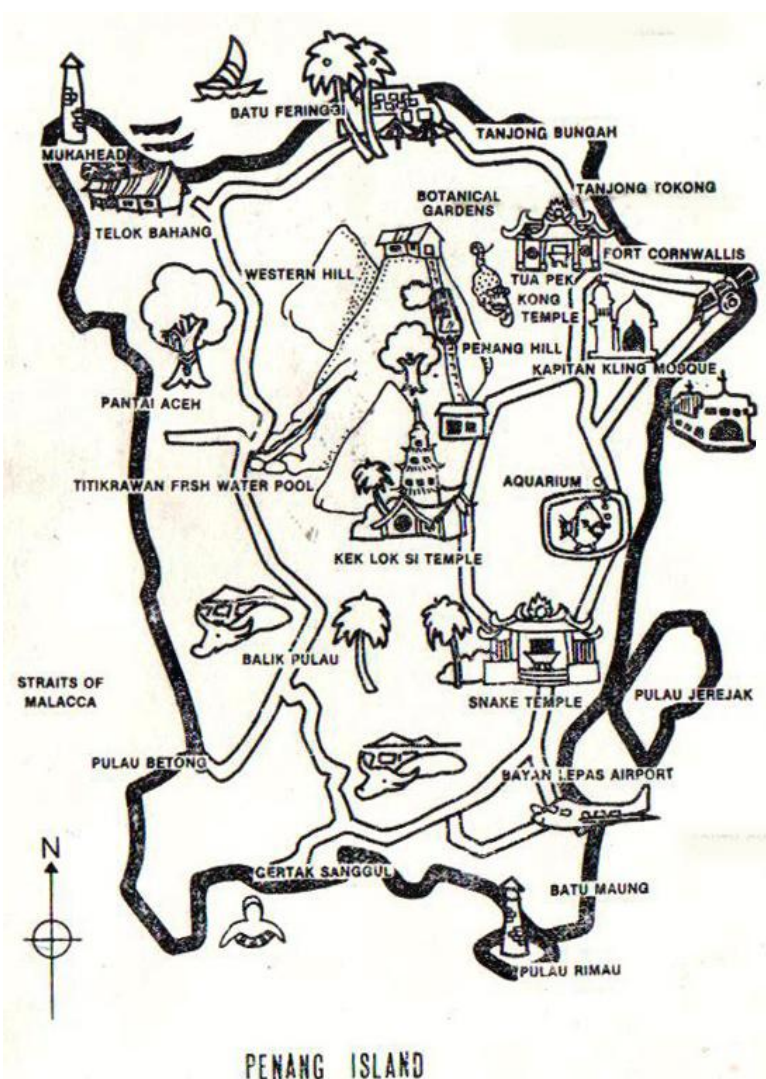




# *Eastward* *Summer 2020*



*RAF Butterworth & Penang Association*

*Issue 57*



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

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848 Squadron (Royal Navy) Sikorsky HAR 21. Whirlwind Helicopters (c1953) disembarking troops into a jungle clearing at Benta Sebrang, Pahang. More can be seen on the IWM film **ADM 1438 848 SQUADRON IN MALAYA**. Included in the film (10 minutes) are the 6th Malay Regiment, Gurkhas, 22 SAS (also dropping by parachute from a helicopter) and Fort Shean.



## CHAIRMAN'S CHATTER

I hope that after over four months of lockdown and isolation this newsletter finds you in a safe condition, sane and in a good frame of mind? I know I am one of the lucky ones; here in Cumbria more people have died of the virus (500 plus as of 16th June) than the whole of Australia, New Zealand and other countries. It's not been a happy situation. Fortunately, a large garden and the good weather have both contributed to Anne and me being fully occupied and not staring at blank walls or watching the clock (Have a look at *YouTube Editor Parrini* and you'll see the results of our endeavours) But we are lucky and know that for many of you things haven't been so easy. Hopefully, we can now get back on our feet and attempt to get back to something resembling normal.

We do need to sort out attendance for this year's Cenotaph Parade (if there is one?) as numbers were seriously reduced last year. Since this section was originally submitted a solution has been offered to our members for those who still wish to attend the 2020 Cenotaph Parade, and that is to march with the NMBVA contingent. However the very last date to contact Don Mott, the NMBVA Cenotaph Parade Organiser was given as the end of July 2020 so as many RAFBPA members as possible have been contacted by e-mail before the newsletter went to print. Also next year commemorates 50 years since the final withdrawal from the Far East in 1971 and we need to decide with our sister Associations how to mark the occasion?

All this disruption is understandable. To some degree we have all recently, and perhaps are still, fighting a World War, but this time it's an invisible viral enemy. This time our soldiers are the designated key workers in the NHS, the police, firemen, paramedics, truck and delivery drivers, council workers and many others who have fought the battle on our behalf. At the moment the key workers are all heroes. But when this war is over will they be forgotten, or will they be given their rightful status in our community? Sadly, many of the key workers are also the poorest paid and come from the less developed areas of the world. It is a sad fact many are classed as unskilled and in certain parts of the community are made to feel unwanted and rejected. Where would we be without the huge numbers of doctors and nurses from overseas, including some 18,000 Filipino nurses?

It has been the great events in history that have caused the greatest changes in our society. After the Black Death, the feudal society disappeared, and after World War 1 the ideas of class altered, and after World War 2 the Welfare state and the NHS were created to look after us 'from cradle to grave'! So one wonders how this pandemic will influence the world of the future? Will it bring better international understanding? How are we going to manage the effects on the huge increase in unemployed people? Has the pandemic improved relationships in local communities? Will we continue to help each other in the way we have recently? Whilst we must never dismiss the trauma and problems many have faced recently, I believe we must work hard to ensure that good things that have come out of the pandemic, such as, for example, neighbourliness and appreciation of our key workers of all backgrounds and capabilities are not forgotten. When the 'time of danger has passed' we must hold fast to the good aspects and experiences of 2020.

One task I set myself at the start of the pandemic was to write my life story. I'm currently on page 36 and haven't got past my 26 years in the RAF - yet! But I felt it important that my children, grandchildren and any subsequent generations know what post World war 2 life has been since 1946 when I was born. There's no heroics, no acts of bravery, no real hardships. Perhaps, if there are to be labels, the words 'happy', 'enjoyable' and 'service' might be appropriate. When the chapter on Butterworth and Penang is complete I'll share it with you in future issues of '*Eastward*'. But don't get over excited, it's just about a young gullible and inexperienced Supply Officer doing his best to carve out a career and also enjoying life.

Stay safe and look forward, better things are 'somewhere over the rainbow' and 'we will surely meet again some sunny' day

With best wishes,

**Tony and Anne Parrini**

## From the Editor



This issue of '*Eastward*' is also to remind us that 2020 commemorates the end of the 'Japanese war' 75 years ago when Emperor Hirohito announced Japan's surrender on the 15th August 1945. In this issue, IWM images, have been used to show a little of the re-occupation of Penang by the British in September 1945. Also a condensed version of the story of RAF PoW Fred Freeman (from Issue 51, 2018) a RAF Butterworth airman is included, also the immediate post war story of RAFBPA member Les Downey when at Glugor in 1945. Both stories are a reminder of those times, but perhaps more especially for those 'younsters' of us of what our 'heroes', now more often a 'memory' in a family

photo album, suffered as Prisoners of War and as Civilian Internees - what would the outcome have been without that 'new and most cruel bomb' and the surrender of the Japanese forces? Perhaps the book '*The Remorseless Road - Singapore to Nagasaki*' by James McEwan (a RAFVR Intelligence Officer, initially posted to Sungei Patani but diverted to Seletar and later a PoW in Japan) describes it as well as it can be? *'To every Japanese his duty was appointed to obey his Emperor and to fight to the death in defence of His sacred person and soil. The struggle might well last a hundred years (it had every appearance of doing so), the present being nothing more than the opening campaigns.'* On his eventual 'escape' from 'The Ravaged Isle' on board an American Navy hospital ship in 1945, James McEwan writes '*Of Japan and the Japanese I had taken my last farewell. Henceforth, their ways would not be my ways. A numerous people, they were without doubt a great one, possessing vast energy and creative capacity. In less than a century they had heaved themselves from the Middle Ages to the forefront of modernity humiliating in the process some of the world's greatest powers, But there was a dark side to their character. Splendid as had been their achievements, and striking their virtues,[for] those whom it had been our misfortune to encounter during our three-and-a-half years of captivity had shown a remarkable aptitude in concealing the latter from us. Systematically upon defenceless prisoners they had practised a naked barbarity. For this, at the moment of parting, forgiveness was not much in evidence in my mind. For us, the future held in its hand a glass in which we saw but darkly. But this much we could assume at its worst, it was unlikely to be as bad as the past which had just ended.'*

Despite the situation the country has recently found itself in, possibly giving members an opportunity to write something about themselves and their time in the Far East, only a few have done so, and these have already contributed previously. Surely there is a wealth of experiences that are worth putting pen to paper too? In this issue we have more of his experiences in Malaya sent in by Eddie Edwards who was at Seletar in the early 60's. Also there is a piece on an orphaned (or abandoned) Gurkha boy adopted by an RAF Squadron in India, a squadron that was also in Burma and was part of Operation Zipper, followed by a short stay at RAF Seletar. Butterworth also plays a part in the story which was sent in by Steve Wilcockson (a non member) who is writing about his father's war with No. 17 Squadron RAF in the Far East. Also included are stories from Laurie Bean (Supermarine Seafire VP441) and from the committee members of the mix-up on replacement parts for a stranded Shackleton at Butterworth. From those contributors to this issue. my thanks, and for this issue we have been able to produce a newsletter/magazine of 29 pages. Also received from Tony Parrini and Don Brereton is material to make a start on Issue 58... again, as I have often been reminded, the newsletter is central to the Association and to do that it needs continuous input from members, and others!

