

Eastward

Summer 2018



RAF Butterworth & Penang Association

Issue 51



The RAF Butterworth & Penang Association was formed on the 30th August 1996 at the Casuarina Hotel, Batu Ferringhi, Penang Island.

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Front cover: Queen's Colours of the Far East Air Force



Boston Bar in Georgetown

Syd Rogers 1956-58

Chairman's Page

Reunion and AGM - 13 to 15 May 2018.



My first task is to record our thanks to Len Wood for making all the arrangements for the Reunion in Lichfield. It is fair to record that the venue was good as it gave us all the options of going to the Arboretum, Birmingham, RAF Cosford or simply being tourists in Lichfield. I think that all of us were happy with the accommodation and the service provided by the hotel staff who did everything they could to make our stay enjoyable. However, the big letdown was the food at the 'Gala Dinner' and the buffet lunch, which resulted in much food being returned to the kitchen, amateurish food presentation and a poor choice of ingredients - certainly not value for money! I know that Len has written to the General Manager on our behalf and is intending to visit the hotel to sort things out for next year. I think the best advice for everyone is to 'Keep the Faith' and trust Len to make sure that the hotel knows our feelings. Overall, a most enjoyable Reunion and AGM and Anne and I are already looking forward to next year's extravaganza.

Cenotaph Parade



I've booked 30 places for the 'Units of the Far East Air Force' to participate as a contingent in this year's Cenotaph Parade in London on Remembrance Sunday, alongside members from the RAF Changi and RAF Seletar Associations. This year will be very special as 11th November marks the centenary of the end of World War 1 and most certainly there will be other commemorative events in London for you to attend. If you would like to experience the camaraderie and emotion of the event then please send your details to me by **13th August**, with your **full name** verifiable with your **photo ID to be carried on the day**. The other details I require are: your **Full address, Date and Place of Birth**, your **Service** (RAF etc.) **Service Number** and **years of Service**. Also required is (where applicable) your **e-mail address, mobile phone number** and **landline number**. My contact details are on the Committee Members page (2) of the newsletter.

Remembrance Events

Please don't forget that if you are laying a wreath at any local Remembrance event this year the Association has a stock of wreath centres...these are available, free of charge, from Don Donovan (contact details on page 2).

What's in a Tie?

As most of you know, I wear my RAFBPA tie at the slightest opportunity rather than my British Legion tie. Recently RAF Spadeadam was granted the Freedom of the City of Carlisle and, although we weren't guests, a local councillor, seeing the unusual RAF tie with the hornet, kris and Chinese junk showing on it invited us into the reception, complete with Prosecco, buffet and wine! We also have the 'Weeping Window at Carlisle Castle and we work as volunteers in meeting the thousands of visitors where my BPA tie has been a talking point on quite a few occasions. With Armed Forces Day and Battle of Britain Sunday who knows where the RAF BPA tie will get me to next?

'O sole mio.

Recently, as President of my Rotary Club, the opportunity arose for me to tick something off my bucket list! Entering to 'O sole mio...I served 70 cornetto ice creams to the assembled throng, which included the Mayor of Carlisle and the National President of Rotary in Great Britain and Ireland.

With all our best wishes and hoping you all keep well and enjoy life to the full.

Tony and Anne Parrini



From the Editor



Welcome to Issue 51 and I would like to thank those of you who have contributed to finding out 'extras' following previous articles, also those who have continued to provide stories on a regular basis and those of you who have sent in material for the first time or 'snippets' of information....it's all interesting and much appreciated. My thanks also go to Laurie Bean yet again for his help with Squadron Operational Diaries and proof reading of each newsletter, also to Bob Margolis for the Annual Reunion photographs. I have chosen for the main story for this issue a subject that has had my interest ever since Don Brereton sent (a long time ago) a copy of a photograph of LAC Frederick George Freeman (the photograph copy was sent to Don by Margaret Martin, daughter of Fred). Fred was at Butterworth in 1941 followed by Singapore and then evacuation to Java and then becoming a POW of the Japanese in 1942. My interest, knowing he returned to the UK at the end of the war, was in finding what happened to him between 1942 and 1945. The article on pages 23 to 26 is the condensed story, the result of searching through a number of stories in various references over a long period of time.

A request was made by member Geof Myatt to mention the RAF Music Service Association in this issue. It is a pleasure to do so and details of the RAFMuSA can be found on page 14.

I met Dr Mike Pattison over the reunion weekend where we spent an interesting hour or so looking, and discussing, his father's medals and photographs from his wartime RAF service in S.E. Asia. His father, LAC Geoffrey Pattison, was featured in Issue 49 of the newsletter. Since the meeting we have continued to unravel bits about of his father's service, steadily because no information on the photographs has been recorded, but Mike has now made a start on his father's diary, written when on squadron service in India and Burma. Laurie Bean has been of great help with the squadron records and in time Mike thinks he will have enough material to provide us with an article on squadron life for the ground crews. I look forward to reading it.

Also, sometime during the reunion period, the Big Book of Butterworth photographs (Issue 49, page 31) was delivered to the RAF Museum, Cosford by RAFBPA members Bob Margolis, Viv Addy, Margaret Croft and myself. It turned out to be a very pleasant outing as Bob and I spent time explaining many technical details about a number of aircraft to the ladies, who showed much interest! My thanks to Bob and Viv for driving us over to the museum, and back!

Tony Parrini has already mentioned 2018 being the centenary of the end of WW1 and the formation of the Royal Air Force. Two other historical notable events also worth adding to this year are:

- 1 The formation of the RAF Nursing Service in 1918, which in turn became Princess Mary's Royal Air Force Nursing Service in 1923 - celebrating 95 years of (PMRAFNS) service in 2018.
- 2 The National Health Service celebrates 70 years of service since being launched on the 5th July 1948

I'm sure a growing number of us can relate more to the NHS as we grow steadily older; I for one have had to call on the expertise of RAF consultants and PMRAFNS during my time in the RAF, and later with the NHS. So, happy anniversary to both and long may they continue.

Before I sign off from this page I would like to draw attention to the picture at the top of the page. I thought it was one of me receiving a £5 note but have since been informed it was of me handing over £5. It must be a mistake, I never willingly part with money, in fact I never have money on me!

Dave Croft

RAFBPA Correspondence and Stories

General Templer. Following the request for any further information about General Templer's 'visit' to Butterworth sometime in May 1954 (*Eastward* Issue 50, page 6), **John Gibson** writes that 'At one point he came to the Control Tower and demanded a cup of tea, which I made for him. Tall and slim he had a commanding presence'. **Brian Lloyd** also wrote to say that he was part of the road guard at



RAF Kuala Lumpur (*right*), possibly on May 30th or 31st 1954 when the Templers passed in an open car to embark on a DC3 on the first stage of their leaving Malaya. The above photograph from Brian of General and Lady Templer is also backed up by separate film footage held by British Pathé; the date(s) of their departure are given as 30th May in *The War of the Running Dogs* (Noel Barber) or 31st May by *Our Man in Malaya* (Margaret Shennan), the British Pathé film only gives the date as being 1954.

Further to the above, another reference source (Leon Comber 2015) gives the 1st June as being the date of General and Lady Templer's departure from Malaya, via Singapore.

Laurie Bean. Following the article *Testing the Beam* in Issue 50, Laurie adds the following: 'I obtained a copy of the 191 Squadron F541 (Operations Record Book) for June 1945 where the flight to Brown Island (Cocos) was shown as "Transit Flight to Brown". The Navigator in the crew listing is a Flt Sgt (Eric?) Knight and there are three possible contenders for the *Joe* mentioned in the story. The flight timings also correspond with those mentioned by (Flt) Sgt Norman Hudson, so it looks as though it was a flight to test out the newly installed Loran-B equipment.'

OPERATIONS RECORD BOOK.

DETAIL OF WORK CARRIED OUT.

By No. 191 Squadron.

