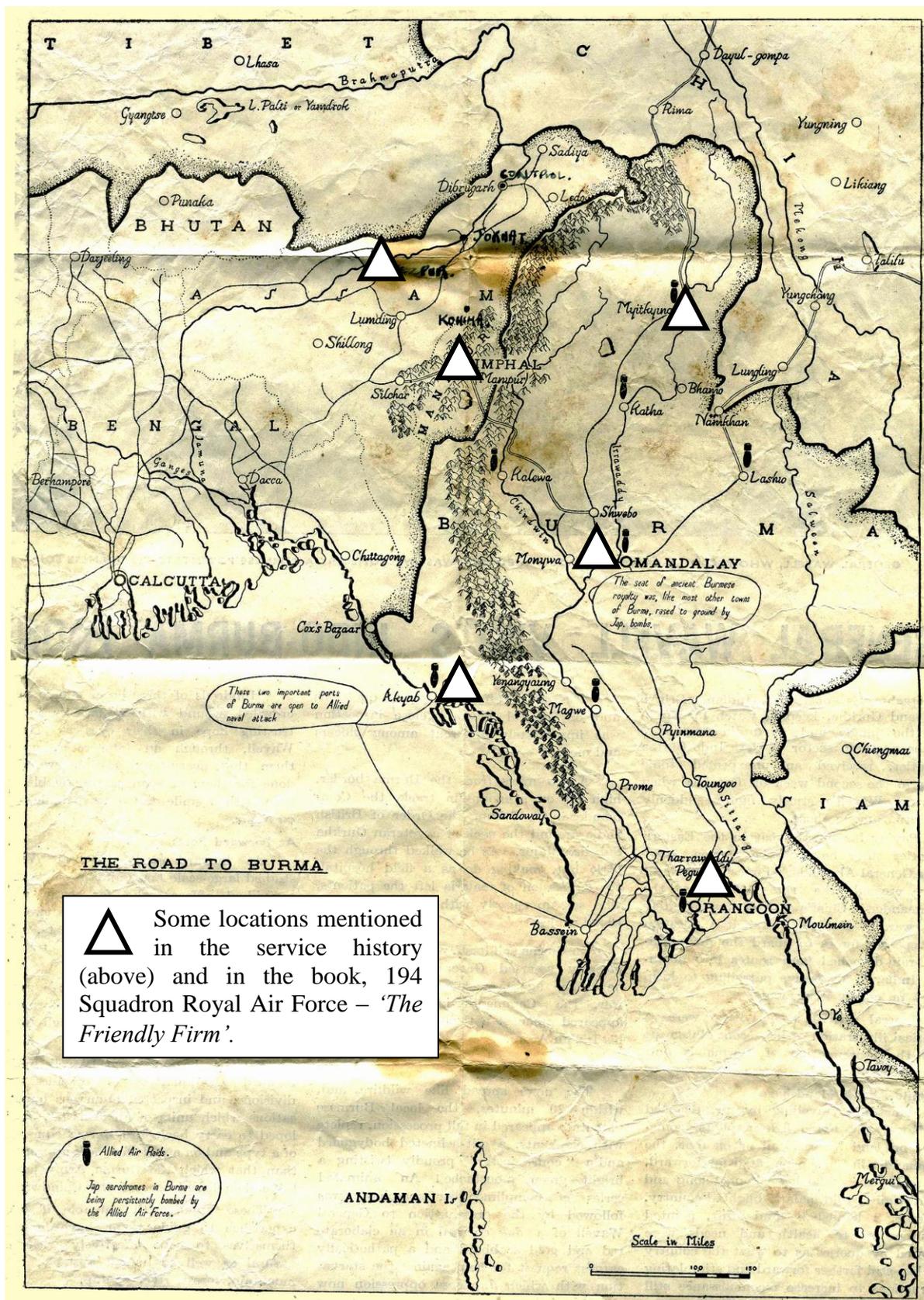
I arrived at Georgetown (Penang) having lost a stone in weight and as weak as a kitten. But brick buildings! Electric lights! What luxury. Well it was until the Japanese diesel generator got so hot it picked up its sump oil through the breather and disintegrated, along with part of the building. We started to get organised at the airfield but halfway through the morning went on alert – Chinese Communists! What a life.

I was servicing any planes that came in, but mostly DC3's. Most carried the 'Railway' POW's at the beginning; I still have difficulties when seeing Japanese. It wasn't easy seeing all sorts of planes not seen before. Almost as bad as at Ratnap when they arrived with a Tiger Moth in two packing cases and told me to put it together. No anedral or dihedral boards – so I tightened the wires and stays to where I thought they should be and told the pilot to give it a run along the strip to see what happens. Typical TAF, he took off, went by me with hands off the controls slapping the sides of the cockpit....mad as hatters!

After the POW's had all gone it was easy going on Penang. I bought a small fishing boat from the locals having got to know them, and spent some time sailing it after fitting a bit of a keel and some tentage for a sail. They (locals) used to go fishing in it when I did not want it and also joined them on occasions – I almost never came back when caught by a sharp storm at the fish traps of Leper Island. That involved plenty of baling out and paddling!

I got an early release under Class B in early January 1946, flew to Singapore and came home on the SS Andes breaking the record to Southampton in 22 days, arriving three years away almost to the day. I gave the boat away to fishermen with a chitty to confirm it was a gift on my leaving.

The book, *194 Squadron Royal Air Force – ‘The Friendly Firm’ (Burma Campaign)* by Flight Lieutenant Douglas Williams (still available) is an excellent read telling of the role of this squadron during the Burma Campaign. No. 194 Squadron reformed 1<sup>st</sup> February 1953 at RAF Sembawang, Singapore and later merged with 155 Squadron to become 110 Squadron based at RAF Kuala Lumpur.



## AAC Auster WZ706

'Eastward' has included a number of pieces relating to WZ706 in previous issues where on one occasion a copy of David Shepherd's painting was used as the cover picture (Issue 25, Christmas 2009) and on another was the 'star' of a recovery from Thailand where a force landing was effected due to loss of oil pressure (Issue 30, Summer 2011). Now there is more news about WZ706 and a request from the owner of the aircraft, **Peter Gill**: 'Can I please introduce myself, my name is Peter Gill, a member of 656 Squadron Association and I am the proud owner of Auster AOP9 WZ706. As you know she is a very historic aircraft having a long service history and also being rescued from Thailand and of course being painted by David Shepherd, the world renowned artist.