Whilst on the subject of membership, RAFBPA subscriptions are from the beginning of January each year, and members are also reminded that if there is a change of address, telephone and/or e-mail, please let us know...

June 2020

## RAFBPA Correspondence and Stories

Member **Geoff Fean** responded to Tony Parrini's mention of Michael Portillo's Great Asia Railway Journeys where the 'new' Malaysia network was described. Geoff sent a copy of a newspaper cutting (below) answering a query from a reader in the Daily Mail, dated 19th March 2020.

**'Question: When was the single railway track from Butterworth towards Kuala Lumpur upgraded to the modern double track featured in Michael Portillo's TV railway journey through Malaysia?'**

**Answer:** *Train lines in Malaysia run on narrow or metre-gauge track, not the European standard gauge of 1,435mm. (4' 8½"). Much of it is single track and curved, a legacy that dates back to 1885 when railway services were introduced to transport tin ore from the mines to smelting centres.*



*For many years, travellers would have to take a slow sleeper train from Singapore to Kuala Lumpur or Kuala Lumpur to Butterworth. Today, a trip from KL to Butterworth takes just four hours and 18 minutes in a comfortable electric train. In 1989, the Malaysian government embarked on a major programme of double tracking and electrification under the auspices of Keretapi Tanah Melayu (KTM) or Malayan Railways Limited. Electric trains run at up to 100 mph, making them some of the fastest on a metre gauge in the world. The KTM ETS service was inaugurated on August 12, 2010, with services running north from*

*KL to Ipoh and south to Seremban. The service was extended from Ipoh to Padang Besar, via Butterworth, in July 2015.'*

**'Bulldog Kuan'.** The death on March 20th 2020 of Kuan Huah Chin (aged 87) better known as Bulldog Kuan was reported by George Gault. Bulldog Kuan was well known to all with motorcycles in Penang and was a legend on the 1960s to 1980s Malaysian motorcycle road racing circuit. He was also an excellent mechanic and friend to many service personnel that frequented his shop in George Town.

**'Fields of Thunder'** - continued. Following the article by member **Sam Mold** in Issue 56 (pages 18/19) of his involvement in Operation Buffalo (1956), member **Tam McCrorie** sent a selection of images of a RAF Fire Service crew seconded to Maralinga, July November 1956.







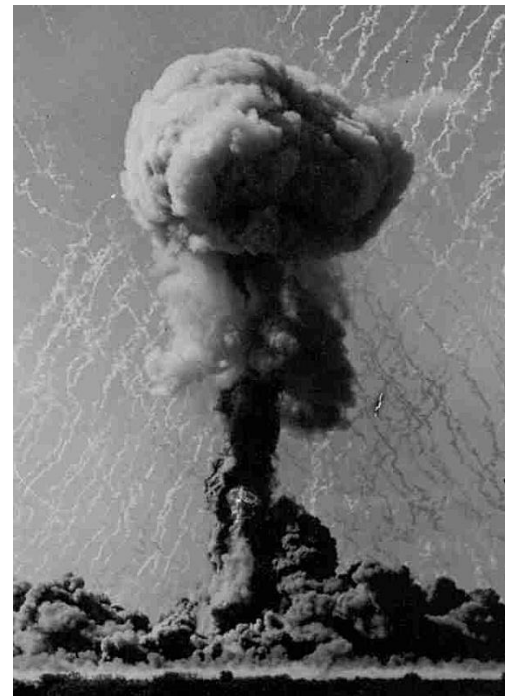
**Page 6:** Fire crew gathered at Adelaide ready to leave for Maralinga.

**Above left:** Cpl Ingles and crew.

**Above right:** Cpl Ingles, 'Lofty' Hansford and Roy Sparkes...at 6' 7" everyone looked up to 'Lofty'.

**Left:** Cpl Shaw's crew at Edinburgh Field (Australia) before setting off for Maralinga.

**Right:** Operation Buffalo.



**Don Walton.** The Association has been informed of the death of member Don Walton on the 10th April 2020. SAC Don Walton (No. 4179276) worked in the ASF/Electrical Section at Butterworth, 1956 -1957, with a period spent on the Visiting Aircraft Section during this time. During his time at Butterworth, Don was one of the chosen few 'recruited to push the wings up and down' of 45 Squadrons Venoms in order to investigate a pilot's report of 'a strange creaking noise' when in flight. The noise was found to be caused by the laminated wood fuselage of the aircraft starting to de-laminate through the tropical conditions. Don was posted to RAF Tengah in November 1957 to help set up facilities for the arrival of Canberra aircraft, due in December, and was on duty when two 45 Squadron Canberras collided over Johore. With others he attended the crash site to search for bodies and secure the site...in one case he helped recover a body buried deep in the ground. Don was 21 years old at the time (*'Eastward'* Issue 32, pages 11 and 12). After RAF service he worked for the MOD as a diagnostic engineer, mostly on RAF aircraft, and in a number of different overseas locations.

**RAF Regiment (Malaya).** Continuing with **Sam Mold's** newspaper reports on the RAF Regiment (Malaya) operations for 1952.

### **R.A.F. SCORE: 16 REDS KILLED, 13 HIT, 31 HELD**

**Kuala Lumpur** - "The scoreboard for the RAF Regiment (Malaya) stands today at sixteen bandits killed, thirteen wounded and thirty one captured. Well over one hundred major camps and food dumps have been located and destroyed, and many other minor caches of terrorist supplies have been taken over. The cost to the regiment has been eight killed and thirteen wounded. Its battle honours include an OBE, MBE, two Military Medals, two BEM's and sixteen Mentions in Despatches.

This was revealed by Wing Commander I.O. Carlson, Officer Commanding, RAF Regiment (Malaya) in the 'Spotlight on the Emergency' broadcast over Radio Malaya tonight (27th April 1952), dealing with the part played by the Regiment in the fight against the bandits, in addition to its routine task of ground defence of airfields in Malaya and Hong Kong. It is a proud record, and although the Regiment is not yet five years old it has laid the foundations of a sturdy tradition.. W/Cdr Carlson added that quite recently the Regiment was joined by its first four Malay officers, trained and commissioned from among its own ranks. Soon they will be leading all-Malay patrols into action in the jungle, and adding new figures to the Regiment's scoreboard. **'We will Never Retreat'** is the phrase in Jawi on the official badge of the RAF Regiment (Malaya); the Regiment's Squadrons have stuck to their motto in many desperate jungle battles in the past, and they have every intention of living up to it in the future.

The need for fighting men in Malaya in 1948 was urgent, and so the Army authorities approached the RAF and asked if a Regiment Squadron could be "borrowed" for the time being for anti-bandit operations in a purely Army role? The Commander-in-Chief of the Far East Air Force readily agreed, for his aircraft were already making airstrikes against bandit targets and the whole service was being geared up to play an important part in the campaign against the terrorists.

**Number 91 Squadron of the RAF Regiment** was then placed at the disposal of the Army authorities. This was on June 23 1948. It began operations in the Segamat area of Johore and the work consisted for the most part of patrolling local rubber estates and the nearby jungle. The squadron had beginners luck , for within four days of taking up its position it arrested a badly-wanted Communist and handed him over to the civil police. In July 1948 there was a big increase in terrorist activity on the Segamat area, and the Regiment Squadron was reinforced by two companies of the Seaforth Highlanders. During the next few days the combined Army and Air Force unit rounded up ten Communist suspects, and captured a great deal of subversive literature and incriminating documents.

Late in July the Squadron was moved to the Kota Tinggi and Mersing area of Johore, where it became almost a naval force. It was in this area that the Regiment suffered its first operational casualty - a British NCO, who died after collapsing from heat exhaustion. Apart from this, good luck attended the Squadron once again; in their first week of operations they brought in eight Communist suspects, and located and destroyed their first big bandit camp. A few days later, after the murder of an Estate Manager, the Squadron's patrols captured two members of the terrorist gang responsible.

At the end of three months of operations, the Squadron's score was sixty terrorists and collaborators arrested, and a large number of camps and supply dumps located and destroyed. After completing five months of operational service in the jungle, 91 Squadron was withdrawn for a rest and re-training.

**Number 92 Squadron.** It had been intended that the second Squadron, No. 92, should relieve No. 91 Squadron. But at about this time, October 1948, bandit activity in the region of Kuala Lumpur airfield became quite troublesome, and 92 Squadron was sent there to work for a time as a very necessary airfield defence force. They frustrated several terrorist attempts to interfere with aircraft and installations at Kuala Lumpur which was not as well defended as it is now.

During all this time work had been going ahead to form new RAF Regiment (Malaya) Squadrons as quickly



as possible. By February 1949, all the five Squadrons planned were in existence and well forward with their training. As much operational experience as possible was given to selected officers and men who were sent for periods to work with Army units in the jungle.

**Numbers 94 and 95 Squadrons**, the Regiment's youngest, were placed on duty during the Anti-Bandit Month in 1950. They acquitted themselves so well that after Anti-Bandir month was over, the Federation Government and the Army asked for their continued help. Although the Squadrons were not yet fully trained, this was agreed to, and they continued to serve in the jungle for four months altogether. About this time the decision was taken to keep one Squadron permanently at the disposal of the Army, each Squadron taking at turn at this duty.

So it has worked ever since. Regiment Squadrons have undertaken countless patrols facing danger, hardship and monotony".



No. 91 Rifle Squadron of the RAF Regiment (Malaya) was formed at Kuala Lumpur, 1st April 1948. In June 1948 the Squadron began duties alongside the Army on anti-terrorist patrols.