Catalina IVB JX 374 2/191	W/O. B.Carr (Capt) F/Sgt. N.Hudson (2 Pilot) F/Sgt. E.Knight (Nav.) F/Sgt. L.J.Garson F/Sgt. J.Bower. Sgt. G. Hannen. F/Sgt. N.D.Hawkins Sgt. W.Sidebottom. Sgt. J.Emery.	Transit Flight to Brown.	10th. June 071038Z 080248Z 091024Z 100143Z	Aircraft being airborne at 071038Z, had a good flight to "Brown", being waterborne at 091024Z. Weather fair. For the return journey aircraft was airborne at 091024Z and flying through very bad weather base was made at 100143Z
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RAF Airstrip Directory - Malaysia and Brunei. Thanks to efforts made by **Lee Le Clerq** on behalf of the Association, we are now the owners of a copy of the October 1969 (final edition) directory. Within the document are notes on the many obscure strips and also maps showing the approximate locations of the same, also a number of 'forts' constructed in the early 50s. A very interesting document.

Laying a wreath. On Mother's Day, Sunday 11th March, **Laurie Bean** met with RAFBPA member **David (Tug) Wilson** and party to visit the Western Road Cemetery in Penang to lay a wreath on behalf of the Association. He was also in the company of members of the RAF Changi Association and the message on the wreath reads 'For the mothers of all who lie here and on behalf of RAF Butterworth.'



FEAF Disbandment Ceremony 1971. Following the issue of the Easter 2018 newsletter an e-mail was received from **Dave Taylor** who referred to page 29 and the Disbandment Ceremony of HQ FEAF images used in that they 'actually depict the closing down of Seletar and are official photos from the album of AVM Maisner.' Dave is thanked for this, however the images used were from Mel Bonfield who was with the RAF Regiment in the period leading up to disbandment and later a professional photographer. Also the intention was not to represent the closing down of individual units etc, within FEAF but to highlight the official disbandment of FEAF on October 31st 1971. It was felt the images used presented a high level of professionalism worthy of the occasion.

Dave's timely reminder in mentioning AVM Maisner is also of interest as he was O/C RAF Seletar from 28 March 1969 until the disbandment of the Far East Air Force. Group Captain Alec Maisner, as he was then, was born Aleksander Maisner of a Polish father and German mother in Hamburg, July 26 1921. At the outbreak of WW2 he was a student at Warsaw University and fought with the Citizens Guard until the fall of Warsaw towards the end of September 1939. He attempted to reach France via neutral Romania but was captured by the Russians and interned in a Siberian labour camp. In 1941 he was released on amnesty after the German invasion of the Soviet Union and with thousands of other Polish citizens travelled south to join the reforming Polish Army in Kyrgyzstan.

Later Aleksander Maisner (with the Polish II Corps) was transferred by the Russians to British control in Iran (Persia), where in 1943 he volunteered for the Polish Air Force and transferred to England. He served in the PAF until 1946 when he was offered a permanent commission with the RAF. In the RAF he flew with Transport Command and then in 1952 joined 50 Squadron who were starting out with the Canberra. He was one of the first pilots to fly the Vulcan in 1955 and was awarded the AFC for his part in introducing the aircraft into RAF service. In 1960, Wing Commander Maisner was attached to the Royal New Zealand Air Force Base Ohakea as OC Flying where he was instrumental in introducing the Canberra into RNZAF service. A MOD appointment in the planning of contraction of RAF presence overseas followed then, as Group Captain, commanded RAF Seletar from the 28th March 1969 until closure of the station. He retired from the RAF in 1977.

History Note - Russia's 'gift' to the RAF. Have you ever wondered why the RAF has such a distinctive blue coloured uniform? The answer was provided by the Yorkshire Post of March 31 2018: 'The Royal Air Force has a Yorkshire textiles manufacturer to thank for the distinctive blue colour of its uniforms. It was in 1918 when the RAF was first formed that the new service approached a cloth maker in Leeds. Based in Pudsey, family run business Hainsworth has been making and providing the RAF with the blue material for its uniforms for a century.' At the time the firm 'actually had a warehouse full of blue grey material that had been woven for the Tsar of Russia for his (Imperial Army) Cossack trousers, but were unable to deliver it because 'war' had broken out in Russia.' Then the RAF came along and that was it - 'they have taken the fabric since and they still take it for their ceremonial uniforms now.'

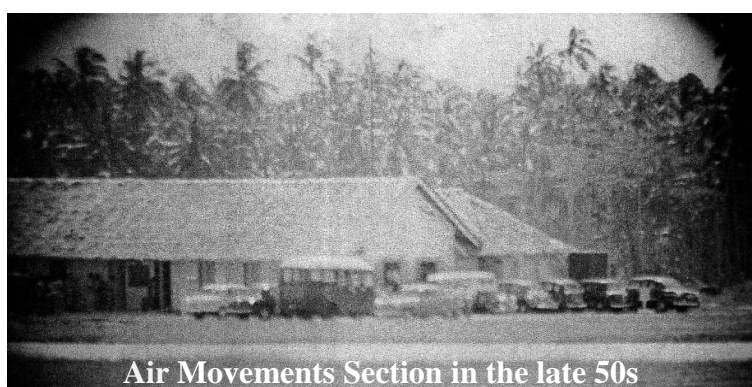
A Sign of the Times. From the pen of **Don Brerton** is the story of some 'disappearing' items from RAF Butterworth during his time there.

The following are a few thoughts about Bristol Freighters, and their crews, that the article in the last newsletter brought to mind:

1 Thursday 27th June 1957 - I returned from eleven days leave at the TOC H in Singapore. I departed Changi, via KL and arrived at Butterworth around mid afternoon. The aircraft used was a RNZAF Bristol Freighter which might just have been 5911, the aircraft described in issue 50.

2 41 Squadron RNZAF had a bad habit of trying to acquire items belonging to other units without their permission. Some of these came from RAF Butterworth and there are two occasions I know of, the first I witnessed myself. I was on duty in the Tower watching a 41 Squadron Bristol Freighter taxiing past us when the intercom from 45 Squadron 'buzzed'. The SATCO answered it, a flight sergeant was on the other end "Stop that aircraft" he shouted. "They have pinched our squadron sign!" Flight Lieutenant Stephenson DFC AFC called over the intercom to the Fire Section and ordered 'Crash One' to proceed in front of the aircraft to stop it taxiing. Stephenson then told the Freighter pilot that he wouldn't be allowed to take-off until the squadron sign was returned. I watched as the side door opened and the sign (which was quite large) was passed to the waiting fire crew. Crash One then withdrew and the aircraft went on its way.

3 In another incident they succeeded. A corporal from Air Movements collected the RNZAF crew of an overnighted Freighter from the Sergeants Mess in the Standard Vanguard pickup. When he arrived they were waiting outside the mess; one sat in the front and the others climbed in at the back. A few yards from the mess the passenger in the front asked the driver to stop for a minute. The driver heard the men in the back get out and lift something into the back of the vehicle - he thought it was some of their kit as he couldn't see into the back of the pickup. When he arrived at the aircraft he stopped at the side door and the crew got out with their kit, leaving the corporal to drive back to Air Movements. It wasn't until later in the week he heard a cannon from outside the Sergeants Mess, was missing and he put two and two together. The cannon had originally been at Fort Cornwallis on Penang Island and had been presented to the Sergeants Mess by the Penang Port Commission; the corporal never let on at the time of his part in the 'abduction' but now asks if anyone knows where the cannon is today?



Regarding the 'cannon' incident, **Laurie Bean** (in Penang) was contacted to see if he could throw any light on the 'abduction'? In his reply Laurie says he is unaware of this particular incident, but there were a lot of squadrons involved in 'trophy hunting' at one time or other. Laurie also added that the type of cannon from the Cornwallis area are heavy cast iron items and most likely would have put a strain on the vehicles suspension. However it does seem that in the past cannons had been donated by the authorities to different organisations judging by those displayed around George town.