The aircraft is in the final weeks of a four year restoration project, the wings will go on within ten days (e-mail & telephone call dated 21 May) and then the coupling of control runs, electrical wiring and more importantly the fuel pipes, and then she will have her first engine run in over forty years. Shortly after that the first air tests will take place.

The restoration is also to show the finish the aircraft would have shown when on active service with the FEAF and Commonwealth Division. Also I am fortunate in that I have all the Forms 700 so Association members are able to view the writings of their more youthful days!

I am writing to your Association to ask if it is possible to put out a request for any WZ706 photos and stories that your members may have from their service times when they had worked on, or flown in, the aircraft? I am also looking for any genuine service equipment that may have been used by those working on the aircraft, such as flying helmets, tin helmets, signal flares (used), signal pistol, emergency equipment, signal markers, books that were issued for tropical desert and jungle survival, first aid boxes and .303 ammo boxes. The list goes on, but anything your members might think would be of interest to display under the aircraft when shown at air shows around the country would be much appreciated; any donated items would be coming to a great home. 656 Squadron AAC are constructing a history board for use at forthcoming air shows and with any donated equipment would make for a better panorama.

Should anyone wish to contact me, even for a chat, I am on telephone: 01663 733496 or 07779080946, alternatively on e-mail: [peterjgill@hotmail.com](mailto:peterjgill@hotmail.com)

The Association has forwarded a copy of a photograph of Auster WZ706 taken when at Butterworth c1957. This photograph is from the collection of Butterworth aircraft photographs donated by member Norman Harvey and are destined for the National Aerospace Library at Farnborough. Peter Gill has not seen this particular picture before and it will be used on the history display.

## Doing the Rounds by Richard Harcourt (1965-67)

As often stated there are at least two 'histories' relating to our times in the Far East: the official history and the history as given by the individual, which more often than not gives an insight into the organisation at levels not covered by the official versions. Richard's story is just that:

*'During my time at Butterworth Base Radio it was the RAF (especially me, a newly promoted corporal) that got all the "interesting jobs". These were stints of a week or in some cases two weeks, at Bidan and Song Song ranges, month long stints at Gong Kedak and once monthly trips to remote landing strips and airfields to replace the batteries and check out the ARC52 standby comms. radios. Sometimes I could get it arranged as a training flight with the "Yellow Peril"; if not, I had to take a Land Rover and drive round, the chopper boys didn't like carrying lead acid batteries!*

*Bidan Islands were all open with no security at all other than the dogs that kept the snakes and locals out of the accommodation. Alor Star was a civilian airfield with the addition of a pair of RAF ARC52's in the tower in case of emergency. Gong Kedak was an old WWII Japanese airfield built close to where they landed. The airfield was completely open, no fences or anything and just tented accommodation. There were no radios, or even a telephone, just a low power NDB (Non Directional Beacon). I also did two weeks there during the East Coast floods on supposed flood relief, but we couldn't do much as the water was too deep for our vehicles and anyway you couldn't see the road surfaces. The only security was provided by two local police from Butterworth, mail was collected each day from the Post office in Pasir Puteh, our only contact with Butterworth. Evening and weekend trips were to places like Kota Bharu and Tak Bai just over the Thai border. The airfield is now a RMAF base with a new Officers Mess and accommodation, new MQ developments and although like Butterworth there is only one runway there are a large number of normal and hardened aircraft dispersals.*

*Another bind was month stints of nights with the mosquitoes in Bayan Lepas (Penang Airport) tower. I had to keep a Land Rover at home at Chee Seng Gardens for this. The emergency cover was one RAF Air Traffic Control Officer, one Ground Wireless Fitter and three firemen, with one Crash Land Rover and one 3 tonner full of fire extinguishers. I wonder what the aircrew would have thought if they had known?*

*During all this time travelling alone around the north of Malaya I never had any security worries. The only time I handled a weapon at Butterworth was during a two week stay at Bidan. With nothing to do over the weekend it was really a drag. This weekend though one of the Malaysian Marine Police launches called in to collect some water. Two of us asked if we could scrounge a trip which was accepted, so with the aid of a couple of crates of cold cola we climbed aboard and were promptly handed a fully loaded Stirling sun machine gun each; as the captain said "Just in case". Their task was to search any suspicious craft and check papers and cargoes, not just for terrorists but also smugglers. One of my more interesting weekends! Richard's pictures are to be found on pages 13 and 14.*

### **Big Guns on Penang**

An e-mail 'discussion' via e-mail was held with **Laurie Bean** during March about the WWII Penang gun batteries, especially the Batu Maung and Fort Auchry Counter-Bombardment Batteries located on the south east and north of the island respectively. Laurie took to visiting both the Batu Maung War Museum and the site of Fort Auchry with a suggestion of his findings appearing in the Christmas 2013 issue of '*Eastward*'.



Left – Laurie's 2013 photograph of the Batu Maung No.2 gun site.

Inset – Photograph of No.2 gun site taken in 1946. The gun was 'spiked' in December 1941 destroying both the gun and shield. Laurie's photograph was taken in much the same position as that of the 1946 picture.

**Group Captain R. N. McKern.**

There has been an ongoing correspondence with **Alan** and **Bill McKern**, grandsons of Dr Albert McKern (Elysian) and sons of Group Captain R. N. McKern (who leased Elysian to the RAF as the RAF Leave Centre in the 1950's). The RAF career of R. N. McKern included a 10 week detachment to northern Russia in early 1943 on convoy protection duties and this appears to qualify him (or his next of kin) for the Arctic Star award. That he was in northern Russia within the qualifying area of operations was confirmed by his flying log book entry and based on this, and his RAF service list, an application has been made to receive the award. Further to this correspondence, photographs of R. N. McKern, one taken pre-war in Malaya and the other taken in wartime Britain were sent for including in the Association archives. Alan and Bill are also in the pre-war picture (below).