*Left: 'A' Flight searching a Selangor oil palm grove for a wounded bandit, 18 August 1952.*

**Supermarine Seafire VP441.** Following the mention of Hawker Tempest 5R-V and Steve Atkin (Warbird Colour) in Issue 56, pages 8/9, **Laurie Bean**, our member in Penang wrote say that he worked closely with Steve and Peter Arnold (Spitfire historian) on the final colour scheme for restored Seafire FR47 VP441. With this in mind, Laurie was asked if he would be willing to write an article on his involvement with the aircraft, which he kindly has.

"Being born in Plymouth, Devon, in Southwest England in February 1946, I grew up in an area steeped in Naval Tradition. However it was another of the Armed Services that was to play a major part in my life, the Royal Air Force. This was brought about by a very deep interest in aircraft that had been generated by one thing, a chance meeting with one particular aeroplane, Supermarine Seafire FR Mk 47, VP441 (*Right*). This meeting occurred on an afternoon in mid-1958 when I first came upon the aircraft shortly after it had been towed into position between the two wooden training huts belonging to No. 335 Squadron, Air Training Corps (ATC). Even though the aircraft was incomplete, sitting between the huts with wings folded, its sheer power and grace shone through. I was hooked!



The ATC at that time was an organisation open to young men between the ages of 14 to 18 who were interested in joining the RAF and offered opportunities to learn about subjects associated with aviation, visit RAF stations and to fly in RAF aircraft. I was too young at that time to join, but shortly after my 14th birthday I was at the Squadron applying to join. So began an association with VP441 that was to last for the

next four years. It was with some sadness, in mid-January 1964, we saw her taken away. However it was planned for her to be restored and put on display somewhere afterwards. Later that year I joined the RAF and spent just over 23 years moving around the UK and overseas, losing contact with VP441's fate. After leaving the RAF I spent almost 11 years in Saudi Arabia working for British Aerospace on the Al Yamamah Project. In mid-1999 I decided to retire, a little earlier than planned, and move back to my wife's home on Penang Island.

At that time I bought a computer and got connected to the internet. One of the first things I did was to run a search on the Seafire. I was totally amazed to find that she still existed, and after several emails, discovered her whereabouts. I learned that VP441 was being restored to fly again by a company called Ezell Aviation in Breckenridge, Texas. In May 2001, whilst on a visit to the US, I was lucky enough to be able to visit Breckenridge and see the aircraft at first hand again.

As Ezell's had very little information on the aircraft I decided to research its history since construction for them and its present owner. Several individuals helped out here, including probably the UK's foremost Spitfire researcher, Peter Arnold.

Part of that research involved getting details of the colour schemes that it wore whilst in service so the owner could decide what scheme he would have applied to the aircraft. Towards the end of that section of research, Peter and I were very ably assisted by a newcomer to our small team, Steve Atkin. The owner of VP441, Jim Smith, decided that he would like to have the aircraft painted in the last scheme it wore in service: dark sea grey upper surfaces and sky on the lower surfaces. That scheme, I think, is one of the best ever applied to any aeroplane".



The finished aircraft



Laurie enjoying the results of his research

**A Brief History of the Mk 47 Seafire.** The Mk 47 was fitted with a Rolls Royce Griffon engine driving two counter-rotating propellers that counteracted the tremendous torque produced by the powerful engine. The Mk 47 was also fitted with a much improved supercharger and single piece folding wings. The Seafire Mk 47 FR variant was fitted with a camera bay for reconnaissance operations as well as being designed for the fighter-bomber role, the aircraft being fitted with four Hispano 20 mm cannons and underwing hard points for bombs (2 x 250 lb or 2 x 500 lb) or 8 x 60 lb rockets.

VP441 was assigned to RNAS Ford (HMS Peregrine) on delivery in 1947 and joined HMS Ocean 1948 for service in the Mediterranean. During transit, the aircraft developed an oil leak in the rear propeller and was off-loaded at Malta, later to be shipped back to the UK.

Seafires of 800 Squadron (Sembawang) flew several missions over Malaya in the early days of the Emergency, most notably being that of the 21 October 1949 (Operation Leo) when 10 Mk 47 Seafires, along with 12 Fireflies carried out airstrikes, with the RAF, against Communist Guerillas in Negri Sembilan.



**Anyone can make a mistake!** This story involves a Shackleton that went u/s at Butterworth in 1969 and was initially raised by **Colin Bates**. 'As Chinese whispers went, the aircraft was grounded for a long time and eventually a pair of wings arrived. Apparently someone got the section and reference for the [required] spare part wrong by putting in the wrong digit or digits on the paperwork! The aircraft eventually left Butterworth but it is not known for how long it was on the ground. **Don Donovan** added to the story with the following, 'I remember the u/s Shackleton at Butterworth, and yes it was a clerical error as two port mainplanes were ordered - the new computerised ordering system did not have the human touch that would have indicated this was wrong. Both items were diverted to Changi where it was eventually sorted out.'

Another 'clerical error' occurred around the same time when 20 coal scuttles arrived at Butterworth, and the local storeman did not recognise what they were? On a further check they were found to be part of an assorted order, the accompanying 20 companion sets still being in transit. Luckily both orders were diverted to Honk Kong. Eventually the blame for the 'mistake' was laid on the stores sergeant, who was posted away! **Tony Parrini** joined in the 'discussion' with an explanation on how such errors could, and did, occur in those early days of going over to a computerised system for ordering from stores. He added that a Shackleton mainplane did arrive at Singapore - for the wrong mark of Shackleton! He also added that the officer i/c Supply Control and Accounting Flight was also posted out of Butterworth.

**Shackleton WE963.** This aircraft (below) from 205 Squadron (Changi) was photographed at Butterworth in 1969 by **Roger Hughes-Jones** in the hope it might be the aircraft mentioned above. It appears not to be!



A brief history of WR963/H shows it to be first flown on the 11th March 1954 before going to 38 MU for storage. From there the aircraft was allocated to 224 Squadron at Gibraltar, to be followed in February 1960 with a move to 210 Squadron. In November 1961 the aircraft joined 38 Squadron and then in January 1966, coded A, it went to 205 Squadron. Following modifications it was returned to 205 Squadron, coded H, in August 1967. The aircraft went to 5 MU for storage in December 1970 and later served with 8 Squadron (RAF Kinloss) in the AEW role.

Most Shackletons of the squadron were named after characters in the Magic Roundabout with the remainder named after those from the 'Herbs'. WR963 was named initially *Ermintrude* then changed to *Parsley* shortly afterwards. The aircraft was retired from service in 1991 and now resides at Coventry Airport (latest information 2020). If anyone can take the story of why WR963 was at Butterworth further please let us know.



**A Boy Among Men.** The following article is an ongoing story from **Steve Wilcockson** about an orphaned Gurkha boy and 17 Squadron RAF starting in the middle of the Far East War. Steve writes '*When researching my father's World War 2 experiences in Burma with 17 Squadron (RAF), my story arrived unexpectedly at RAF Butterworth (Malaya) in 1945.*'

*His father was 1035831 Cpl Stephen Donald (Don) Wilcockson who applied for pilot training in the RAF on reaching the age of 18 but had to complete his electrician apprenticeship before being accepted for the RAF as an electrician. Later he joined No. 17 Squadron at RAF Catterick in November 1941, leaving for the Middle East by sea in December 1941. Part way through the voyage the convoy was diverted for the Far East; 17 Squadron was sent to Burma, arriving at Rangoon in early 1942.*

**Chico** Having survived the disasterous first Burma Campaign and an 800 mile retreat, 17 Squadron was airlifted to India in late April 1942. From August 1942, it was stationed in the Calcutta area.

In August 1942 Warrant Officer G.I. Williams and some ground crew took a 15 hundredweight truck into Calcutta on an errand. Returning along the Chowringhee road, traffic was stationary. A small Gurkha boy of about four kept rapping on the cab doors and sides of the vehicle, begging for food and shouting in semi-English that he had no parents or home. Anyone with similar experience in the East knows how difficult it can be to shake off these city street urchins, and this one was more determined than most. Seeing the boy was in a bad way they took him on board and back to base. Further, previously unreported, details of this were given to me this year by 97 year old John Giddings, the last survivor of 17 Squadron's 'Burma Boys' who, with my Dad, saw through the entire Burma Campaign, from the convoy out to the East in 1941 to the end at Singapore in 1945.

WO Williams got the boy admitted to the Calcutta Military Hospital where he was treated for malaria. On his discharge, with nowhere else to go, the crew rather reluctantly took him into the squadron as their mascot. His name was Jimmy Nattu, but was nicknamed 'Jimmy Nutti', or more commonly, 'Chico'. WO Williams organised 'Chico's' care and the ground crew took turns, aware of the responsibility they had taken on. To keep an eye on him, he slept in the Sergeant's quarters. The whole squadron collected for his pocket money each week which he had to earn through good behaviour. John Giddings remembers that other ranks gave one rupee a week, officers two rupees. They also saved up for his longer term care and education, and started a 'pre-school' for him, covering the 3R's, sport and good behaviour, and provided him with a child-size replica jungle green uniform, marked up with the distinctive three chevrons of a sergeant. His infectious energy and cheerfulness made him a favourite with everyone, officers and other ranks alike. One Group Captain liked 'Chico' to call him 'Uncle'. John Giddings recalled, "He was a cheerful little fellow, and very well behaved - but of course he knew that if he caused us any trouble we could always drop him back in Calcutta!"

Already in a bad way from the rigours of the 800 mile Burma retreat, the squadron spent a further year in the defence of Calcutta until granted much needed recovery time in Ceylon, beginning in late August 1943.