On the Pan. A further piece from **Don Brereton** relates to the RAAF and one of their Lincoln bombers being prepared for operations against the CT's at Butterworth: 'Below is an image (right) of what the CT's feared more than any of the other air ordinances that were thrown at them*. The aircraft being prepared on the pan at Butterworth in 1956 is a Lincoln of No 1 Squadron RAAF based at Tengah. The bombs shown are 500 pounders, a World War 2 model, courtesy of the Butterworth bomb dump who were quite happy to get rid of them.'

* From interrogation reports of captured CT's.



General Templer visit 1954. Further to the request in Issue 50 for information regarding the 'forced landing at Butterworth aerodrome with engine trouble', **Charlie Tagg** has written of his experience of the visit, prior to the 19th May 1954, when he left Butterworth for Singapore. On the occasion of the visit 'we were on the airstrip when we saw Army troops and armoured cars appear. I don't even know what aircraft he (General Templer) was in, I assume it was a Valetta?. As we were not wearing much clothing my mate and I decided to lose ourselves in the long grass, then hearing two armoured cars approaching, we looked up and found ourselves looking at four Bren guns pointing at us. They must have seen us from their turrets and wanted to know who we were and what we were doing. So we told them we were keeping out of the way and they told us to get back to our Armourers tent (right) because we might get (accidentally) shot!'



I only saw the General from about 50 yards away, but not his wife. So until I read the article in the newsletter I didn't know that it wasn't an official visit.'

Note: Charlie was an Armourer with 33 Squadron at Butterworth From December 1952 to May 1954.

1956 Flight to Australia. The March 24/25 1956 non-stop 17 hour flight of a Qantas 'Dreamliner' Boeing 707 from Perth to London prompted **Sam Mold** to write in about his 1956 four-day scheduled flight to



Sydney, courtesy of a Qantas Airlines L-1049 Super Constellation that superseded Lockheed's L-749 model. The two main differences were at the start and end of the journey. The first stop on this long flight to Australia was at Rome (not Tripoli), and the other deviation was after an overnight stay in Singapore, then we next landed in Indonesia

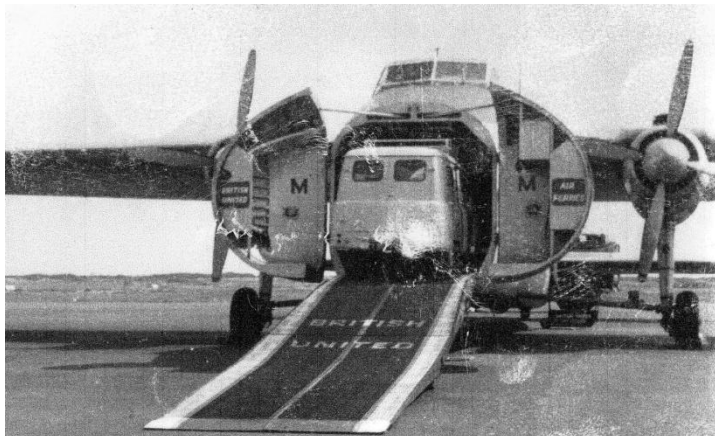
(Jakarta) before continuing to Perth where the Immigration Office was situated and my passport was stamped to confirm my arrival. Some 15 months later I flew out of RAAF Edingurgh Field to return home on an original RAF Comet C2. As the RAAF base did not have an Immigration Office, means, and my passport confirms, I have never left Australia. Could I claim citizenship?' The Air Ministry supplied my one-way airline ticket for the flight to Australia; it was sold by BOAC who had a tie-up arrangement with Qantas who had no handling facilities along the route until we reached Perth. Though drinks were served on the flight, all meals were served on the ground. BOAC had 'Speedbird' houses at each refuelling stop where one could have a wash and brush up and a slap-up meal washed down with free beer. There was none of the inevitable hassle that one experiences at today's international airports. Today, flights give top speeds but don't give pleasure - in days long gone by there was no queueing and no security problems, and that's what made them so enjoyable.

Going back to my 1956 posting to Australia, it was the first time I had to apply for a passport, and since then I have obtained five more. Originally I was prepared to fly to Oz by chartered York a/c that would have flown me out by refuelling stops at military air bases along the route. As such, provided such bases were used, RAF and chartered flights could fly as far away as Iwakuni in Japan (thence to Korea) without the need for a passport. In 1956 I was a member of an RAF Air Task Group (ATG) that had been formed at RAF Weston Zoyland (in Somerset) to support the atomic bomb trials to be held at Maralinga in the South Australian desert. Chartered York a/c were scheduled for the task of flying out the ATG, but the one I was due to fly in crashed on take-off from RAF Luqa in Malta. Until the cause of the crash could be confirmed all chartered York a/c were grounded. That's when the panic set in. Met officers had already planned when it would be safe to conduct these atomic tests to ensure that any nuclear fall out would not occur over populated areas such as Alice Springs, Perth and Adelaide - so it was essential to stick to the prepared plans. Talk about government top priorities. No obstacles were allowed to hinder the government's desire to become a member of the Nuclear Club alongside the USA and Soviet Union. One morning the Task Group were lined up for individual photos to be taken along with their personal details. A despatch rider rushed to London, and I still find it hard to believe that we all possessed a passport later that day. That's what 'pulling all the stops out' means. With no military air transport available the Air Ministry had no alternative than to quickly arrange for ATG personnel to be flown out by civilian airlines. The first ATG batch flew the westwards route to Australia with Pan American on Boeing Stratocruisers. I was with the second batch taking the eastern route aboard a Qantas Airlines L-1049 Super Constellation that landed me in Sydney on 9th May 1956. I then transferred to a TAA Vickers Viscount to fly me to Adelaide, my destination.

Note: Sam's FEAF service included Seletar, Tengah and Butterworth in the early 50s and RMAF Kuala Lumpur and Tengah in the 60s. More from Sam in the next issue (52).

Just a hop across the Channel. From **Les Downey** is his story of travelling by Bristol Freighter (ref: Issue 50) across the English Channel: 'The article in "*Eastward*" about the Bristol Freighter brought back memories, Despite serving four years in the RAF I never managed to get a flight in any aircraft. As you can see from the photographs (below) the first time was in 1962 using the British United Air ferries service from Llyd to Le Touquet. Violet, with our ten year old daughter, myself and two friends took my self converted Bedford van to France and Spain. On arrival at the airport you just left your vehicle in a compound with the key in the ignition. You then went and reported your arrival and when your flight was called went through customs where you could watch your vehicle being loaded. You were then escorted to the plane which could carry three cars and twelve passengers.

If a party was late and you were early you could be queue jumped; also there was a good restaurant there as well. On arrival at Le Touquet the reverse procedure took place and then off you went to enjoy your holiday. Over the years Violet and I used this service many times and we were sorry when it closed down. We never had to wait long at either airport and the flight took 20 minutes, hardly time for the attendant to deal with the duty free! Oh happy days. Referring to the RNZAF Freighter NZ5911, it would be wonderful if the aircraft could be brought back into flying condition, or for taxi runs like *Just Jane*, the Lancaster at East Kirkby.'



Under reorganisation of the parent United Airways company in 1967 and 1968, the air ferry division was renamed British Air Ferries, as shown in the picture (left).



Note: Les arrived at Seletar from India in November 1945 and was then posted to Base Work Shops, Glugor (ASR Unit) before returning to Seletar. Top pictures are of his Bedford being loaded aboard a Freighter.

The Dump and my Bush Jacket. In response to the 1957 picture of one of our members wearing a 'bush jacket' style of uniform top in Issue 50 (page 4), **Don Brereton** has provided the following: 'In the 50s at Butterworth there was a dump, surrounded by a topped barbed wire security fence (which wasn't very secure), situated the other side of the accommodation area past the dhobi building. Inside the fence were various wings and fuselages of written off Venoms and many 'mysterious' wooden crates.