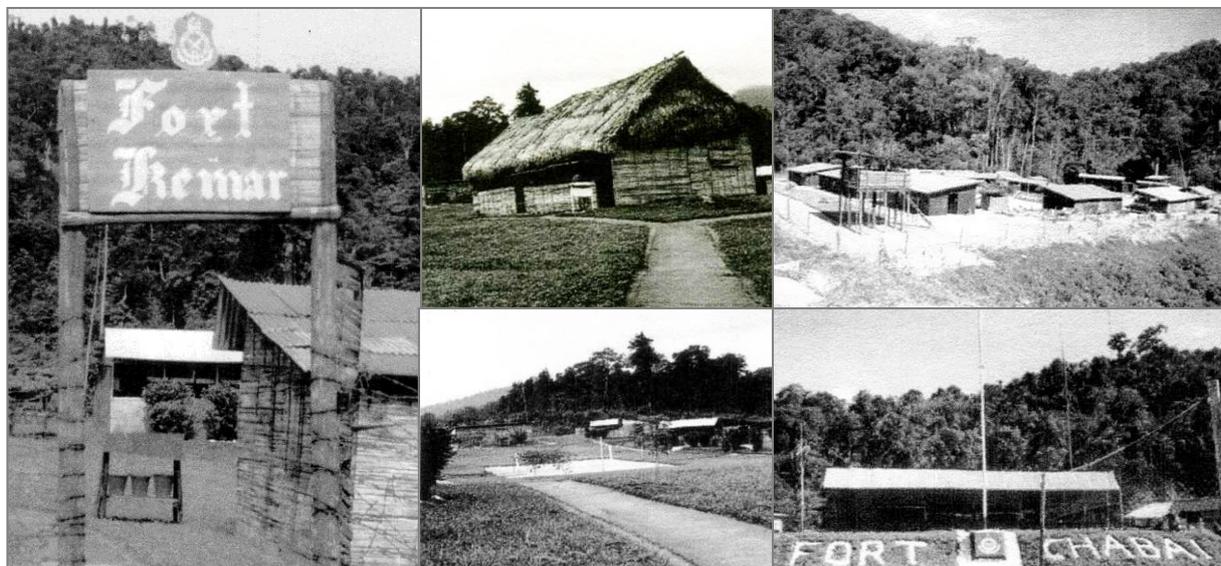
Alan also sent a copy of Elysian c1937, taken from the front of the building and a view taken from the back looking out to sea (below). Interestingly there was a brief note beneath the original copy of the sea scene, confirmed to be in Dr McKern's hand writing that indicates it was taken from his bedroom window with both Rat Island and Kedah Peak identified.



## Jungle Forts

From **David Howard** 1958-60 (*A Devonian residing in Scotland*), are a set of copies of general pictures taken of his time at Butterworth, including a couple of leaflets dropped into the jungle and also two of the jungle forts; Chabai and Kemar.

David writes: *A number of forts were constructed in the early 50's, all in deep jungle. The main purpose being to keep in touch with the Aborigines to stop them being dominated by the CT's. They were also used for troop movements by British and Allied troops as well as the Field Police, SAS and Gurkhas.*



The archives have a copy (donated by Association member **Sam Mold**) of the *Jungle Beat* by Roy Follows (Malay Police Force 1952-1961). Several chapters are devoted in the book to his time at Fort Brooke and make for interesting reading. And should any members have experiences they wish to share regarding jungle forts please write in....

### The folly of drinking....

A lesson to be learnt from the pen of a highly decorated senior police officer in the RMPF, Leong Chee Who, as it appears in the book *Smashing Terrorism in the Malayan Emergency*\* by Brian Stewart CMG MCS: "I worked for several years in South Thailand with the cooperation of the Thais who gave us extraordinary freedom to operate in their territory, a wave of the hand at the Frontier Post was the only visa I required.

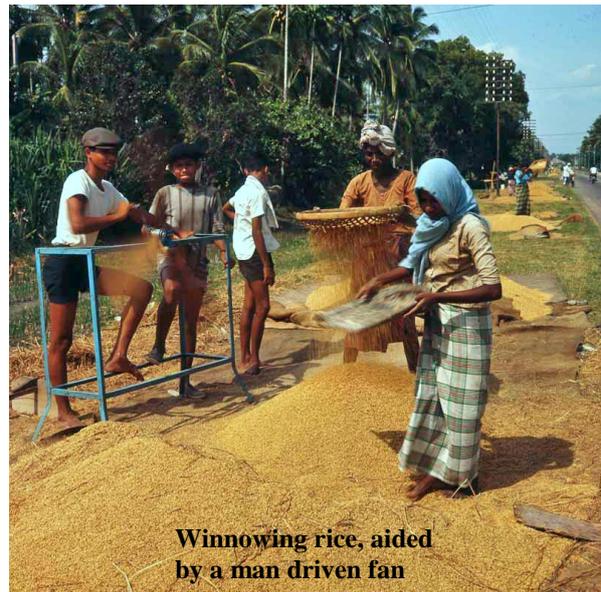
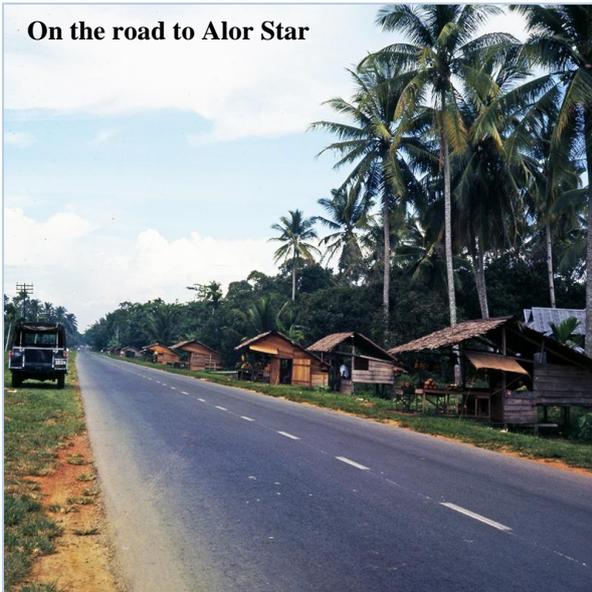
When I left Thailand the farewell parties were generous in the extreme. The most memorable was on the last weekend in Yala. The drinking sessions were of heroic proportions and, despite a short siesta in the late afternoon I was in serious need of support by the end of dinner. Finally, a huge box was wheeled in on a trolley. It was my farewell present and I found within it a Thai maiden. Alas I was in no state to appreciate her beauty."