**Ceylon.** They made a gruelling fourteen day train journey from Calcutta down the eastern edge of India, a tortuous ride, frequently changing trains due to variable gauge tracks. Eventually they pulled into Dhanushkodi at the extreme south of the country. There they boarded a ferry for the short crossing to Ceylon, and as 'Chico' was not allowed through border checks he was smuggled in over someone's shoulder, trussed up in a kitbag and under threat of his life if made a sound! Over the next fifteen months he became fluent in English, RAF slang, Urdu and Singhalese. 'Bush' Cotton, who led the squadron from January 1943 to late 1944, describes 'Chico' having the time of his life in Ceylon, swimming and diving into the ocean and hanging out with the men. Pilots occasionally let 'Chico' ride on their laps on short non-operational flights. He clocked up a few hours flying time that way. The picture on the next page is from my Dad's Ceylon

collection, taken in September 1943, in China Bay. Dad is second right with WO G. I. Williams on his left, steadying 'Chico'.

**Burma.** In November 1944, 17 Squadron returned to the fray in N.E. India in support of the Allied advance southwards through Burma. Four months or so before the liberation of Rangoon (May 1945), a newsreel crew captured brief footage (still accessible online at the IWM site) of 'Chico' with the squadron at Tabingaung, a forward airfield north of Madalay. We see him queuing for food, receiving his 'pay', having an inoculation and splashing around with some of the ground crew lads in a river bathing spot\*.



'Chico' with an RAF 'guardian' watching a 155 Squadron Spitfire taxiing at Tabingaung <sup>1</sup> forward airstrip.



March 1945: 'Chico' with RAF guardian Cpl M. McCullough.

After the recapture of Burma, 17 Squadron was withdrawn to South India to re-equip for a seaborne invasion of Malaya. 'Chico' came too. However the Japanese surrender turned the Malay operation into a peace enforcing exercise. My Dad and others were looking forward to a return to civilian life as the aircraft carrier HMS Trumpeter slipped its moorings at China Bay, Ceylon, on September 1st.

**Malaya.** From this point on, 'Chico's' story becomes less clear. With the war over, the ship joined the flotilla anchored in the Malacca Straits. Arrangements were made for 'Chico' with people in Penang. S/Ldr 'Bush' Cotton refers to as a 'family', another accounts says 'a clergyman', and S/Ldr 'Ginger' Lacey's biographer (Richard Townshend Bickers), reports 'Chico' being "left at RAF Butterworth." I wonder if the Penang clergyman and 'the family' might be the same people, and if he was perhaps a Padre at Butterworth? It seems inherently likely that the 17 Squadron Padre aboard Trumpeter might have contacted an opposite number in Penang to make pastoral arrangements on behalf of the young orphan. However, I can find no firm evidence of who cared for him during his early years in Penang - he was still only seven! Current clergy at St Mark's, Butterworth and staff at St Mark's School where Jimmy ('Chico') was enrolled have not been able to confirm any record of him.

I am grateful to the RAFBPA, especially to the Archivist, Dave Croft, for help in my quest for post-war information about Jimmy. RAFBPA member Bob Margolis, whose father was a civilian Metrological Officer 1947-1952 at RAF Butterworth lived only a few doors away from the Padre's home in Butterworth.

The right time, right place, but Bob has no recollection of anyone matching Jimmy's description there during his own childhood in Butterworth. We do know that Jimmy was re-homed somewhere in the area. A 1961 *Straits Times* interview with Jimmy confirms that he attended St. Mark's School in Butterworth for a number of years. HMS Trumpeter deployed briefly at Port Swettenham on September 8th, returning to Singapore on the 23rd (where my Dad disembarked on September 26th<sup>2</sup>). It did not put in at Penang, but those two weeks at Port Swettenham, while aircrew were ashore and aloft for surrender ceremonies at Morib and Kuala Lumpur, would be enough for ground personnel. perhaps helped by the Padre, to arrange things for Jimmy at Butterworth, some 230 miles to the north. It would also see him safely into his new home, and it would be interesting to know how, and by whom, these arrangements were made?

**School.** The savings from 1942-45 were handed over for 'Chico's' welfare. 'Bush' Cotton and Jimmy himself (see below), say he was enrolled at St Mark's School in Butterworth, and he was enrolled as Jimmy Nathu although he is later referred to as Nathu Alis Salim. According to one report, when the above clergyman left Butterworth, the school headmaster looked after him.

Saying goodbye was difficult for 'Chico' (Jimmy) and his RAF friends; Ginger Lacey's biographer calls it 'heart rending'. They were his only family, and he had raised their spirits in difficult times. The heat, humidity and tough living conditions of Bengal and Burma never bothered him - being alive and fed was his idea of luxury. Their continued affection was demonstrated by a group of them later tracking him down and making arrangements for him to come to England.

The *Straits Times* followed Jimmy's life intermittently from 1960 to 1962. In 1960, it asked about his whereabouts after ex-17 Squadron pilots had tried to locate him for their reunions in England. Replies to the paper show Jimmy having a rather mixed career on leaving school. A school friend and fellow orphan told the paper in May that year that he last saw Jimmy in 1958, wearing 'tatty' clothes, at the dockside in Singapore, and that Jimmy had earlier converted to Islam and married a Muslim girl.

**Jimmy.** In an interview with the paper in September 1961, Jimmy confirmed that he converted to Islam at 14, and identifies his adoptive father as Inche Meh bin Ahmad, a Penang Transport ticket inspector. Jimmy, now named Salim bin Meh, says " I left St Mark's to join the Ghurka Boys Company in Sungei Patani in 1953. I stayed there only a few months and then left to work as an apprentice in the Straits Steamship dockyard at Sungei Nyok. I was there four years." He says that his first ship was a Japanese trawler. He describes his life at sea from 1958, until a Norwegian vessel landed him at San Francisco. There he jumped ship (apparently not for the first time), took a train to Chicago, and after some months in a labouring job to save money for a college course he enrolled at the Greer Trade School in 1960 to study diesel engineering. The *Chicago Tribune* got hold of his story, traced him to the college and published the fact and that his old squadron was looking for him. This tipped off the immigration authorities who promptly arrested Jimmy as an 'illegal'.

He says "I was saved by a *Chicago Tribune* reporter who told the police and immigration authorities that I had done nothing during my stay except study," They may not have mentioned that Jimmy had worked in Chicago for some months 'shifting boxes' (Jimmy's description) to pay for his course! He left the States, and on September 17th 1961, the *Straits Times* reports that Jimmy is 'back in Singapore looking for a job'.

**Citizenship.** In December 1962, the paper triumphantly announced that after a two year campaign by ex-17 Squadron men, stateless Jimmy had been granted British citizenship. He had been trying to reach England but could get no travel ID. Legal adoption would bestow the nationality of the adoptive parent, but Jimmy's 'adoption' appears to have been more informal. This was not unique, it might not affect a small child's everyday life, but would be problematic later as regards nationality and travel.

But Jimmy's life was never straightforward! Before his new British nationality was reported he had gone 'off



grid' again. His 'adoptive' father told the paper that he had no idea of his 'son's' whereabouts, but that he had suddenly left for Singapore. leaving no forwarding address after having tried in vain to obtain valid travel documents. It looks as if Jimmy wanted to disappear, possibly on a ship from Singapore - he knew how to 'board and jump' if necessary!

**1965.** The 1965 picture and text shown below, is taken from the Key.Aero website\*\* and shows 'Jimmy Nutti', spelt as 'Nuttie', aged 27, at a Squadron Reunion, possibly the Squadron's 50th Anniversary (1915-65). *Some details given the text are now regarded as being incorrect as more information about 'Chico' has come to light over the past 55 years.* Colin Smith, post-war RAF and current Chairman of 17 Squadron RAF Association has heard reports of Jimmy attending the event, or one like it. He clearly got to England to be reunited with old RAF 'mates'. When Jimmy quit Singapore, I imagine that he had already received his papers of nationality and privately knew that he could enter Britain legally. We know from the *Straits Times* that old friends had repeatedly urged him to come to Britain. The same article states that Don Healey, a WW2 No. 17 Squadron pilot, later Secretary of the Squadron Reunions Committee, who had led the original search for Jimmy's whereabouts, had offered him a job in England with his company. On receiving his papers, Jimmy may have slipped away, avoiding old ties that had not worked out so well?

**JIMMIE NUTTIE.** *17 Squadron, while stationed in Calcutta in 1942, adopted a 3 year old Gurkha boy, Nattu Alis Salim, whom they renamed "Jimmie Nuttie" or more commonly "Chico". At the time Jimmie was starving and seriously ill with malaria and was willingly put in the care of the Squadron by the 12 year old girl who until then been looking after him. After a short stay in the British Military Hospital he joined the Squadron as their mascot which position he retained until 1946 when they had to leave Malaya for Japan. Jimmie had been supported by a fund subscribed to by all members of the Squadron and in 1946 when they left Malaya arrangements were made for him to be looked after at RAF Butterworth with funds for his education and a start in life.*

*Inevitably Jimmie became a major topic of Squadron re-unions and in 1960 attempts were made to trace him. With the aid of Malayan Newspapers it was discovered that Jimmie had passed into the care, first of a clergyman and then his School's headmaster, until 1954 when he joined the Merchant Service in Singapore. By late 1960 he was found taking an engineering course at the Greer Technical Institute, Chicago, USA which country he had entered illegally. This unhappy situation was quickly rectified by the ex-squadron pilot who had found him and in 1965 Jimmie rekindled old friendships with the pilots of 17 Squadron who he last saw in 1946 when he attended their re-union.*



After 1965 the trail goes cold. Colin Smith recalls once being told that they had to cajole Jimmy ('Chico') into attending a reunion...'The Burma Boys all stated that 'Chico' was not at all pleased with the way things had worked out for him and was very reluctant to attend the reunion. This reluctance may refer to the earlier 60's when Jimmy had neither the means nor papers to attend. There has been time for an uplift in his fortunes since '65, although it is strange that he 'went to ground' so permanently.