One time I was looking for souvenir instruments in the scrap fuselages, but my attention was drawn to the wooden crates. Straightaway I struck pay dirt - the first crate I looked in was full of clothing from Stores. But, they all had been slashed with knives! At the bottom of the pile was a bush jacket complete with black buttons and SAC flashes. The Stores seemed to have less enthusiasm in slashing the bush jacket compared to the other garments; there were only four cuts in it!

At the time you were allowed to wear bush jackets (right - Don in his newly acquired bush jacket), even though they had stopped being issued in 1956. The airtex shirt that replaced them looked awful and only rank of corporal and above were shown, without medal ribbons. Having acquired the bush jacket I abandoned my search for instruments and rapidly departed from the dump with my prize! I kept it secretly in my locker until Rose sew-sew made her weekly call - it was hard to explain what invisible mending was to her because of her limited English and my limited Chinese. But I think she got the picture because when she returned the following week you could hardly see the joins, and it had also been washed and pressed. It was so much easier and comfortable to wear than the issue shirt (right - Don in his newly acquired bush jacket)



I kept the jacket up to the end of my tour and then brought it home with me where, stored in the loft, it was eventually 'eaten' by nesting mice.'

Reaching New Heights - RAF Aerial Erectors. In the search for a subject to celebrate the RAF's Centenary by way of the achievements of Far East Air Force ground personnel, the website: 'Ex-RAF Aerial Erectors Association' provided the very subject. RAF Aerial Erectors (Riggers) provide maintenance and servicing of all types of communication aerials worldwide and in the Far East they included Chia Keng (Singapore receiver site FEAF HQ Singapore), Jurong (Singapore transmitter site FEAF HQ Singapore), both serving as relay stations in the Commonwealth Air Forces Network (CAFNet), also Butterworth, Seletar (390 MU) HK, Gan etc. The 'Aerial Erectors' website is run by **Brian 'Eddie' Edwards** who founded the Association in 1996. Eddie joined the RAF in January 1956 and following training and his 'first' UK posting was then posted to FEAF in November 1956. On arrival at Singapore he was posted to the Signals Centre at RAF Negombo (Ceylon), later to RAF Kai Tak (Hong Kong) in November 1957, returning to the UK in May 1959. 'Eddie' was again posted to FEAF (390 MU) in November 1959 where he was involved in the installation, recovery and servicing of masts, aerial arrays and feeder systems at RAF stations throughout Singapore, Malaya and Borneo until May 1962 when he was posted back to the UK. In December 1963 He was again posted overseas, this time to MEAF until 1965. He left the RAF in 1968 and states 'Nearly 8 years of my 12 years service were carried out overseas'.



A Rigger's Tale - it's just up the hill. This article appeared in the Association newsletter and is printed in this issue of 'Eastward' courtesy of Eddie.

'1960. It was a payday Thursday (we were paid fortnightly out there) and Joe Reid, Terry Russell and I were the only ones still in the Aerial section that afternoon. Jimmy Orr and Ian Mackay had 'disappeared', allegedly on various tasks. WO Bradley, the Ground Radio Flight 2 i/c came in and said he had an emergency repair job for me. I was to fly up to the Royal Australian Air Force base at Butterworth on Friday afternoon and to take Reid and Russell with me. We would be taken by launch to the RAF's Song Song Bombing Range base on Bidan Island where one of their communications aerials had been blown down (in a

storm)! He then told them to go back to the billet and get their kit ready, also to collect their paybooks from the accounts section and be ready to leave on Friday afternoon. I went to the office to get all the paperwork for the job and returned to the section to get all the spare parts etc, ready to take with us.

When I got back from the accounts office with my paybook WO Bradley was waiting for me. It seems our flight to Butterworth had been brought forward to 6 am next morning - The RNZAF Bristol Freighter we were travelling in would now be making an urgent medical return trip to bring some casualties back down to the hospital at RAF Changi. A patrol had been in a clash with some CT's up near the border with Thailand and the casualties from the patrol were expected to arrive at Butterworth, from the bondoo, mid-morning. He (the WO) said he had sent someone across to the billet but Reid and Russell were nowhere to be found. He then said to me (with a grin on his face) " It's pay day and riggers plus money equals beer." "You will know where to find them so go and make sure they don't miss the flight, transport will be picking you all up outside the section at 0430 hrs tomorrow." I knew exactly where they would be, and they had a head start on me!

We made the flight and the Kiwis even fed us breakfast from their galley. They had met us before as we were 'frequent fliers' on their aircraft. As soon as the plane landed we were quickly unloaded and refuelling had started almost as soon as the aircraft came to a stop. Two ambulances and a Landrover, with the casualties, were already waiting to be boarded on the plane. In less than an hour we heard it take off heading south. We were dropped off at the transit billet and I was taken to see the RAF Element Signals Officer who said that the damaged mast was just up the hill from the radio shack on the base camp at Bidan Island. In the morning we would be picked up and taken with all our kit down to the Straits Trading Jetty where we would board a Range Safety launch from RAF Glugor, the RAF MCU on Penang Island, and be taken to Bidan Island. Return journey arrangements would be sorted out once the job was completed, hopefully in a day or so. The range was out of action until a proper radio contact with Butterworth was available, and also the quadrant huts were working once again. Having checked in at the RAF Element Orderly Room we had nothing to do until next morning so we decided to enjoy the delights of a visit to Penang Town rather than hang about in Butterworth camp for the rest of the day.

Next morning (Saturday) we were duly collected, along with our kit, and taken by a marine craft launch to the RAF Bidan bombing range base. In landing we were shown round the camp which was located along the back of the seashore and were given beds in one of the accommodation buildings. The radio operator



took us to the radio shack (above - marked with arrow) where he had now successfully repaired the HF aerial himself and then pointed out the location of the VHF aerial mast, He said he had been up there and inspected the site after the storm. The mast, which was a small air transportable type of mast, had little damage apart from a couple of broken guy wires. The special bracket for the Type 24 aerial was also undamaged but the actual aerial was completely wrecked having hit the ground and needed to be replaced. The co-axial cable was undamaged and tests showed it to be in good working order.

It was as the Signals Officer at Butterworth had said 'just up the hill.' It was located in the jungle right up on the top of the island and the only way to reach it was to climb up a very rough path which ran beside the co-axial cable to the aerial mast. It took us two hours for us to scramble up the overgrown jungle path carrying a replacement aerial, a spare set of guys and all our tools, plus several bottles of water. Fortunately, as the radio operator stated, the mast was not badly damaged and we replaced the Type 24 aerial and the mast was re-erected with a new set of guys. We made a quick telephone call to the radio shack using the field

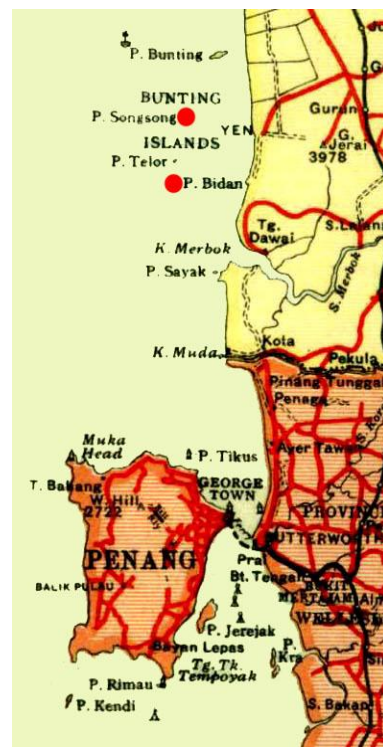
telephone which was in a box beside the mast and the radio operator did some signals to confirm everything was working again. We had a short rest break and admired the magnificent views before setting off back to camp.

Descending the path proved even worse than climbing up it and we were all totally exhausted by the time we had returned to base camp. We then checked out the HF aerial to ensure that the repairs done by the radio operator were OK? Further test were carried out by the radio operator and everything was found to be working correctly - job done, and RAF Bidan bombing range was open for business once more. The first customers were due to call in on Monday.

