



RAF Butterworth/Penang Association



Chairman: Tony Parrini Treasurer: Len Wood Secretary: Pete Mather
(formed: 30th August 1996 at the Casuarina Hotel, Batu Ferringhi, Penang Island)

NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2004

Aims of the Association

The Association aims to establish and maintain contact with personnel and their dependants who served at Butterworth or Penang by means of annual reunions in the UK and the circulation of a membership list. The Association may also arrange holidays in Malaysia from time to time.

Chairman's Corner



Eastward

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Notices

Member George Blood passed away earlier this year. His funeral was held on 18 June 2004. We offer our condolences to his family.

Dave Taylor would like members to be aware that there is another trip to Singapore planned for next April; dates yet to be confirmed. The emphasis will be on the Heroes' Return Initiative whereby veterans can claim up to £1250 to revisit areas in which they served in WW2. If enough interest is forthcoming by 30 October the RAF Seletar Association will make a combined request to travel as a group. The trip is open to everyone, not just veterans.



Alor Star Officers' Mess as it is today.



Bishop Street, Penang.

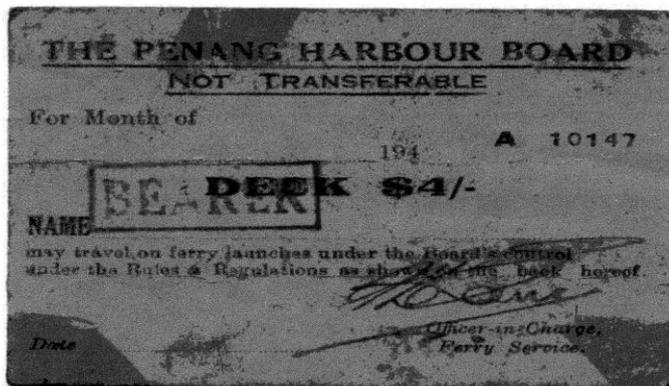
'OOPS'

Les Downey arrived at Butterworth from Seletar and spent around nine months there in 1946.....

“At that time I was L.A.C. Fitter General Number 3020516. At Butterworth I was assigned to Station Workshops as a general dogsbody and then seconded to Glugor on Penang Island as the ‘OOPS’ enclosure will explain. When that task was completed I returned to the mainland for about five weeks until an Air Sea Rescue Unit arrived from Rangoon with three H.S. L.s and a floating base. The latter was a converted lighter about 150 ft in length with living quarters, offices and galley etc. Soon after anchoring in the harbour at Penang all the Fitters Marine left for Singapore and home.

The ‘dogsbody’ was dispatched to take their places despite having no knowledge of marine craft and I lived aboard the ‘HATIALI’ for nearly six months until the unit was disbanded and crews from Seletar came to take the launches back to Singapore. On two of the launches the three 500 HP Sea Lion engines were overheating and the third was waiting for a replacement V drive gear box which I refitted when it arrived. Oh happy days!! One consolation was that despite the depleted crew numbers we were still drawing full rations of spirits and since no Officers were living aboard things were free and easy at night apart from having to stand anchor watch.

After returning to Butterworth I did a service on a diesel generator for the Signals Unit and then was posted back to Seletar to the bomb dump at 314 M.U. where I completed my time in the service running the M.T. section and finally made Cpl too late to make any difference to my Gratuity.



Les's Ferry Pass,
Issued January/February 1946

'OOPS'

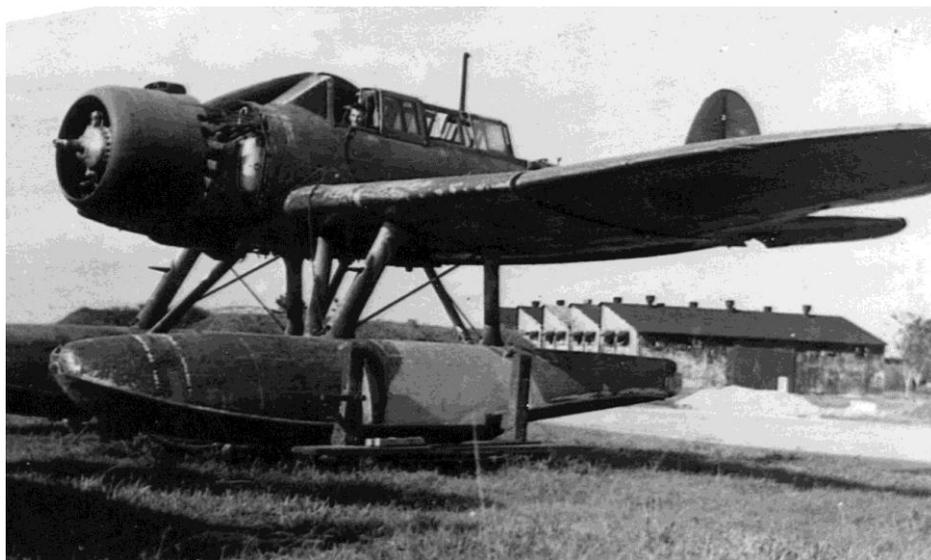
R.A.F. Seletar was a pre-war base on the edge of the Straits of Johore, Singapore. Because of its' location it accommodated land based and seaplanes. When I arrived there in November 1945 from India all the Japanese planes and equipment had been dumped in an area away from the main camp. The Japs had made use of a lot of single engined twin float sea planes in the area and an unknown genius had realized 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 was posted to R.A.F. Butterworth in northern Malaya opposite Penang Island. I must have mentioned this to someone and the grapevine had been at work because soon after I was sent across to the seaplane base at Glugor on Penang Island to remove the floats from about eight Japanese seaplanes before they were sent to the scrap man.