This year (2020), he would be 82. As a youth he had a knack of landing on his feet. I hope his luck has continued, or perhaps picked up?

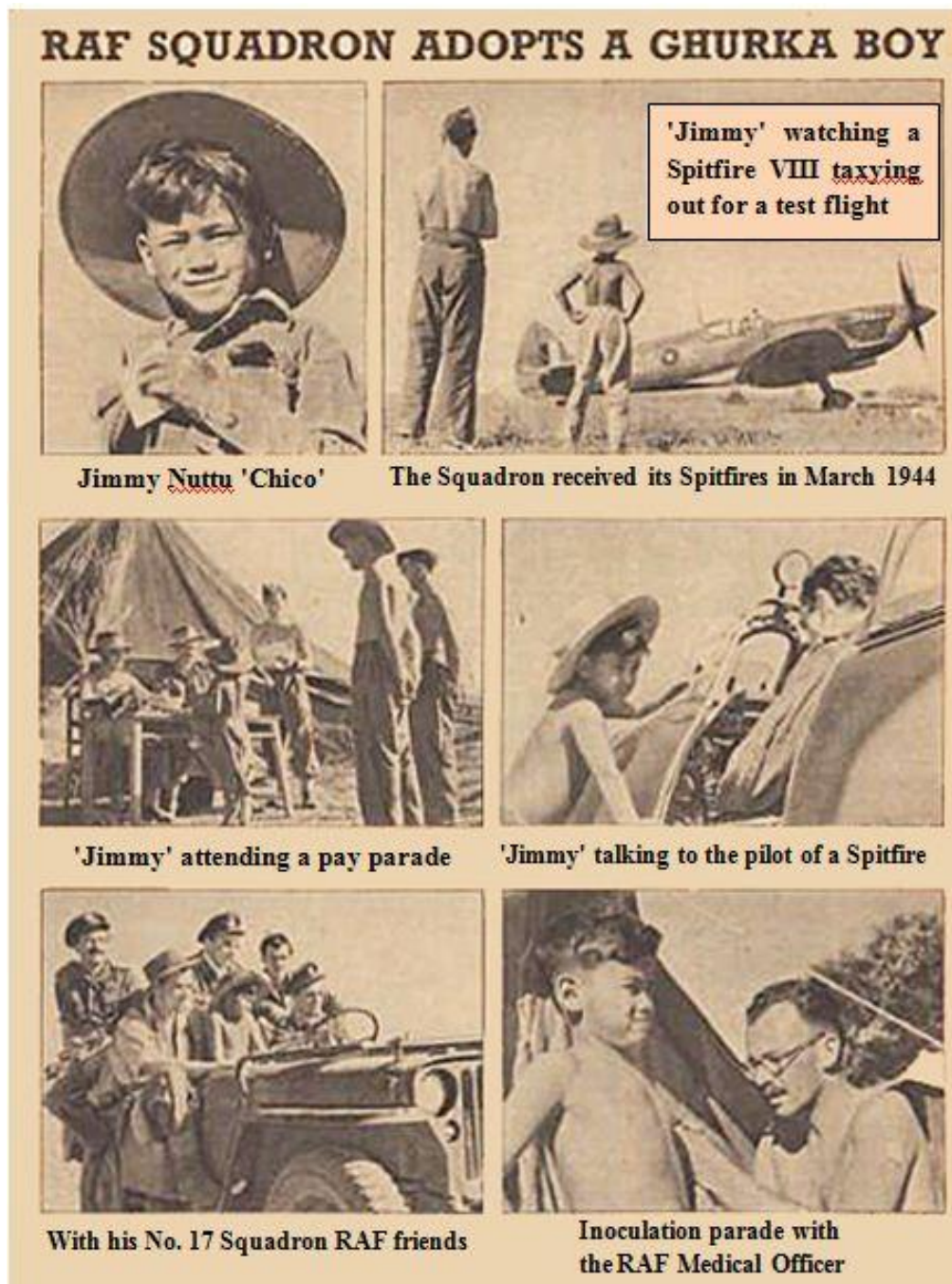
<sup>1</sup> Tabingaung forward airstrip was briefly shared by 155 and 17 Squadrons in early 1945. The watchful RAF person in the foreground looks very like G. I. Williams.

<sup>2</sup> 17 Squadron personnel disembarked from HMS Trumpeter at Singapore and were then based at RAF Seletar from September 1945 to January 1946.

\* <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1060022401> (*final few minutes of footage*)

\*\* <https://www.key.aero/forum/historic-aviation/47726-jimmy-nutti>

Note: If anyone has further information about 'Chico', especially of his 'Butterworth period', or after, or has any news of his current whereabouts, I would be glad to hear from you via the RAFBPA or at [stevewilcockson@yahoo.com](mailto:stevewilcockson@yahoo.com) And if you notice any factual errors in my account, I would love to know!



Adapted from a circa 1945 publication...note the spelling of Gurkha!

**A 'Eureka' moment at Kuantan.** This is another article by **Eddie Edwards** from his time on the Radio Repair Squadron, RAF Seletar. 'In May 1961 I was based at the Radio Repair Squadron, 390 MU, RAF Seletar in Singapore. Our Aerial Section was part of the Ground Radio Repair Flight based in West Camp across the runway from the main part of RAF Seletar.'

**A little 'civvy digs' job.** On the 3rd May I was summoned to WO Bradley's office who said he had a nice little 'civvy digs' job for me. I was to take SAC Joe Reid and J/T 'Chips' Kemp to Kuantan Airport to carry out servicing on the Eureka navigation aid at the airfield. As the Malayan Civil Aviation Department did not want British servicemen to be seen working on the airfield we would have to wear civilian clothes. Accommodation had been arranged by HQ 390 MU at a hotel in the town which was several miles away from the airport. I cannot remember the name of the hotel we stayed in but at that time Kuantan had not yet become a major holiday centre and there were only a couple of hotels in the town.

We would be flying by Malayan Airways on the 8th May to Kuantan airport from Paya Lebar airport departing at 0700 hours, via Malacca to Kuala Lumpur, and then a second flight at 1230 hours from KL to Kuantan. We would be met on landing at Kuantan by a Civil Aviation Department person who would arrange transport to the control tower for our equipment and then onto our hotel in the town. We were to use the local bus service to and from the airport and the fares would be refunded by pay accounts on production of the tickets on our return. All our accommodation and meals at the hotel were already paid for, extras such as soft drinks and beer were not included and were our own responsibility. Transport from the control tower to the site would be provided by the Civil Aviation Dept. on request. Our flights back to Singapore would be arranged on completion of the task.

**Preparing for the task.** The Eureka aerials were mounted on two large wooden poles beside the Eureka hut which were located well away from the runway. We were to carry out the usual continuity checks on the cables and replace them if necessary; spare cables were available on site. We were to climb up the poles and remove the aerials, inspect and clean them, then re-install them. J/T Kemp would carry out the checks of the wireless equipment and carry out modifications, also do any necessary repairs. Each wooden pole was permanently fixed in the upright position between two steel girders and set in a concrete base and couldn't be lowered to the ground. We would have to climb up them using climbing irons and safety belts. As we didn't have any climbing irons at Seletar, arrangements were made to borrow two sets of climbing irons from the Royal Signals Depot in Singapore, which we duly collected.

Neither Joe nor I had used climbing irons since we did our trade training. We managed to find a wooded telegraph pole near our workshop and much to the amusement of everyone, did a bit of practicing at climbing up and down it.

**Kuantan.** The morning of the 8th May duly arrived and after an early breakfast we were taken, along with all our equipment, to Paya Lebar airport to catch our Malayan Airways flights to Kuantan. After a short stop in Kuala Lumpur airport we were transferred to the Kuantan flight, making sure all our equipment was also transferred. We departed at 1230 hrs and soon landed at Kuantan and were met by a Civil Aviation man who loaded all our kit and equipment into a Land Rover and took us to the control tower. Our equipment was unloaded and placed in a storeroom. We were introduced to the officer in charge who gave me his name and internal telephone number and said that he would see us next day to start the job. The Land Rover driver then took us several miles to Kuantan town and our hotel. He pointed out the location of the bus stop for the airport before leaving us.

We checked into the very posh hotel and were even given separate rooms - the dining room, meal times etc, were pointed out to us and we were even given a welcome drink in the bar. After the West Camp NAAFI and the bars in Seletar village this was almost paradise. WO Bradley was right, it was going to be a nice little 'civvy digs' job - we were going to enjoy this job!



After we had freshened up in our rooms we went for a walk around the town to see if there were any bars nearby as drinking at the hotel was clearly going to be expensive. Sadly, we were unable to locate any places suitable to our needs and returned the hotel. We had dinner in the palatial dining room and then found a quiet corner in the lounge and played cards for a while. We also noticed that there were a number of very nice looking young women sitting in the lounge chatting to each other. Every so often a smartly dressed man would come in and join them, and after chatting for a while the smartly dressed man would leave with one of the girls.

After watching for a while the penny finally dropped, having spent 18 months in Hong Kong on my previous tour out east, I recognised the signs - the girls were on the game! The hotel was renting rooms out to the girls by the hour! We were staying in a hotel which was being used as the local high class brothel!