We were informed that we would have to stay (on the island) until Monday as the marine craft unit could not collect us until then. As we were very short of cash having spent most of our ready money in Penang, we were expecting a very miserable weekend stuck there with nothing to do, Wrong - most of the staff had returned to the mainland on Friday and would return on Monday morning, leaving just a maintenance and safety team on site over the weekend. We had a great Saturday night in their small canteen, the CO getting in the first round of drinks. All the booze was tax free and at cost as there were no staff wages to pay etc. Sunday breakfast was superb, and cooked while you waited. Aussie rations ensured you got fresh food and not the awful tinned food, powdered potatoes etc, that we were used to at Seletar.

Monday morning the range staff returned in the launch which then took us back to the Straits Trading Jetty and then transport back to Butterworth. The RAF Element Signals Officer thanked us for doing such a quick job and apologised for us being stuck on Bidan over the whole weekend - if only he knew! He then fixed us with a flight back to Seletar on a 34 Sqn Beverley that same afternoon. We went straight home as 34 Sqn were based at West Camp in Seletar and were our next door neighbours. So no messing about trying to get transport from Changi back to Seletar. Joe and Terry were soon back in the bar they had started from on the previous Thursday afternoon.'

RAF Bidan and Song Song Bombing Range. The Song Song range was a sea range located 17 nautical miles north of Penang. It provided high and medium level bombing on a large floating pontoon target and low level bombing on locally made floating targets and an Air to Ground rocket and gunnery facility. The range was used by a number of 'customers', the Canberras and Sabre aircraft of the RAAF, based at Butterworth, and detachments of the RAF V-bomber force and the Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm. The range was manned by RAF personnel from the RAF Element at Butterworth and normally operated Monday to Friday. The Range Safety Officer was usually an active pilot and he controlled the 'attacking' aircraft through VHF radio. In addition to the RSO was the Range SNCO, usually a RAF Sergeant who was i/c the (mostly) RAF range party, normally six armourers who operated the Quadrant Sights for bomb plotting - these were a radio operator, a ground equipment airman responsible for the electrical generators etc, a RAF or RAAF cook, also a RAF/RAAF medic. A Range Safety Launch policed the range area during bombing and firing exercises.



The Royal Air Force Music Service Association. The aim of the RAFMuSA is to enable ex music services personnel to maintain contact with musicians and friends at home and abroad. Further details can be found on the Association website at www.rafmusa.org, or from the membership secretary on e-mail: enquiries@rafmusa.org or telephone: **01296 433763**.

Down Memory Lane. Reporting a recent visit to RMAF Base Butterworth by **Mike Gregory**.

'On departing Singapore on HMT Empire Orwell in October 1958 I bade Malaya farewell but vowed that someday I would return. Sixty years later this month (April) I accomplished just that closing a chapter in my mind of the wonderful time spent at RAF Butterworth, KL and Singapore between 1956 and 1958'.

'On this recent visit to Penang I bade farewell to my travelling companions and took a taxi ride across the major causeway which now links Penang with Butterworth town. My specific destination was the main gate at the former RAF, then RAAF and currently RMAF base some miles north and familiar to us all who were stationed there at some time or other.

It hadn't changed that much, same main gate, same guardhouse on the left after entering, same main admin building fronted by the circular garden in which is planted the flagpole. Only the personnel have changed, and they are very polite! After having been introduced to a senior NCO and orderly officer, the result was the same - for security reasons I could not be permitted to look round for 'old times sake', even with an escort. When I described the base in detail as I remembered it in 1956, they agreed it hadn't changed much but, nevertheless, no entry for the prodigal son without higher authority sanction. How I wished I had written to the CO in advance of my intentions!

I will elaborate more and include more when I have recovered from hand surgery for Singapore and KL were also stops on the trip and this was closure to the memories of this 60 year old dream and reunion. One specific recollection of this agenda were the war memorials dedicated to those Commonwealth personnel that made the ultimate sacrifice in the Far East campaigns. I was quite surprised to note the 'recent' addition of the Malayan Emergency from 1948 to 1960 and, for a moment in time, truly felt a veteran and proud of my service in this country. I will be back with more on the visit and photographs....'

From mountain to desert to jungle. It was after overhearing a conversation at the 2017 Reunion by **David (Tug) Wilson**, where he mentioned taking part in mountain, desert and jungle rescues during his RAF career that he was persuaded to put pen to paper for the newsletter. Here is his story...

'Back in 1958 I was a volunteer driver attached to the RAF Mountain Rescue Service team at RAF St Athan in Wales. At first I hadn't a clue about the team when they were out on the mountain, but as I loved the outdoors and rather than sit and wait around for them to come off the mountain, I joined them.

Over the next few months we went out on exercises; it was great and most of the time we did map exercises, finding our way round the mountains in all weathers, and simulated casualty recoveries. My biggest surprise was how boggy it was on top of the mountains, also how fast the weather could change, also the visibility and also how fast the temperature could drop making it a very dangerous and cold place. We did a lot of rope training and stretcher work off the mountain.

On one occasion we found an old World War 2 wreck of a bomber that had crashed and also had a call to a Canberra that went in - we found wreckage and parts of the crew, but not much else. The most memorable occasion I remember was what happened on the mountain some years later after I came back from three years at Changi to St Athan. It was October and cold, and I was asked if I would lead a female team to help find two fourteen year old girls lost on the mountains near Sennybridge?

The main teams were already deployed and we were the back-up team. We set off for Sennybridge which was the start point of our allotted search area; already there were five teams in the area looking for the girls whose plan was supposed to take them down a right hand ridge on a triple peak with three routes to choose from. We took the centre ridge and went down the right side where at this stage one of my team started to have trouble with her feet. We stopped and discovered she was wearing nylon tights, causing friction and burning her feet - high on the mountain this was a not very private strip off of trousers and tights and on with cream and woollen socks (nice legs but a bit blue). The moral to the story being 'don't wear nylons when tramping over the mountains'.

Anyway we went down the ridge for about a mile and came to a shepherd's stone built sheep shelter - inside

we found two very cold and frightened girls. We made a hot drink for them, warmed them up and then set off for a pub with a telephone and fire about a mile away. On arrival we found the pub packed with two teams taking a break to dry out; they didn't live it down that it took a team of ladies to find the girls! Sadly this was my last trek on the mountains but I would like to mention that as many people who go for a drive on a sunny day like to stop and have a walk on the hills, then down comes the cloud and cold...they try to walk back off the hills but miss the path or fall. It is better that if you go for a mountain walk to be dressed for it, and to carry some means of alerting someone should you need to...preferably by blowing a whistle three times in a row at intervals.'

Note: The RAF Mountain Rescue Service was officially created in 1943. This year (2018) is the 75th anniversary of the RAF MRS.

In 1958 I was on detachment to 425 Signals Unit at El Adem in Libya when, as a MT driver, I got caught up in a desert rescue. One weekend some Germans from German Town* (where we were living), sited at the back of the airfield decided to drive out in to the desert and go hunting gazelles. They left early on a Saturday morning in an old Land Rover. By Sunday morning they had not returned, so volunteers to search for them were requested, in the well practised manner of "you, you and you".

We took two Land Rovers and one low Bedford 15 cwt truck well loaded with water, food and first aid gear as well as warm clothes for the night. This was my first time out in the desert, however we had experienced men with us. The desert was awe inspiring, not all sand, but also hard rocks and mixed sand and dust so we could easily follow their tracks as there was no wind to cover them. We were dressed like Arabs with a traditional type headdress which could be pulled over the face; glasses were also used to keep the dust out of our eyes, which was like sand paper on the skin and got in everywhere, even into your underclothes! We pressed on, stopping once to brew tea using a 'desert cooker'; two bricks laid on the ground, petrol poured into the space between them, light the petrol soaked ground and put the kettle 'on'.