### And to always find time to read....

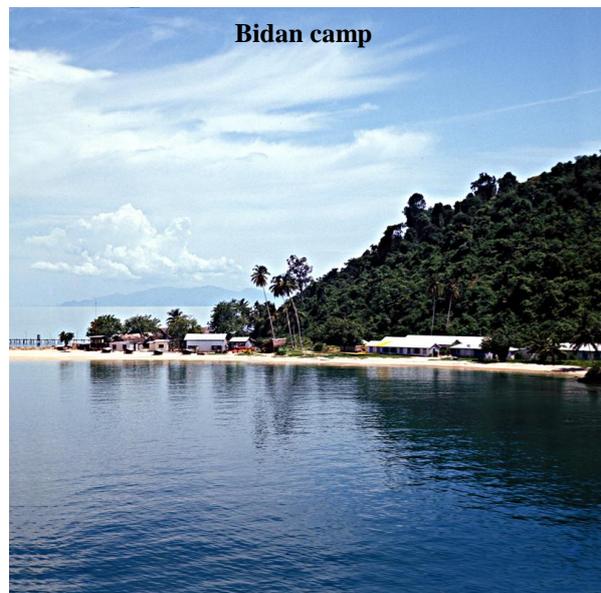
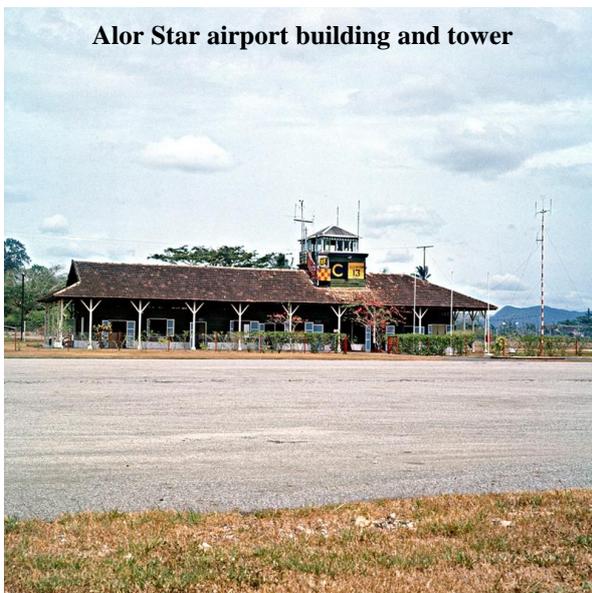
From the same book a story by P. J. D. Guest, OC Police Jungle Squad, relating of the time that he and another police officer had afternoon tea in the garden. Relaxing, with their weapons put aside, all seemed well with the world until there was a burst of firing from nearby rubber trees. Both dived for their weapons and rolled onto the lawn facing the sound of the firing. Shouting to his new wife to "Fetch the (*spare Sten*) magazines" from indoors, she ran inside and reappeared with the *Times* and *Newsweek* which she handed to the two grown men 'playing cowboys!'

\*This book was presented to the Association archives by Sam Mold.

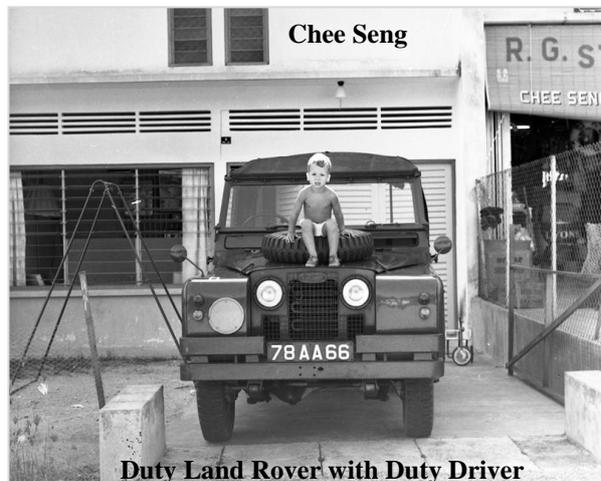
**Doing the Rounds (continued)**



**Winnowing rice, aided by a man driven fan**



**41 Squadron RNZAF 'Bristol Vibrator'**



**Duty Land Rover with Duty Driver**

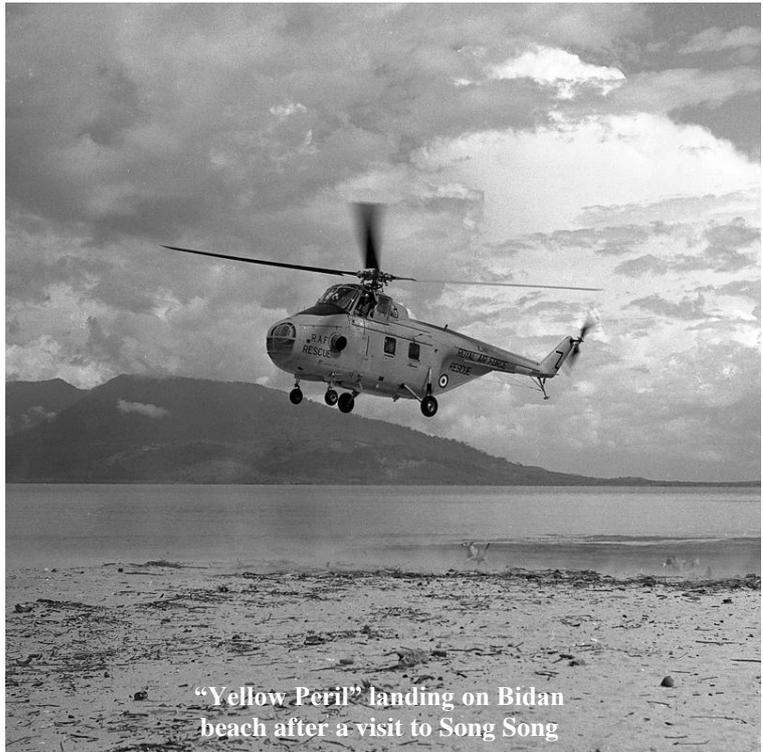
From Song Song beach towards Telor (The Egg) and Bidan Island in the distance