**The job starts.** Next morning, after an excellent breakfast, we set off to catch the bus to the airport and to get started on the job. The route the bus, which was quite small (*below left*), took was different from the journey we had made the day before in the Civil Aviation Land Rover. After travelling around the town the bus arrived at the Kuantan river. It then waited for the small ferry (*below right*) to arrive from the other bank to take the bus across the river and then continue onto the airport. At the airport we made our way to the control tower and were taken out to the site in the Land Rover with all our equipment. Were told to ring the tower if we encountered any problems, or needed any further assistance.



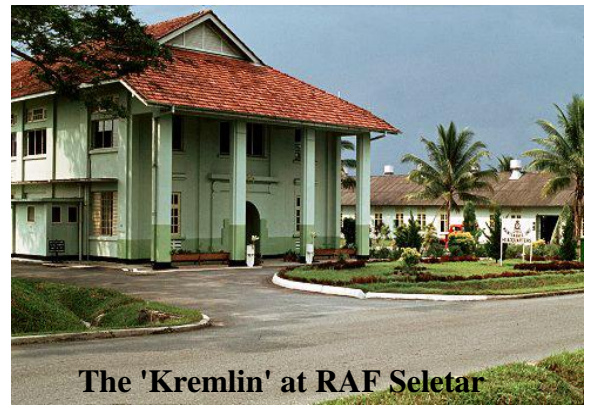
We would be collected at 1230 hrs and given lunch in the staff canteen before being taken back to the hut at 1330 and collected again at 1630 hrs. 'Chips' immediately got to work checking out the equipment and getting ready to install a number of modifications etc. Joe and I went outside to inspect the poles etc. We found one of the poles had rungs attached on the upper part which would make our job a bit easier.

Our first problem was getting past the 10 ft upright steel girders supporting the poles while wearing our climbing irons and safety belts. We found a rather precarious wooden trestle to stand on which gave us just enough height to reach the wooden poles.

We decided to tackle the pole with the rungs first, and Joe started to climb up using his climbing irons. He reached up and grabbed hold of the lowest of the rungs - it came away in his hand, and had he not been using his safety belt he would have fallen to the ground. He was covered in a white powder which was rotten wood, and also small wormlike insects which had bored into the pole. I immediately started to climb the other pole, and while the wood was sound lower down it was also infested as I went higher up. Both poles were infested and rotten, it was a miracle they were still standing and definately not safe to climb up!

I informed the CA man about the state of the poles and said the only way we could access the aerals was to use a cherry-picker. There were several cherry-pickers at the airport, but it was decided it was too dangerous to drive one along the (rough) site track. The poles would have to be replaced, and that would take several weeks, if not months.

I then contacted WO Bradley at Seletar and informed him of the situation and also told him the cables and aerals were still functioning properly. He then passed on the information to the Kremlin (HQ 390 MU). We were to stay there until 'Chips' had completed his part of the job. After our evening meal we again retired to the lounge bar for a beer or two. We were joined by several of the 'girls' who were curious as to who we were...it was made clear that we were not considered as potential clients! They joined in our game of solo until their clients arrived, and they even bought us a round of beer. It made for a very pleasant evening. Next day we caught the bus back to the airport and 'Chips' went out to the site to finish his tasks. Joe and I decided to explore the airport and surrounding area before we went out to the site to bring our tools and climbing kit back to the control tower.



The 'Kremlin' at RAF Seletar

**RAF Kuantan.** Kuantan had been an RAF airfield, apart from the period of the Japanese occupation, since 1931 and had been an important airfield during the Malayan Emergency. The Malayan Emergency was the fight against the Malayan Communist Party's insurrection which had lasted from 1948 to 1960. The granting of independence to Malaya on the 31st August 1957 took away the stated reason for the MCP's reason for fighting a war against us and the Malayan Government. During our walk about we found a number of buildings belonging to the camp, all of which were still in good condition and boarded up. They were to be put to good use again when a detachment of the RAF returned to Kuantan to help support the Malaysian government during the Indonesian Confrontation which lasted from 1963 to 1966. We returned to the control tower and had lunch in the staff canteen then went back out to the site with 'Chips' who had almost completed all his tasks. He just had a few odds and ends to sort out next day then the job would be done and we could all return to Seletar. We informed the CA man that our tasks would be completed next day and were hoping to return to Seletar the day after. He said he would pass on the info to WO Bradley and also assist us to set up our return flights.



**Beer fund under threat.** That evening we followed our usual routine of beer and solo in the lounge bar and 'Chips' was being taught how to play Mahjong by some of the 'girls'. Funds were running very low but we thought we probably had just enough cash to last out one more evening. Our pay day had come and gone but although we had our pay books with us there was nowhere in Kuantan where we could draw our pay. Next day at the airport we were informed that we would be flying back to Singapore in two days, not the next day! While we could get to Kuala Lumpur next day, the flights to Singapore were fully booked. Rather than us finding somewhere to stay overnight in KL it was best to do the whole journey the day after. Our only problem was the lack of funds! Our accommodation and food were already taken care of and that evening 'Chips' came up trumps. I don't know how he did it but he got a loan of cash from the hotel manager - problem solved! We had extra time to go and explore the town and relax for a day. We flew back the Singapore the day after, job done.

On arrival back at Seletar we drew our pay and 'Chips' posted off the money we owed to the hotel manager.



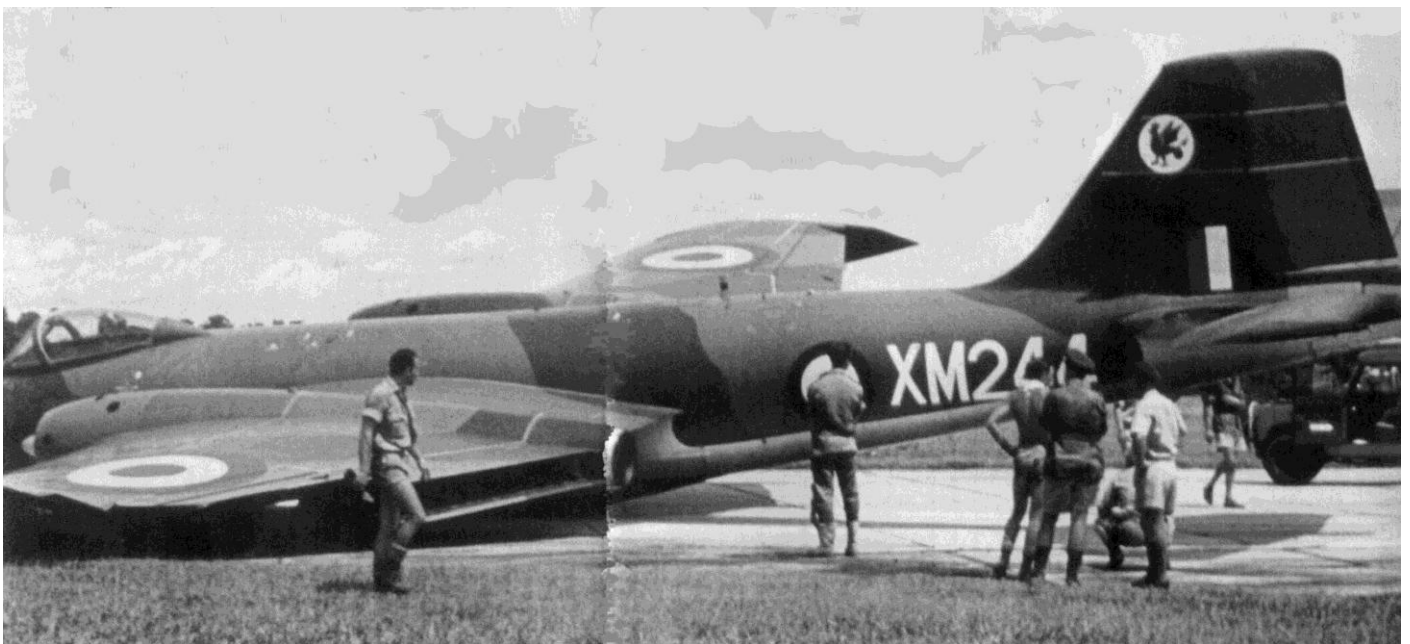
It had been a very, very nice little 'civvy digs' job.

A few days later I was sent for by WO Bradley who informed me he had received a letter from the CA authorities at Kuantan, via the Kremlin (390 MU HQ) praising our efforts.' **EE**



Above: The Japanese aerial attack on the Kuantan Ferry, December 1941

Below: 3 Squadron Canberra XM244/C with an undercarriage collapse at Kuantan, November 1964





## 15th August 2020

The 15th of August 2020 is the 75th Anniversary of VJ Day, remembering both the surrender of Japan and the end of the Second World War.

The surrender of Imperial Japan was announced by Emperor Hirohito on the 15th of August and formally signed on the 2nd September 1945.



The following is a part of the Emperor's announcement made to the people of Japan on that day.

### TO ALL OUR GOOD AND LOYAL SUBJECTS

"Indeed, we declared war on America and Britain out of our sincere desire to ensure Japan's self-preservation and the stabilization of East Asia, it being far from our thoughts to either infringe upon the sovereignty of other nations or embark upon territorial aggrandizement. But now the war has lasted nearly four years...the war situation has developed not necessarily to Japan's advantage, while the general trends of the world have all turned against her interest. Moreover the enemy has begun to employ a new and most cruel bomb, the power of which to do damage is indeed incalculable, taking the toll of many innocent lives. Should we continue to fight, not only would it result in an ultimate collapse of the Japanese Nation, but would also lead to the total extinction of human civilization."