When it started to get dark we stopped for a meal and to wait for the moon to come up. It was so quiet and the stars were so bright and near you felt you could reach out and touch them. The temperature which had been in the thirties (°C) suddenly dropped to freezing and I was glad we had brought warm gear. It was here where I learnt to cook a meal of tinned potatoes, bacon, dried eggs, with hard tack biscuits soaked in tinned tomatoes (and juice) on a two brick fire. It seemed to be OK, at least all was eaten and washed down with a brew.

Once the moon came up, it was like daylight again, so we started out again. After a few hours we spotted the Land Rover with the lost party lying under the vehicle. They were very cold and dehydrated as they had run out of water soon after breaking down, and had even tried to drink water from the Land Rover radiator, which had anti-freeze in it. After first aid and some warmth from hot tea they started to recover; the Land Rover was in a bad way and it was decided to leave it where it was. One very worrying thing about this place was as the sun went down explosions could be heard as wartime mines went off with the change in temperature and we were never sure if we were safe, but we made it back OK and dropped them off at the main camp sick bay.

I got the bug and wanted to go out again, but had to undergo survival training. It amazed me the amount of water that can be got from stretching a bit of plastic sheet over a mug buried in the sand; dew ran down into the sheet into the cup and would help keep you alive. It is very weird how lack of moisture can make you delirious and imagine all sorts of things but as soon as you get some fluid into you, you start to recover. Also the body gets very sore through the dust and sand rubbing the skin, and the lack of washing, but this is outweighed by experiencing the desert.'

** German Town - opposite the main camp was a small village of concrete huts enclosed within a fenced compound. This was locally known as German Town, home to civilian workers and at times visiting RAF*

personnel. **D C Adams**, in writing of a 425 SU detachment to RAF El Adem (c1958) gives the following description of German Town: 'Enclosed in its own wire fence was a small village of shabby concrete huts; this was to be our new home and it was known as "German Town". The name was apt because this was a DIY enterprise of German prisoners-of-war undertaken to better accomodate themselves. Presently about twenty huts were occupied by civilians...We learnt later that some of these people really were German and some were, almost unbelievably, original ex-prisoners who had stayed after the war to work for the British. Their little community was ruled over by a sort of 'burgomeister'[sic], the rotund Herr Ditmar...There were enough huts to accommodate all of our airmen and NCOs but our officers would, of course, be resident in their comparatively luxurious mess on the main camp.'

'Tug' Wilson continues: 'Since finishing my rescuing in both mountains and desert, the next target was be in the jungle in Malaya. My first time in the jungle (in pre-rescue days) was in 1956 with the Malay Army when I was attached to them as a driver. I was very green, only seventeen and a half at the time and I grew up very fast. We wore jungle green shirts, trousers and jungle boots; we carried machetes and a weapon, mine was a Sten. Also we carried all our dry rations and water purification tablets. There were communist bandits roaming the jungle in some large numbers so we had to be very wary at all times. I grew up in the country so was not unused to woods but this was very different, very wet and all sorts of things that decided I tasted very nice as well as things like snakes and spiders.

I was lucky I got on well with the Gurkhas and Malay Regiment guys who did my bivouac for me most of the time. It was also amazing what can be caught and eaten in the jungle; monkey curry and python steaks taste great when you are hungry, also there are wild bananas and berries; if you see monkeys eating these then normally they are safe to eat. In the jungle it can take hours to go just a few yards if cutting bamboo - as you cut it you have to drop it and then walk on it as there is no room to throw it to one side. Also never push a branch up or down if you can go under, or over, without touching it. Snakes like to lay along branches lying in wait for its prey - a human is normally too big for them and if you don't bother them they won't bother you. Sleeping in the jungle, better, if possible off the ground with a (mosquito) net over you. Sleeping on the ground near water is not safe, it is where all sorts come to drink and leeches thrive. Those that are feasting on your blood need to be removed, if you smoke, by touching them with a lit cigarette and they will drop off. We also met local natives in the jungle. Mostly they were shy but also friendly, and we stayed in their long houses, but we set guards up.

Next time I returned in 1967 and joined the jungle survival team as a first aider and stretcher carrier. We made stretchers by cutting thick bamboo and threading it through the sleeves of your jacket and lashing the injured guy to this. I well remember flying down to Changi in a Bristol Freighter to take injured personnel to hospital and a nursing sister holding an umbrella over a stretcher case as rain was leaking into the aircraft!

Well folks, that's my bit about rescue in the mountains, desert and jungle. Would I do it again? Too true I would. I had the time of my life and was the best 23 years I've ever spent.'

The Beach of Passionate Love. From Australia , **Bob Ashley** has sent in a story of a helicopter PR trip in the Kota Bharu area in the mid-1950s: 'The RAAF here of course remember Kota Bharu from 1941 (*Eastward* Christmas 2017 pp17-18) when their aircraft were flying operations from KB and sank a Jap transport. I first flew there in late 54/early 55 as crewman with Flt Lt Hicks in a 155 Squadron Whirlwind; he was 'A' Flight Commander with the squadron. We flew from KL, and this was quite a long flight, we had to refuel at Gua Musang (about half way there) from 'flimsy' four gallon cans. On reaching Kota Bharu in the late afternoon we landed on the padang, too late to go further, and were met by the local European dignitaries from the State, the local judge, head doctor, Chief of Police, and other senior persons. A guard of local police was provided for the parked helicopter, which was the first time one had been seen there. Flt Lt Hicks and myself, then only a corporal, were taken to the Chief of Police's house to stay overnight.

Nobody commented on rank and we shared a large room with all facilities provided. There we both cleaned up and changed into green jungle greens; this was all we had anyway and mine were actually Malayan Police greens! These I had been given when I had run out of dry gear when on an 'op' with a police jungle squad in Segamat, Johore. Much nicer and lighter than our issue, and also a slightly different green.

We were then driven to the European club for drinks and dinner - there again we were joined by local senior, mainly English administration, people. At times like this knowing table manners and how to act in mixed company helps! As we sat there, after a very nice dinner, a lady arrived, the local madam it seemed, a White Russian who was followed by a string of lovely, varied nationality, girls. She seemed to know, and be accepted, by the people there and she sat and chatted with us. She told me that the beach on the north side of the town was called "The beach of passionate love". I looked it over as we flew out the next morning but felt I was missing something?

Question of rank, we dressed alike, did not occur as away from base as it didn't seem needed. Later, thinking about it, maybe the 'administrators' presumed that all flying crew were commissioned? It was there we learned that our trip was not military but a sort of public relations activity. A local Malay woman from a kampong right up on the then Siam border was in labour and having major problems. As a sort of PR 'op' we were to fly up to the border at first light, with a doctor and nurse and (possibly) bring her out. We were ready as soon as it was light enough and flew, guided by the doctor, to a very small kampong right in the hills, on the border. We landed in the middle of a ring of huts where the doctor checked her out and said she had to go to hospital immediately. Watched by the villagers, she and her husband were taken aboard and in about twenty minutes we were in Kota Bharu.

As it was still early Flt Lt Hicks decided, after a sort of morning tea we should return to KL. We were thanked by all concerned and was told the woman was now OK, so it had been worthwhile. I refuelled the helicopter and then returned home via Gua Musang, arriving by mid afternoon. I went back in 1974 and drove all over our ops area, from north to south; it seemed strange not to be carrying a Mk V Sten or a jungle carbine!

A Summary of the 2018 Annual General Meeting held on 15th May

1 After the introduction to the meeting by the Secretary, **Colin Bates**, apologies were recorded from **Bob Barrett, Sallie Hammond, Richard Harcourt, Sam Mold, Peter Schmull** and **Bill Staff** followed by reporting the passing of two members in the past year. The Association also gained a new member, **Frank Tierney** (Station Workshops 1967-70).