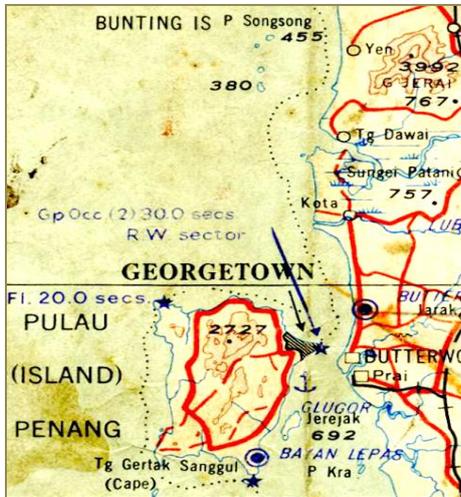
Flight of three RAAF Sabres arriving at the range



Gong Kedak crash crew



"Yellow Peril" landing on Bidan beach after a visit to Song Song



Avro Lancaster G-ASXX at Butterworth May 1965



Richard Harcourt

## New Standard for No. 33 Squadron

**Richard Harcourt** has drawn attention to the official RAF Website, dated 20 May 2013 where it reports on the receiving of a new standard by 33 Squadron on 17<sup>th</sup> May. The report states that 'RAF Benson's\* Honorary Air Marshal, His Royal Highness Prince Michael of Kent was the Reviewing Officer at the Consecration of the new 33 Squadron Standard at a full formal parade by Squadron personnel.



The Consecration of the replacement Standard involved a parade of some 85 personnel and was attended by VIPs, including past Commanding Officers of the Squadron. The importance of the ceremony to the Squadron was described (in part) by the OC Commanding 33 Squadron, Wing Commander Shane Anderson DFC: *33 Squadron has a long and proud*

*history which we should rightly be proud of. Our battle honours have been hard won and many members have laid down their lives so we can enjoy the freedoms that we have today.'*

\*The present home of 33 Squadron.

## Their 4,000<sup>th</sup> Sortie and a well earned rest.

The following timely article received by **Lee Le Clercq** from **Ronald Ingle**, was published in 1953 and tells of the exploits of 33 Squadron up to that year: 'No.33 Squadron, Royal Air Force of Butterworth is having a short respite this weekend after ten days of intensive operations against Communist terrorists in the South Kedah area. They are also celebrating the fact that at half past three last Saturday Nov. 21) they flew their 4,000<sup>th</sup> sortie in Malaya.

The rest is particularly welcome as they have flown 289 individual sorties with their Hornet aircraft in the past ten days – an achievement in keeping with tradition of the squadron and another item to add to its already noteworthy history.

The squadron was first formed in 1916 and played an important part in the defence of the industrial North of England, operating both by day and night during the latter part of the first World War.

**Disbanded:** After the war the squadron was disbanded but was reformed in 1929 and moved to the Middle East, and was in Egypt based at Mersa Matruh, equipped with Gladiators, when the Second World War broke out in 1939.

In June 1940, when Italy declared war, the squadron went over to the offensive and scored heavily against the Italian Air Force. In January 1941 they moved to Greece and remained there in support of the ground forces until the withdrawal. From there they evacuated to Crete and continued the battle against ever increasing numbers of Luftwaffe aircraft.

When the German airborne invasion took place their last few aircraft were destroyed in a ground attack by the enemy supporting fighters. With all its aircraft gone the squadron joined with the Army and fought a delaying action with considerable heroism.

**Evacuated:** During the retreat they became involved in an action which is probably unique in Air Force history. At one stage, finding them selves cut off from the coast, they fixed bayonets and charged their way through the enemy and made their way to the coast where the survivors were evacuated by Sunderland flying boats to Egypt. Here they were re-equipped with Hurricanes and supported the Allies until the final defeat of Rommel and the routing of Axis forces in North Africa.

In April 1944, the squadron moved back to England where they were re-equipped with Spitfires to form part of the 'air umbrella' over the Allied invasion fleet on 'D' Day.



There were several hundred of us marched onto the parade ground behind the Central Band of the RAF and a section of the ATC. Considering the time gap from square bashing some fifty odd years ago, we did pretty good.



The reviewing officer was Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Dalton. Not only did he review us but he also awarded four ex-WW2 Bomber Command aircrew with the Bomber Command clasp. One had been on the first 1,000 bomber raid, another was on a raid that lost 91 aircraft and yet another was on 'Operation Manna' at the end of the war dropping food to the starving Dutch people. The applause for these men would bring a tear to your eyes.

We were entertained in one of the hangars before, and after, the ceremonies by three women in RAF uniforms who sang well known songs of the forties. They were appropriately named the 'D' Day Darlings!

There was going to be a flypast by the BBMF Lancaster but rumour had it that it would end up being a Dakota so we high tailed it to the Bell at Tong and had a slap up meal...we had seen Dakotas before when at Butterworth.



### **Report from the 2013 Annual Reunion and AGM**

The Annual Reunion for this year was held on Monday /Tuesday 10 -11 June. The following is a brief report of part the AGM:

1. National Arboretum FEAF plinth. The recent winter weather has been unkind to the structure and costs for repairs of £75 have been submitted, £25 each from Butterworth & Penang, Changi and Seletar Associations.

A case for considering a long term maintenance programme was discussed and the proposal of a small percentage payment based on each member in each association is to be forwarded to the other associations for comment. The percentage payment is not intended to be borne by the members but to be levied against the numbers in each association, intended to give a fair charge for each association in respect of numbers of members on the books!

2. Cenotaph wreaths: this subject is covered in the Chairman's Report, page 3.

3. Election of officers of the Association: Tony Parrini was elected as Chairman, Richard Harcourt as Secretary, Len Wood as Treasurer and Dave Croft as Archivist/Editor

4. Subscriptions are to remain at £12 per annum.

5. It was agreed by the members present at the meeting that the Falcon Hotel at Stratford upon Avon be the venue for future reunions although flexibility in choice of venues is still there should suitable (and acceptable) alternatives be proposed in the future. In this respect, the Annual Reunion/AGM for 2014 will be held at the Falcon Hotel over the period 19/20 May (Monday/Tuesday) at a small increase on this years costs.