I had successfully removed the floats from two of the aircraft which were on cradles on dry land by the following 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 removed, the plane jacked up enough to drive out the bolts and then jacked up further so that 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 till I kicked away the support when instead of the tail dropping first as usual it rose slowly upwards and straight through the overhead power line supplying the base. This took two days to repair so there were no lights, fans or fridges, which in the tropics is no joke. If you can remember the Bateman cartoons '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 conversion to the last. This was still equipped with a propeller and also two 20mm cannons which we quickly removed and handed them into the guardroom. The Communist uprising was just starting and the thought of these weapons falling into terrorists' hands did not bear thinking about.

Removing the propeller 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 method of attachment which it did in the form of a cylindrical 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. Just as I fell off the float the realization 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."



Japanese seaplane at Seletar, 1945.

WESTERN HILL, PENANG – A JOINT RAF/RAAF RADAR *By Roy Bullers*

On the west coast of West Malaysia, formerly Malaya, lies the island of Penang, adjacent to Butterworth on the mainland.

In the late 1960s, and following the disbandment of the Royal Australian Air Force radar No 114 Mobile Control and Reporting Unit at Butterworth on 31st October 1966, an RAF radar unit was established on top of Western Hill on Penang Island.

Before the 1939-45 War a brief survey had been made of the island in 1938, but no site for a radar had been selected (but then no radar equipment was available). In 1941 a set of radar priorities had been set for the Far East, firstly all round cover for Singapore, then the east coast of Malaya and then Penang. By the outbreak of war with Japan on 7th December 1941 building work on Penang Island for two Mobile Radar Units and on Chain Overseas Low had started. However, before the work had been finished the invading Japanese had reached Singapore on 15th February 1942 and the Allied surrender followed.

By March/April 1945 the Japanese had installed three radars on Penang Island, probably in the locations 0525N and 0527N, both at 10016E. Operating on frequencies between 77M/cs and 103 M/cs it is likely that the stations were used for air surveillance.

One of my colleagues on Penang Island, Squadron Leader Peter Kay, told me that on his first tour in April 1947 in that part of the world, he set up Type 14 and 13 radars and a Type 15 on what is now Changi airfield's main runway, Singapore. But that such a set-up had vanished on his next visit in 1962. By this time he was the Radar Staff Officer at HQ AFFE (or was it FEAF?) and he resurrected the Types 13/14/15 from a swamp at Seletar where they had been parked when removed from Changi. After restoration these radars were sent to Labuan and Kuching, together with some other kit sent out from the Persian Gulf - all as part of the 'Confrontation' measures against Indonesia.

Planning for the installation of a radar on Western Hill, Penang Island, was then in progress - that being the only site that could see the Melan area, from which the Indonesians had been active, even inserting small forces by air into south Malaysia. One of his contributions was to look for alternative sites on the Island, as Penang Hill was considered to be too difficult. He had a great day in a 'chopper' at the south end of Penang Island, seeing many very large lizards - but no sites! But he then left the island before any work started on the Hill.

The new radar unit that I joined in July 1969 was one of the three computerised mobile radars on the RAF inventory, being No 1 Air Control Centre (ACC) at RAF Wattisham (which I left to go to Penang), No 2 at Sallalah in the Oman, and No 1 Air Defence Centre (ADC) on Penang Island. The computer equipment was the Plessey

GL161, known as "Tinsmith", which drove an American TPS-34 radar with integral height finding. This radar had originally been designed to accompany United States Marines on a beachhead and operate for only some 48 hours. With the RAF it saw years of service. Also on site was a mobile UPS-1 radar as back up. While both the TPS-34 and UPS-1 were designated 'mobile' their location at the top of Western Hill could only be achieved by the use of twin-rotor Bristol Belvedere helicopters lifting them in.