2 The Secretary outlined to members that the Association was originally formed with 43 members during a visit to Butterworth in 1996. Four of those members were in attendance at the reunion: **Tony Parrini, Pete Mather, Harry Holloway and Colin Bates**. **Sam Mold**, was also a founder member, but was unable to attend the reunion.

3 During the intervening years, some 60 to 65 members have attended the AGM's, however last year the number was down to 42. The Chairman reported on an earlier occasion that if numbers dwindled in the future a possible amalgamation with the Changi and Seletar Association might be considered. The Secretary reported that the committee felt that the Association should remain independent at present but to review the situation if numbers fall below the current level.

4 The posts of Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer and Archivist/Editor remain with the same members as in 2017. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), was discussed in respect of the current practice of use, or not, of members data within the Association.

Pictures from the 2018 Annual Reunion Dinner.

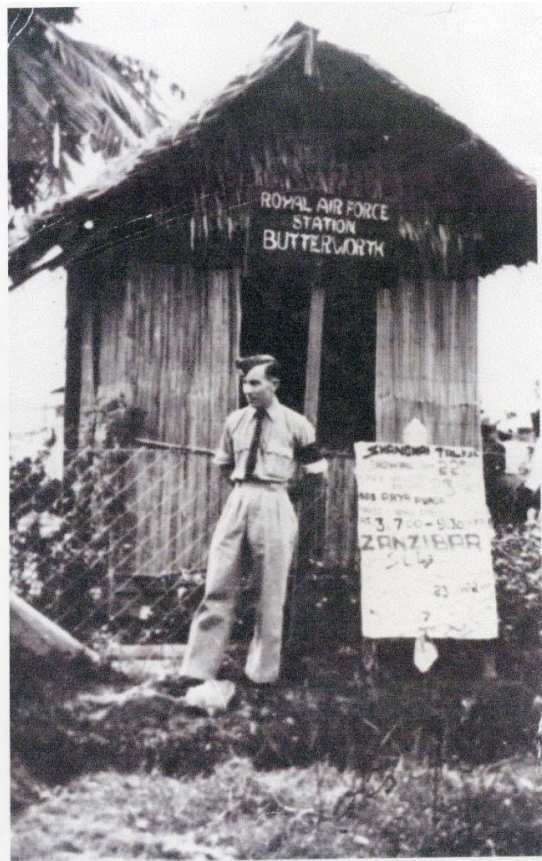




RAF Butterworth & Penang Association Annual Reunion 2018



916461 LAC Fred Freeman: In previous issues of 'Eastward' (Issue 9, 2005 and Issue 26, 2010) both the picture (left) and brief information were given about LAC Fred Freeman (below), an airman stationed at Butterworth, August to November 1941 before moving to the transit camp near Seletar where it is believed he became a member of Gregson's Grenadiers, and then moving to Air HQ (Singapore) on ground staff



duties. As a member of Gregson's Grenadiers he would have been trained as an infantryman for defence of installations on the island but remain an airman by profession. **Gregson's Grenadiers** (officially the 'X' party) were the forerunners to the RAF Regiment (by a few months) and comprised of airmen, who were in effect, surplus to requirement from the technical trades, i.e., insufficient aircraft for numbers of fitters, and those from general ground duties. Gregson's Grenadiers were so-named after their leader, Squadron Leader **Oswald George Gregson**, a veteran of WW1 who, during that war, had transferred to the RFC as a pilot but often took to the trenches with rifle and bayonet when reinforcements were urgently needed. The experiences gained in the trenches was to serve him well when forming the 'X' party in Singapore. Oswald Gregson received a permanent commission in the newly formed RAF (1918) but found the peacetime air force a bit 'quiet' - he retired as a Flight Lieutenant in 1928 and moved to Australia. He rejoined the service when war (1939) was declared and at age 43 arrived at Kallang in Singapore. Later he took on the role of training a defence force at the newly constructed Transit Camp sited near to RAF Seletar. This

defence force was known as Gregson's Grenadiers by those who served in it.

Fred Freeman escaped Singapore on the Empire Star in February 1942 and landed at Batavia, to eventually move to Tjilatjap for evacuation to India. On 1st March, at Poer Bolingo he became a member of a RAF Defence Wing and instructed in the use of the 'Tommy' gun followed on the 4th March (by train) for Bandoeng where a second line of defence was to be formed. He didn't get there due to enemy action and eventually arrived at Tasikmalay instead where he became a POW on the 8th March. Several days later he was moved, with others, to Malang airfield to fill in bomb craters - this was followed by a move to Jaarmarkt POW camp in Surabaya where he was 'employed' in loading ships with salvaged materials for sending to Japan. At this stage of his captivity the effects of malnutrition had started to set in amongst the POWs and Fred was one of those affected.

Early 1943 Fred was one of some two thousand, mainly RAF POWs, transported to Haruku island in the Spice Islands region, in order to construct an airfield for the Japanese by levelling two hills. It was not a picnic on this small coral island; apart from an inadequate diet, hunger, illness, lack of medication, long hours of hard physical labour on the coral and poor sanitation leading to dysentery and other diseases for many, Fred suffered several bouts of dysentery and went down with blindness caused by a lack of Vitamin B12. Also along with the other POWs of all ranks, he had to put up with the sadistic Gunso (Sergeant) Mori and his Korean side kick, the interpreter Kasiyama - this pair being well known as 'Blood and Slime'. Fred was perhaps one of the earliest, if not the first, of the Haruku POWs to suffer malnutritional blindness through lack of Vitamin B12 in his diet and this, and other vitamin deficiency diseases, became the subject for **Flt Lt Leslie John Audus**¹, a botanist by profession, who with **Dr J.G. ten Houten**², a Dutch botanist, using makeshift equipment eventually produced an abundant source of Vitamin B by culturing yeast and

manufacturing *tempeh kedelai* from soya bean fermentation, a spinoff in Flt Lt Audus's work on yeast production when a POW at Jaarmarkt camp in Java. Whether Fred 'trialled' the yeast 'medicine' is not known, he left Haruku in November 1943 on the 'sick' draft to Java where he eventually fully regained his sight. By Christmas bulk production of the yeast suspension had started and was issued in 100 ml doses to the POW hospital patients and eventually all Haruku POWs.

Fred left Haruku on the first draft of sick POWs on a coal boat to Ambon to wait for a replacement for the vessel Suez Maru where priority had been given to injured Japanese, victims of an air raid. An unconfirmed number of RAF POWs travelled aboard this ship which was torpedoed on November 20th by the submarine USS Bonefish on the journey to Java.

¹ Flt Lt L. J. Audus RAFVR was a Radio Location Officer (Radar) posted to the Far East prior to Japanese hostilities commencing. He was i/c 512 AMES, (Air Ministry Experimental Station) a radar unit sited on the south west corner of Johore to cover aircraft approaches to Singapore. Prior to WW2 he was a botanist and continued in that role after the war.