### **For the Archives – a report by Dave Croft**

At each annual reunion a number of archive materials are received and in many cases are accompanied by stories that relate to the item or items given. This reunion was no exception and in one case several of us were privileged to be given the opportunity of looking through an album of postcard pictures of pre-war Iraq brought in by **David** and **Pamela Bloomfield**.

There were fascinating pictures of buildings, bridges etc of the 1920's and it was a pleasure to be able to spend a little time to look through them. Alas, the nature of a reunion, from the position of archivist, is one where the time spent with members is limited, for which I apologise. All I say is take some comfort from the notice shown below and to know you are not alone.

**WE CAN ONLY PLEASE  
ONE PERSON PER DAY  
TODAY IS NOT YOUR DAY  
AND TOMORROW DOES  
NOT LOOK GOOD EITHER**

In spite of this the reunion was a 'goldmine' for both the archives and newsletter. I will start with **Robert Barrett** (1956-1958) who brought in a cutting taken from the *Southend Standard* of 23/3/2012 relating to the funeral of crew members of RAF Dakota KN630 that crashed in a ravine on 25<sup>th</sup> August 1950 (Eastward Issue 33, Summer 2012. Page 11). The cutting is about Corporal Phillip Bryant RASC and whilst not RAF he could be said to be an airman as described in the cutting because he was a dispatcher!

**Bill Wardle** (1955-1957) has presented his 1956 football Charity Cup medal to the Association. Bill thinks it may be unique in that very few, if any, will have been awarded to RAF servicemen playing in a local team. At least I think that is what he said



but I have asked him to write a bit about it for the next issue of 'Eastward'

**David Bloomfield** (1961) left a pack of photographs and slides with me at the reunion. At the moment of writing they have not been properly gone through but look to be very interesting. At first glance the photographs appear to be mainly of the Middle East, probably taken in the 1920's, but further study is needed. The slides, which are to be scanned and returned, are of local Malayan scenes that will stir many memories of time in the Far East.

**Rex Baldwin** (1956-1958) has presented a book of Malayan scenes of the early 1950's. Simply called *Malaya*, the book is filled with black and white photographs of scenes familiar to just about all of us from the 50's and 60's. The views of George Town and Ayer Itam valley taken from Penang Hill are very recognisable, as is Ayer Itam temple.

Surprisingly, on a glance through the book, the picture of the Keletan silversmith at work shows a number of items that have a likeness to Bill Wardle's medal shown above.

**Tony Paley** (1958-1960) brought copies of pictures of various football teams representing Butterworth from his time there. Also I was to find that he was a talented cartoon artist as he gave several copies of his RAF Police artwork to the archives. These will appear in future newsletters although I'm tempted to put them in this issue...but no, a disciplined approach is called for!

Also from Tony are three pages of paperwork regarding the provision of RAF facilities at RAAF Butterworth in 1960 and the problems arising for RAF Medium Bomber detachments.

## Airman laid to rest

A FORGOTTEN airman from Southend has finally received a military funeral after more than 60 years of being buried in the Malaysian jungle.

Corporal Phillip Bryant, 25, died when the RAF Dakota he was on crashed into a ravine in the Malaysian jungle on August 25, 1950, during a daring mission.

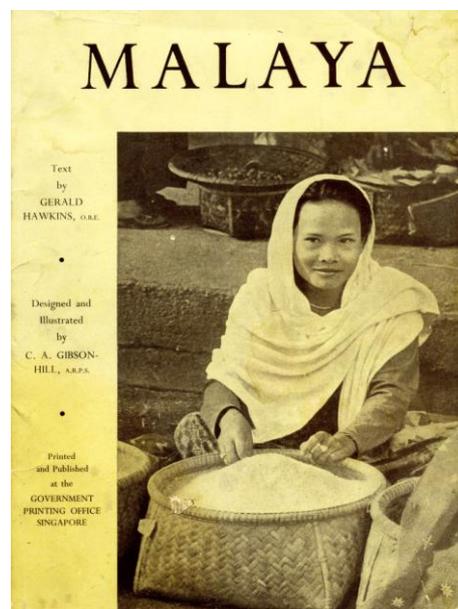
His body was among those



**Phillip Bryant**  
- Army burial

of seven RAF men and five civilians who were lost to the jungle, after being buried in shallow graves by an initial search party. In 2008, a full-scale mission was mounted to recover them.

The men have finally received a full military funeral at the Cheras Road Commonwealth War Grave Cemetery in Kuala Lumpur.



**Harry Holloway** (1957–1960) showed me a greetings card with a scene taken from a watercolour by E.J. Wigston GRA titled ‘Malayan Bound’ The Glasgow scene depicts a locomotive built by the North British Locomotive Company in Glasgow and is on its way to Malaya. The card caught Harry’s eye and he showed it to me thinking I might be interested? The card didn’t go home with Harry after the reunion!

The locomotive intrigued me and a bit of a search revealed it to be a Class 56 locomotive, built by the North British Locomotive Co. for Malaya and was one of a number in service from the late 1940’s being the last class of steam locomotive in Malayan service. The locomotives were still in use in the 1960’s



**Additional**

Winner of the draw for the copy of ‘Butterworth Bruisers’ donated by the artist Chris French GAvA was RAFBPA member **Gil Potter** (1955-1957). The picture was of two 60 Squadron Gloster Javelins from the 1960’s in a steep climb taking off from RAAF Butterworth. The base and runway formed the background of the picture. The proceeds of the raffle are to go to service charities of which there was some discussion about in the AGM.

**John Crooks** (1956-1958) asks if anyone has a photograph of the Station Football Team (with cup) taken around 1956, 57 or 58. If you can help John, please let Dave Croft know and we can take it from there.

Reunion 2013 – a selection of photographs from **Bob Margolis** and **Richard Harcourt**





Bob's reunion photographs are on his site web gallery and can be viewed via:-

<http://margolis.org.uk/raf/rafbpareunions/20130600reunion/index.shtml>

## Flying in the Far East 1963 - 1966

**Barrie Davies** (Sergeant Pilot AAC) continues with his selection of short stories; this time he is back in Borneo after his short visit to Butterworth.

### **CHAPLAIN KILLED IN SHOT DOWN PLANE NAMED**

**SINGAPORE, Fri. —** The chaplain who died when a British Army Air Corps Auster was shot down in Sarawak by Indonesian anti-aircraft guns on Wednesday was the Rev. Alexander Melville Ross.