Airmen of 356 Squadron on the Cocos islands cheer on hearing of the surrender of Japan

**RAF PoW Frerick George Freeman.** In light of the surrender of Japan in 1945, a condensed version of the Far East story of 916461 LAC Frederick George Freeman, who was stationed at RAF Butterworth, August - November 1941 is given below. The full story appeared in Issue 51 of '*Eastward*' 2018.

Fred Freeman moved from Butterworth to the transit camp at Seletar in November 1941 before moving to



Air HQ (Singapore) as a member of 'Gregson's Grenadiers', a defence force formed by S/Ldr Oswald Gregson for the defence of installations on the island. Fred escaped Singapore on the *Empire Star* in February 1942 to Batavia, and became a member of the RAF Defence Wing, becoming a PoW of the Japanese on March 8th 1942. Right from the start, with other PoW's he was forced to fill in bomb craters on Malang airfield, followed by a move to Jaarmarkt PoW camp in Surabaya to load ships with salvaged materials for sending to Japan. At this stage of his captivity he, along with others, was already feeling the effects of malnutrition. Early in 1943 Fred was one of some two thousand PoW's (mainly RAF) who were transported to Haruka island, one of the Spice Islands, in order to construct a runway

for the Japanese. Suffering from an inadequate diet, hunger, illness, lack of medication, poor sanitation and long hours of hard physical labour, he eventually was 'hospitalised' with dysentery and blindness caused by a lack of vitamin B12. To add to this long list of unnecessary suffering caused by the Japanese lack of care, along with other PoW's, he had to put up with the sadistic *Gunso Mori* and his Korean side kick, *Kasiyama* (both together known as 'Blood and Slime'). Fred was one of the earliest of the Haruku PoW's to suffer malnutritional blindness and was believed to have 'trialled' a yeast rich in Vitamin B12, cultured from soya bean production, by two PoW's, Fl Lt Audus RAFVR and Dr J. G. ten Houten, both being professional botanists pre-WW2.

Fred left Haruku on the first draft of sick PoW's on a coal boat and travelled to Ambon Island to await a another vessel (*Nichiman Maru*) which was to (slowly) take them to Surabaya. The sick PoW's eventually ended up at Bicycle Camp, a PoW transit camp, where Fred slowly recovered his eyesight. Bicycle Camp was followed by Makasura 'rest camp' where he continued with his 'recovery'.

In September 1944 he boarded the hellship *Junyo Maru*, along with several hundred Australian, British and Dutch PoW's, plus 4200 romushas (native slave labourers) bound for Sumatra, all destined for construction work on the Sumatran railway.

On September 18th the *Junyo Maru* was sunk by the Royal Navy submarine HMS Tradewind - Fred was one of the 880 survivors! Along with a number of other survivors, after being 'rescued' by the Japanese, he was landed at Bengkulu, only to be transported several hundreds of miles by road to the railway base camp at Pakenbaru. Fred was moved onto 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 this on top of a gruelling work regime imposed by the Japanese, and the usual inadequate rations! Eventually Fred was listed as 'permanently' sick and transferred to No. 2 Hospital Camp where according to the Dutch Military Surgeon, Dr W. J. Van Ramshorst: "*It was worse at night, the rats ran all over you, but once caught in a home-made trap, they made a tasty meal. They had marvellous white flesh, even whiter than rabbit flesh. I saw chickens grubbing around the latrines and quickly getting fat from (eating) 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 (a chili sauce) to the sick, who then visibly improved because of this extra protein. And in fact I made another discovery in that terrible camp where people only came from the railway to die - we had no 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 recovered in the death hospital and returned to the railway to work in No.4 camp as a 'tailor'. He eventually became a free man on the 19th September 1945 when he

finally left Sumatra for hospital in Singapore. From Singapore Fred was flown to Madras by RAF Sunderland, then travelled by ambulance train to No. 137 Indian British General Hospital at Jalahalli followed by train to Karachi before repatriation by air to the UK. On arrival in the UK, Fred came under the care of the RAF Hospital at Cosford from January to June 1946.'

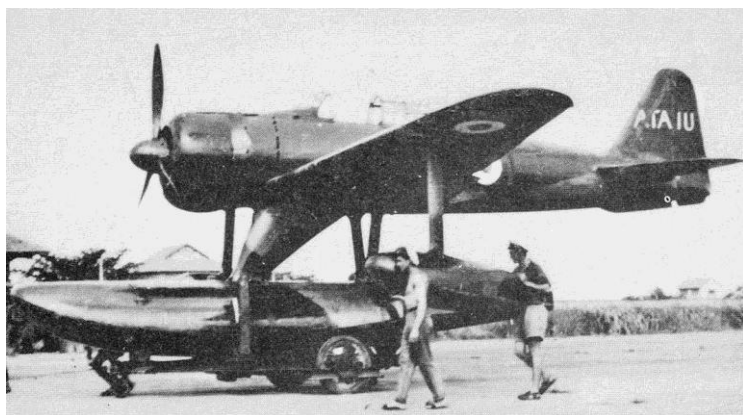
**Post-war. 3020516 Les Downey. Fitter/General. Far East 1945-1947.** The following account of the immediate post-war service of Les at both RAF Seletar and RAF Butterworth was received during the compiling of this issue.



'RAF Seletar was a pre-war base on the edge of the Straits of Johore, Singapore. Because of its location it accommodated land based and seaplanes. When I arrived there in November 1945 from India all the Japanese planes and equipment had been dumped in an area away from the main camp. The Japs had made use of a lot of single engined twin float sea planes in the area, and an unknown genius had realised that, after suitable modifications, the floats, which were about eighteen feet long, could be used as sailing dinghies. I had helped to remove a pair of these floats before the dump was declared 'out of bounds' because of accidents, and soon afterwards I was posted to RAF Butterworth in northern Malaya, opposite Penang Island. I must have mentioned this to someone, and the grapevine had been at work because soon after arriving I

was sent across to the seaplane base at Glugor on Penang Island to remove the floats from about eight Japanese sea plane before they were sent to the scrapman.

I successfully removed the floats from two of the aircraft, which were on cradles on dry land, by following a crude but effective method. Three forty gallon oil drums were stacked pyramid fashion under each wing with a five ton bottle jack on top and a length of steel pipe jammed under the tail. The nuts securing the float struts were then removed, the plane being jacked up enough to be able to drive out the bolts, and then jacked up further so the cradle with the floats could be drawn well clear. The final act was to take a running kick at the tail support when everything would come crashing down. All had gone well with the third plane until I kicked away the support when instead of the tail dropping first as usual, it rose slowly upwards and went straight through the overhead power line supplying the base. This took two days to repair and there were no lights, fans or fridges working, which in the tropics is no joke. If you can recall the famous H M Bateman (1887-1970) cartoons of 'The Man Who ...', you will know how I felt, and the remarks etc, from my billet mates were hardly complimentary. Up till then I had been working alone but someone in authority decided an assistant was needed so a spare carpenter joined me to help carry on the good work, leaving a single float Zero (*right*) conversion to the last. This was still equipped with a propellor and



also two 20mm cannons which we quickly removed and handed in to the guardroom. The Communist uprising<sup>1</sup> was just starting just starting and the thought of these weapons falling into terrorist hands did not bear thinking about. Removing the propellor was the next problem as neither of us had any experience with aircraft, my trade being that of Fitter General i.e. ground equipment, bench work etc. We reasoned that removal of the spinner should disclose the metod of attachment, which it did in the form of a cylindtical



projection which we guessed housed the retaining nuts. All you Fitter Iie's and Flight Mech's know what is inside that cylinder, but I found out the hard way! Standing on the float I could just reach up and unscrew the end plate and was doused from head to foot with about half a gallon of engine oil. As I fell off the float the realisation hit me at the same time as I hit the concrete that this was part of the variable pitch device. The holding nuts were there as we thought and our work was soon completed and we returned to our respective units.

In 1981 my wife and I went on holiday to Penang. RAF Butterworth was no longer a collection of palm thatched wooden huts but a permanent Australian Air Force base flying jets, and also running the local radio station. Glugor was the base for the Customs and Excise and the Marine Police. Just outside the fence was the National Aquarium with fine examples of tropical and exotic fish and other marine life.

**Les Downey**  
**RAF BPA**

<sup>1</sup> In 1945 the British Military Administration was faced with strikes and demonstrations with the Malayan Communist Party playing an active part.