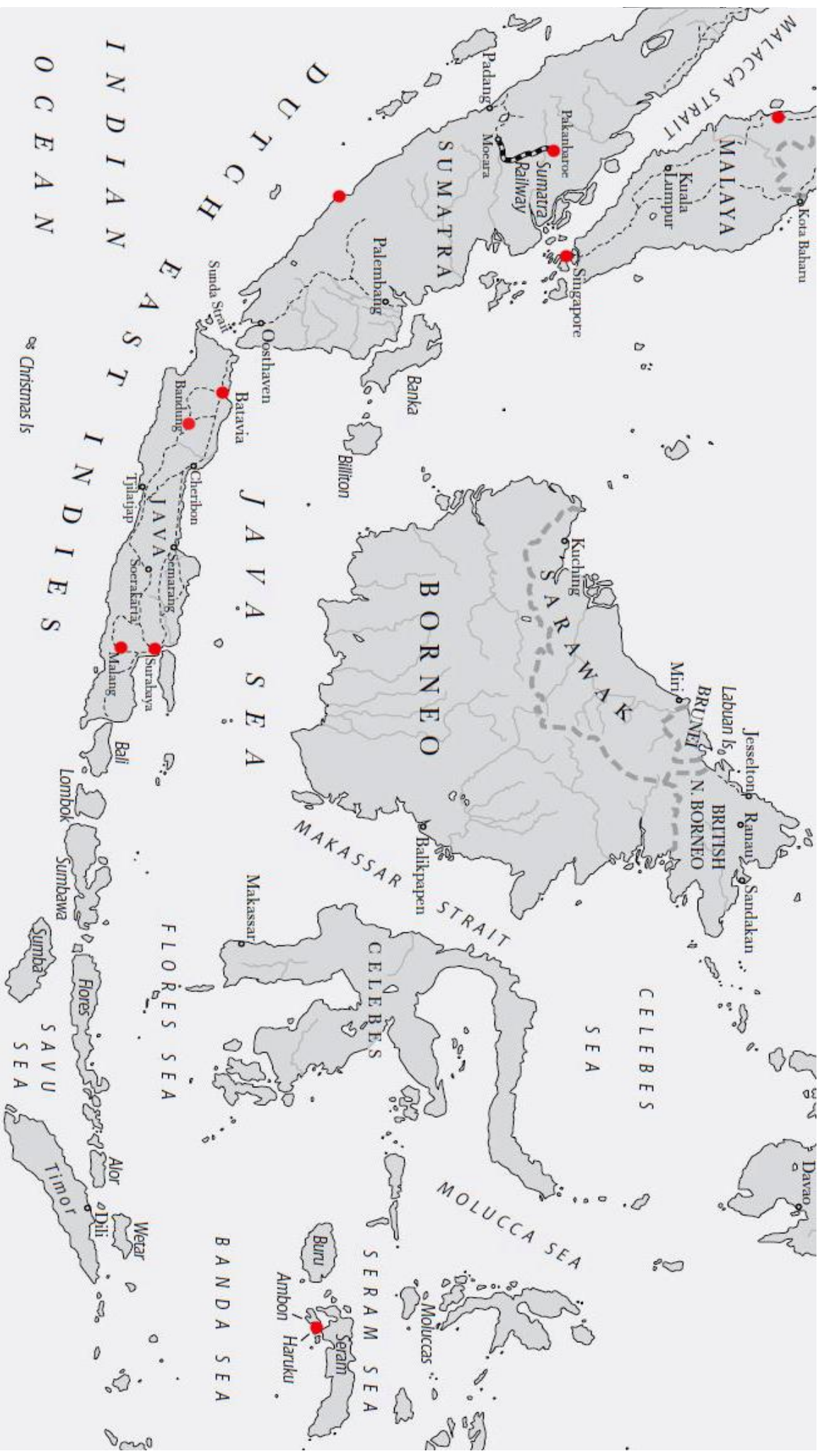


² Dr J. G. ten Houten was a professional botanist working for an agricultural company in Java when hostilities by Japan commenced. He was captured in the Molucca Islands by the Japanese Army and imprisoned at Ceram until moved to Haruku, possibly in October 1943.

After Haruku: The replacement vessel that eventually arrived at Ambon was the Nichiman Maru and the remainder of the sick, mainly RAF POWs were taken to Surabaya where they were forwarded to Batavia by train. Here Fred, along with other very ill POWs, arrived at Bicycle Camp, a POW transit camp, where he continued to slowly recover his sight. This was followed by another move a month later, this time, locally, to Makasura 'rest camp' where he continued with his recovery well into 1944. In September of that year, he was then placed on a draft for Sumatra aboard the hellship Junyo Maru, and in addition to the several hundred POWs (Australian, British and Dutch) being carried there were also 4200 romushas (native slave labourers) on board (source: IWM). All were destined for construction work on the Sumatran Railway! On the 18th September, off Bengkulu, the Junyo Maru was sunk by HMS Tradewind with only 880 survivors, mainly POWs, eventually being rescued by the Japanese after several hours in the water - destination as before, the Sumatran Railway. A number of survivors from the ship, including Fred, were landed at Bengkulu and the following day transported several hundred miles by road to the railway base camp at Pakenbaru. From there groups of POWs were moved to other camps along the line, Fred was sent to No. 3 Camp where he was later affected by malaria - the only treatment available being powdered quinine bark which he believed triggered his latent amoebic dysentery, all on top of a gruelling work regime imposed by the Japanese with the 'normal' inadequate rations. Eventually Fred was listed as being permanently sick and moved to No. 2 Hospital Camp* where the food ration for the patients was further reduced. On 'recovery' he was transferred to No.4 Camp and given the job of camp tailor.

*No. 2 Hospital Camp Dutch Military Surgeon Dr W. J. van Ramshorst describes some of difficulties encountered in the 'hospital' and how they were overcome: *It was worst at night, the rats ran all over you, but once caught in a home-made trap of spring and a small board, they made a tasty meal. They had marvellous white flesh, even whiter than rabbit pieces. I saw chickens grubbing around the latrines and quickly getting fat from the maggots. And I thought 'what's good for chickens is good for people too'. So we fetched maggots by the bucketful out of the latrines, washed them cooked them and gave them with sambal (sauce) to the sick, who then visibly improved because of this extra portion of protein. And in fact I made another discovery in that terrible camp where people actually only came from the railway to die. We had no*

Fred Freeman's destinations in S.E. Asia 1941 -45



disinfectant for treating dirty tropical sores, but once again the maggots provided a solution. I wound an old sheet with maggots in it round a wound and after a few days it was nicely healed.'

Fred was one of the few 'hospitalised' POWs to eventually recover sufficiently enough to be discharged from the hospital and return to a work camp.

Fred Freeman became a free man once again on the 19th September 1945, exactly a year after he arrived at the railway following the sinking of the Junyo Maru. On August 15th, the day the railway was completed Japan surrendered to the Allies and later Fred and other POWs were eventually taken to base camp to await evacuation to Singapore. Fred was evacuated on the 19th September by a Royal Marines landing craft that journeyed 100 miles up the Siak River to Pekanbaru to collect Sumatra Railway ex-POWs - he was taken to hospital in Singapore. From there Fred was flown to Madras via RAF Sunderland, followed by ambulance train to Bangalore (British General Hospital at Jalahalli), then by train to Karachi before repatriation by air to the UK. On return to the UK Fred came under the care of the RAF Hospital at Cosford, January to June 1946.



HIS MAJESTY the King has approved the award of the Order of the British Empire to Acting Wing Commander William Cocke Pitts, R.A.F.

Wing Commander Pitts, a signals technician captured in Java, was in command of 2,070 British and Netherlands POWs on the island of Haroekoe in the Moluccas, from the beginning of May, 1943 until the middle of June, 1944.

Working under the most difficult of conditions, and living in deplorable circumstances, he devoted all his energies to the welfare of his men, and his attitude was such that the Japanese were forced to respect him.

A report from the Chief Medical Officer of the Camp states that many lives were saved from sickness and malnutrition by the outstanding devotion to duty of W/Cmdr. Pitts.

Wg Cdr W C Pitts

↑
Captain Sonni Kenichi

Interpreter Kasiyama

↑
Gunso (Sgt) Mori

Squadron Leader W. C. Pitts was the Senior British Officer (SBO) at Haruku (Hareoekoe) during Fred's time there. Gunso Mori Masao and Interpreter Kasiyama Yoshikichi were the infamous dual act known as 'Blood and Slime' respectively. Lt Sonni Kenichi (Sonny Boy) was commanding officer of Bicycle Camp (Batavia) when Fred Freeman arrived after leaving Haruku - apparently Sonni was mentally affected by a full moon when it came around each month!

Dave Croft

Late News: The Association welcomes new member, **David 'Jeff' Chandler**, (Cpl Ground Radar Fitter, 33 Squadron MOTE*) Butterworth, September 1965 to March 1968 .

* **Missile Overall Test Equipment.**