Mr. Ross, 51, was the R.A.F. padre in the Borneo territories.

The injured pilot was Sgt. D. Thackeray.

An army spokesman said

here today that the chaplain was visiting troops in Sarawak.

After being hit by fire "from across the border" at 3.30 p.m. the Auster crash landed two miles inside Sarawak territory in the Lundu district of the First Division.

Mrs. Thackeray, who is staying at the British military barracks in Ipoh, has been informed of her husband's condition.

The first story starts with the December 18th 1963 incident when an Auster aircraft, piloted by Sergeant David Thackeray AAC, with a senior RAF Chaplain (Wing Commander A. M. Ross) as passenger was fired on by Indonesian AA guns as they flew from Lundu to Kuching. The chaplain was fatally wounded and Sgt Thackeray's left arm was broken. He was also bleeding heavily, but by using his knees and right hand to operate the throttle, flaps and control stick he managed a controlled landing in a helicopter clearing.

Barrie continues with the story: "I hadn't been in Kluang very long and visited Dave in hospital. He only arrived a few weeks before me and was already a casualty. The control column is of course between your legs but the throttle on an Auster Mk 9 is in the centre low to your right so how he managed to control the aircraft and vary his throttle as required on finals with one hand I don't know? His passenger was the padre. Christmas was coming up and there was a bag of Christmas post to be delivered. The padre volunteered to throw the bag out because it was Christmas; he didn't need to because Dave could have done it himself. He got some bullets up through the fuselage, then through his seat and into his body. He died half an hour

after being got out of the Auster by the Marines. The Auster had folded up on landing, looking just like the tail wanted to scratch the nose; it was lying between tree stumps and yet both were uninjured by the landing! I have a copy of the Army Aviation Accidents report for 1964. In it is the short report about Sgt Thackeray landing his aircraft onto a helicopter clearing in Sarawak with his broken left arm dangling out of the door space, flapping in the slipstream. He only got a Green Endorsement for that, an officer would have got a medal."

**Oil leak over the jungle:** "I was tasked to take a brigadier from Tawau to Jesselton (now Kota Kinabalu) and return. The weather was good so I expected the 2½ round trip to be uneventful, not having to fly through forward areas.

A friend of mine, a sergeant in the Royal Military Police, was visiting our tent office on the aircraft dispersal and asked if there was a chance that he could have a trip in the Beaver one day? I said "yes, and he could come today if he was free" He was, so it was arranged that he was going as my 'mechanic' so he could sit in the co-pilots seat next to me. I told him to hide his red beret and his RMP shoulder tags and keep quiet.

The Brigadier arrived on time and asked if he could sit up front. I apologised and said my mechanic would be sitting there. He didn't argue and decided to get some paperwork done on a rear seat. Relief!

I got them strapped in and off we went. It was a beautiful day and at 5500 feet ASL the view was fantastic. About half way there I noticed a small drop of oil creeping up the centre of the windscreen, I thought it had started to rain but there were no clouds! In a few minutes there were three or four dribbles of oil following the first. Within 10 minutes the windscreen was covered in oil. The Beaver uses engine oil to supply the pitch adjustment of the propeller blades and there was an oil seal fitted around the blades and it had sprung a leak!

I was more than half way to my destination so I had no option but to carry on and hope that not all the oil would run out before we got to the airfield, about another 40 minutes flying. It was a little worrying having only one engine which might stop at any minute and nothing but miles of deep jungle beneath us.

Needless to say we made it. We parked up and got out to see a mass of oil all the way down the fuselage to the tail where it was dripping off onto the ground. I checked the engine oil level and it was less than half the minimum required to fly (the oil tank holds five gallons!). I already got a message through to our Flight HQ in Brunei requesting a mechanic with a new seal be sent up to Jesselton ASAP. I was told 'tomorrow'. OK, no problem, we stay the night. The Brigadier came up to me, he wasn't happy that we had to overnight but accepted that I needed to wait for the spare seal and then said "Good job you have your mechanic with you isn't it Sgt?" My friend was nowhere to be seen as he was hiding behind the tail!"

**Night stop at Bario:** "On one occasion I had to fly to Bario, a forward position in central Borneo held by the Gurkhas, for a very early dawn take off from there the following morning. I arrived just before dusk and was taken to a native type hut built on stilts, just by the perimeter fence and given a 'stretcher bed', a canvas and steel spring camping bed and told to bed down. The young 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant looked around the one room hut and told me to make my bed against a wall facing the camp perimeter fence. I suggested I make my bed on the other side where I could easily see my Beaver. "No" he said "the *Indos* were using a type of hand held Russian rocket launcher and if they attacked at night the projectile would pass through the first grass-atap wall but not explode until it hit the other wall on the side I wanted to sleep under. I saw his point and bedded down where he told me to do so. Not the kind of thing you want to hear before going to bed!

I went to the 'grub' tent for a bite to eat and drink and then went to bed, in my flying suit, just in case I needed to make a swift removal. Late in the evening I needed a pee so I climbed down the ladder, got as far as the rain drainage ditch near the hut and proceeded to have a pee. Almost immediately I had that feeling you get when someone comes up to you from behind. I twisted my head around and there, about six inches from my shoulder was the dark face of a Gurkha (on guard duty) who had silently got that close to me. With his white teeth shining out of his camouflaged face he asked "Password Sahib". I didn't know it, hadn't been told it and told him so. He answered with a grin "OK Sahib, I know you're aeroplane driver, pass friend" The rest of the night was uneventful but in the morning I noticed one of a group of Gurkhas looking at me and giving a broad smile, the said "Morning Sahib". He could have cut my throat with his kukri that night and I wouldn't have known anything about it!"