### **Gathering up surrendered Japanese Personnel in Penang (1945)**



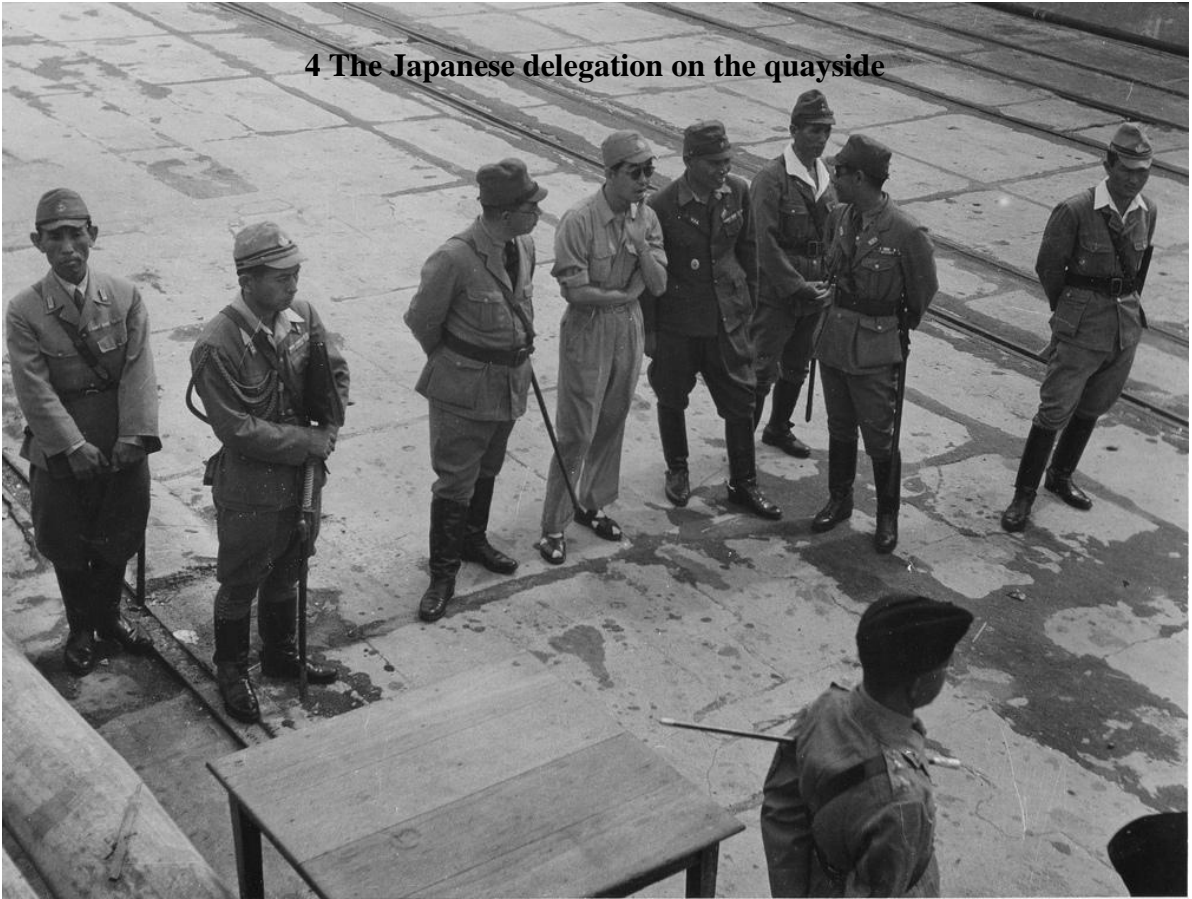
**1. Japanese Naval Personnel escorted from their Penang base**



**2 & 3 Surrender of Glugor**



**4 The Japanese delegation on the quayside**



**5 Japanese liaison officer's  
vessel alongside HMS Nelson**





## Recovery of Dutch Civilian Internees from Java



## Remembering 402875 Sgt R. R. Oelrich 453 Squadron RAAF.

Sergeant Pilot Ronald (*Docum*) Reginald Oelrich (1918-1941) died in action at RAF Butterworth on December 13th 1941. Along with four other RAAF pilots flying Brewster Buffalo's (a fifth returned to Ipoh with an undercarriage problem) he arrived at RAF Butterworth just as a large formation of Nakajima Ki-27's (Army Type 97 aircraft) were gathering over Penang. Using a manually operated early warning system at Butterworth airfield (an airman on the airfield fence line waving a red flag), three aircraft being refuelled at the time managed to take-off and engage the



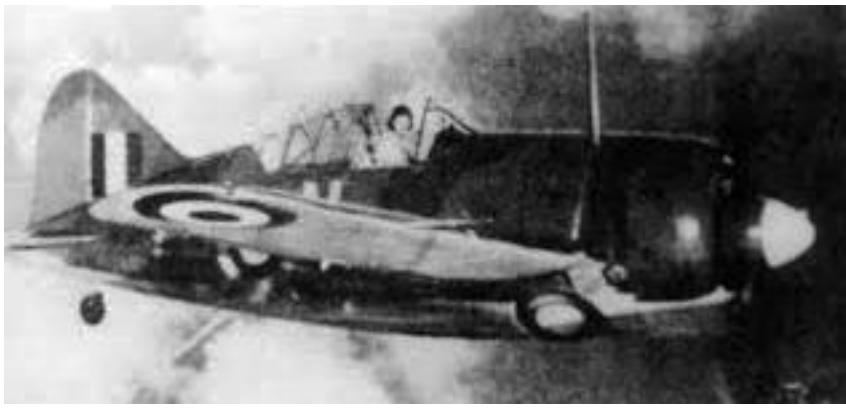
21 Squadron Butterworth December 1941. 453 Squadron arrived on December 13th to support 21 Squadron.

Japanese at height, but the other two continued refuelling when a number of enemy aircraft (apparently Ki-43 'Oscars') were reported gathering in the vicinity of the airfield. Both pilots (Plt Off Geoff Angus and Sgt Ron Oelrich) rapidly abandoned the refuelling and immediately took off...Sgt Oelrich (as reported by his wingman) was instantly attacked at tree top height and his '*burning furiously*' aircraft crashed into trees. The attack was also witnessed by AC2 Rex Collis (27 Sqn) from the ground: "We saw one Buff in a shallow dive, with smoke pouring from its engine, disappear towards the trees to our right. We set off in our wagon as far as we could go over the rough ground round the perimeter of the airfield. At least the plane had not caught fire on hitting the ground, but we feared for the pilot. It took us nearly half an hour to locate the plane, not too badly smashed, in marshy ground between some palm trees. When we reached the cockpit we were amazed not to find the pilot still in the plane, for we were sure he had not baled out; he would have been too low anyway. By some miracle the fuselage had missed the tree trunks, which had ripped off the port wing, thereby reducing speed drastically as the pilot slid down the other wing and landed in the bog. By the time we got there an ambulance [sic] had already reached him from a shorter route." Apparently there is some discrepancy between the above statement and the reference source *Buffaloes over Singapore* in that he was 'later retrieved from the wreck, his body was carried back by Padre Pearce (Pierce) to the airfield for burial (Butterworth airstrip)'. Sgt Ron Oelrich was later Mentioned in Despatches. To date the exact place of burial of Sergeant Ron Oelrich has not been found.

**RAAF Padre John Patrick Pierce.** "His body was carried back by Padre Pierce to the airfield for burial". Who was Padre Pierce? John Patrick Pierce (1909-1970) was ordained 15 July 1934 in Australia. On the outbreak of World War 2 he joined the Australian Military Forces on 3 October 1939 as a chaplain. In December 1940 he transferred to the RAAF and was posted to Sembawang (Singapore) in May 1941, followed by secondment to Ipoh in early December. It was from Ipoh that he attended the burial of Sgt Oelrich at RAF Butterworth on the 13th December.

RAAF personnel were evacuated from Ipoh on the 20th December. Padre Pierce, with five others 'liberated' a car from a deserted Bentley showroom and made their way to Singapore. During the general evacuation from Singapore in early 1942, he commandeered a semi-derelict vessel and took 60 RAAF personnel to Palembang (Sumatra), and then onto Perth. Postings within Australia followed for the duration of the war with the exception of a posting to the RAAF Overseas HQ in London\* 1943-1944. Padre Pierce left the RAAF 14 November 1945 and spent the following years in the Catholic service, retiring through illness in 1969 and died 14 December 1970.

\*RAAF Overseas HQ (London) was an administrative unit formed to coordinate RAAF Squadrons for service with RAF operational commands.



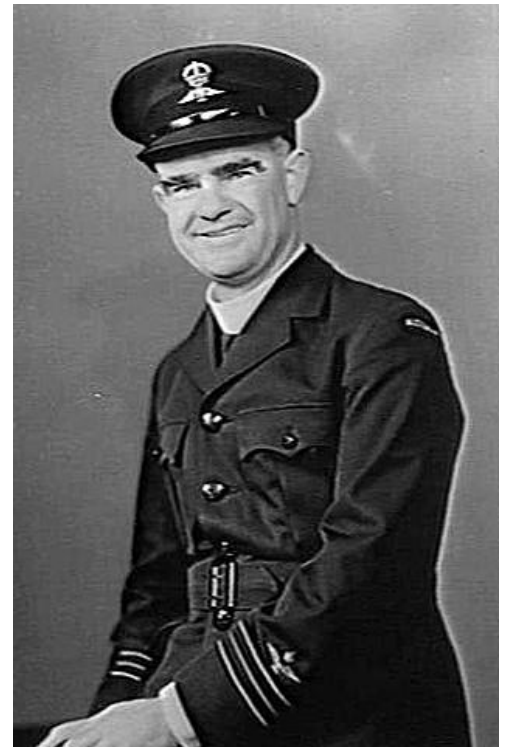
Sgt R. R. Oelrich flying 453 RAAF Squadron Brewster Buffalo W8158 above Keppel Harbour (Singapore) prior to deployment to Butterworth (13th December 1941). Coincidentally Plt Off D. Brown RNZAF, attached to 453 Squadron, died on the same day as Ron Oelrich when he attempted to land the same aircraft (W8158) in a swamp near Pakan Baroe (Sumatra).



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

MEA1892

The early RAAF Chaplains were deployed wherever it was felt they were needed. This picture (*left*) is believed to be have been taken outside the Anderson School in Ipoh in 1941.



*Above;* Squadron Leader J. P. Pierce, RAAF Chaplain, picture taken in London 1943.

Over the years there have been occasional attempts at locating the grave of Sgt Ron Oelrich at Butterworth, all without success. Any future attempts at locating his unmarked grave might follow the Richard III project (c2012-2013) as a model for planning and proceeding using primary sources (references etc), ground penetrating radar, DNA extraction and analysis testing of any skeletal remains found. Should such a search ever be conducted in the future and lead to success, then 402875 Sgt R. E. Oldrich RAAF may finally be interred, after many years in an unmarked grave, fittingly in a Commonwealth War Grave.