### **The start of helicopter support in Malaya – part 3**

**Bob Ashley's** experiences with helicopter flying in the 1950's continues: 'Flying from Kluang using two S55's, we were doing a patrol replacement for the Army. This 'op' was about half an hour flying out to a clearing on a back road at the edge of the jungle. Our fuel had been brought in by the Army in four gallon square tins known as *flimsies* which we opened with a parang (I still have mine). When one of the S55's came back from a drop, it was making an unusual sound from the two blade tail rotor. We stacked up some fuel drums and climbed up to investigate. It appeared that it had hit a tree with one tip which had a small gash torn in it but no other damage. Not having any spares and with the helicopter in a non-secure area once the Army left, we had to do something. We got on the radio to KL for a spare tail rotor to be sent down to Kluang as soon as possible. We discussed the problem and decided that as the small tip pocket was non-structural we would use a hand drill to remove the cherry rivets holding it on. We removed both tip pockets and then replaced all the rivets hoping this would effectively balance up the rotor? The pilot ran the engine up for full rotor revolutions (190 to 210 rpm) and there was no vibration felt that was more than normal. Then, doing the only thing possible as the Army guards were leaving, we flew it back to Kluang!

A Valetta brought in a spare tail rotor that evening and John Hooper and I replaced it, lit by the compound security lights. I do remember the factory 'civvy rep', who I think was Keith Pardoe, was not impressed but there were no other suggestions of what could have been done. Since then, as a matter of interest, in civil aviation I have made similar decisions when operating in isolated back areas over many years when the situation required it.

One Saturday afternoon, when up on one of the helicopters greasing and checking the rotor head, bullets started whistling by our heads – we bailed out fast!

One of the Army SNCO's in the nearby Army Sergeants Mess was shooting at some stray dogs that were hanging around the area, and to do this he was using a Sten gun. Apparently, he didn't notice where he was shooting or where the ricochets were going!

When at the police jungle forts, such as Fort Iskandar out in the swamps and jungle of Tasek Bera, our fuel and other supplies were air dropped by Valettas. These were flown to us from Singapore or KL. These airdrops were quite spectacular to see when watched from the ground. The varied parachute supplies were usually packed on sacks of rice as a base to cushion the landing as they were quite heavy, even when dropped from low altitude. We would watch the load leave the aircraft then move ourselves to a safer place, if necessary! Now and again a drop chute didn't open and the load would disintegrate on impact. If it was a fuel load in four gallon flimsy metal cans, it vaporised with a bang, and the rice went everywhere! The Semelai ( the local indigenous people) would run out and pick up all the rice they could find.

These green drop parachutes made good shirts and up to recently I still had one. I also have a jerry can from a heap that had been air dropped in and then dumped.

Often, after these supply drops, the delivery aircraft would 'beat' us up. They would come back down low over the strip with a wing tip lower than the trees and the Army drop crews would wave to us from the rear doors as they went by, practically at our head height.



Our replacement crews were ferried in to the fort as required by Prestwick single engine Pioneers from 267 Squadron (left). These carried five passengers and went practically anywhere and were much cheaper to run.

Fort Iskandar was a noisy fort to stay at as they had, and used, a 25-pounder gun that had been flown in and reassembled there. The Army would fire this at apparently random targets at intervals during the night just to stir up the bandits, if they were around! To say the least, this tended to wake us up as our hut where we slept was situated right behind the gun. For bedding we would use old drop

chutes on the split bamboo floor in the atap roofed hut. If you wanted a wash you had to go out at the back of the fort, through the wire and bamboo stakes etc, down into the swamp and washed in the water there. You always took your loaded weapon with you when you went and you never went alone!

On all these 'ops' we lived on food from the ration packs we brought from base. These contained little tins of meat and vegetables, beans, cake etc, a small tin opener and a tommy cooker with paraffin blocks for heating. To make water drinkable we put in purification tablets; after putting in the tablets to kill the bugs we put in lemonade crystals obtained from the cookhouse. This drink was known to us as 'battery acid', but it really quenched your thirst.

We made a few trips to Kota Tinggi in Johore, to the Army Jungle Training School. This was to familiarise the troops with helicopters, which were then a new thing for them too. Whilst there I managed to acquire two smoke grenades, just for emergencies! No survival gear was issued in my time; our arms issue was a Mk 5 Sten with a wooden butt and three magazines, but no reloading tool. The Army told me that unless you unloaded these magazines every day, or so, they would not feed and would often jam. You could only load 15 rounds using your thumb and it was a thirty two round magazine. The other option was the Mk 5 Lee Enfield jungle rifle with cut down wood work and a flash eliminator, plus a bandolier of 0.303 ammunition.

*To be continued*



## Late News



I was recently informed of the death, on 10<sup>th</sup> June, of **Tony Richardson** following a period of illness. Tony was not a member of the Association although he kept in close contact with Don Brereton and, through Don's persuasion, presented a copy of his Butterworth memoirs to the archives. These were published in the Christmas 2012 and Easter 2013 issues of 'Eastward' with a promise of further writings to follow. Sadly this wasn't to happen.

Tony was also acquainted with Fl Lt Anthony Burcher when at Butterworth in the 1950's. Tony Burcher was a survivor of the 1943 Dams Raid who sustained serious injuries on bailing out of his damaged Lancaster to eventually become a POW. Tony was able to spend time with him over a beer (or more) in the evenings and eventually teased out his (previously) untold story of survival as a POW. These findings were given to the Association and were published as a series of articles in the newsletter. From both Tony's memoirs and the Anthony Burcher story, the RAF Butterworth & Penang Association has learned how much Tony enjoyed his time whilst at Butterworth and his willingness to share the previously untold story of a modest war hero who just happened to be at Butterworth during his time there.

*Dave Croft*

From **Don Brereton**: I first met Tony Richardson at RAF Butterworth in 1957, to be honest it was in the NAAFI bar!

Tony worked in the signals caravan at the end of the strip so his opportunities to socialise were limited, but from time to time we met up in the bar and 'chewed the fat.' He had been in Korea, and being a couple of years older than me, had earned my respect (I had wanted to be posted to Korea). Then we were posted home!

The next time our paths crossed was in 2009, 52 years later, when I was given his telephone number and gave him a call. He didn't remember me! But when I told him about the personal things he had told me he realised we must have socialised on occasions. We did meet at the 2011 RAF National Service Parade at RAF Cosford and afterwards we had a pint and a meal, and a chat, at the Bell in Tong. Since then we kept in touch by phone, so I was really surprised when Dave Croft told me he had passed away on June 10<sup>th</sup>.

Summing up, Tony was a character and I think that he had enjoyed his life, and after all that is what it is all about.





**'Butterworth Bruisers' – Gloster Javelins from 60 Squadron  
RAF on a rapid take-off from RAAF Butterworth in 1967**



**Borneo Escort**