No 1 ADC was RAF controlled but jointly manned by the RAF and the RAAF: an RAF Commanding Officer, RAF and RAAF squadron commanders, with mixed flights on the operations side. Administration duties were carried out from the airfield at Butterworth on the mainland, with liaison carried out via a ferry trip to the island, until the airfield was handed back to the Royal Malaysian Air Force in the late 1960s, at which time a RAF Unit Headquarters was opened at Glugor on the island. Domestic accommodation was at the capital of Penang Island, Georgetown. In the absence of an Officers' Mess, functions were held in the leave centre, the Runnymede Hotel, with single officers being accommodated in the Eastern and Orient Hotel ('the E & O'), and married officers in hirings, as were married airmen. Single airmen lived at the RAAF Hostel, with the Australian airmen.

The journey from Georgetown to Western Hill required a coach from the domestic accommodation to the bottom station of the funicular railway. From here cable cars ran in two stages up to the top station at 800 metres asl, with a transfer from one stage to the other at the halfway point. An one carriage went up, another, on the other track, came down. It was said that you had truly arrived if you could sleep on the first part of the rail journey, transfer across to the other track, still asleep, and complete the rail journey to the top without waking up. An alternative pleasure on the cable car was card playing, and the trackside at the bottom was littered with playing cards thrown away by airmen on their last journey down at the end of their time at Penang.

At the top, a number of Service Landrovers awaited the servicemen to carry them the mile or so through the top jungle to Western Hill and the radar station. The story was told how a python was crossing the road when the Landrovers rounded the corner. When the front wheels of the lead vehicle ran over the snake, it reared its head to the level of the driver's open window. It is said that the snake was finally driven off by the driver lashing at its head with the vehicle jack as a weapon.

A useful interlude during my time at No 1 ADC was a detachment in January 1970 to Australia to take part in an international air defence exercise, called CASTER OIL, at No2 Control and Reporting Unit (2CARU) outside Darwin in the Northern Territories. My log book tells me that in addition to 'killing' nine Vulcans and four Canberras, nearly 'killing' a friendly F-86 Sabre and a friendly AEW Neptune, I also intercepted a "Flying Doctor", Dr Dove. At the end of the exercise the RAAF

flew a number of the Brits in a C-130 to Sydney for the weekend, where I was able to meet up with my elder brother who married an Australian girl in 1947 and now lived in Sydney.

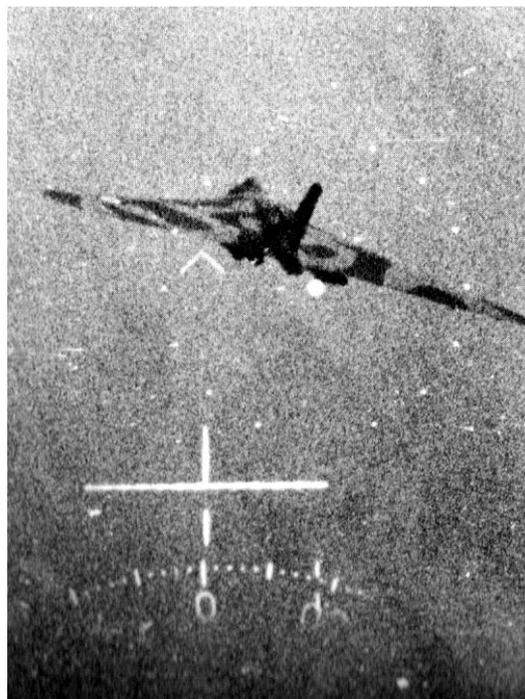


Belvedere of 66 Squadron RAF delivering radar parts to Penang Hill.

Also during my time at Western Hill another international defence exercise called BERSATU PADU (Complete Unity) was held in June 1970 over western Malaysia. The target aircraft included Avro Vulcans from No 44 Squadron, the defending fighters were two RAAF Mirage III squadrons (Nos 3 and 75) based at Butterworth and one RAF Lightning, squadron (No 74 from Tengah). When the first air raiders approached Penang from the west they were intercepted by the fighters which, having ‘splashed’ their targets, then returned to their patrol positions west of the island. The Vulcans carried on, on their own, to attack their targets, including Georgetown. This penetration of unescorted bombers caused consternation on the part of some of the locals who assumed that since there were no fighters apparent, the bombers obviously had got through without being intercepted. It was similar to the beaches of Dunkirk in 1940 when the RAF fighters were busy engaging the Luftwaffe inland, leaving the soldiers being evacuated from the beaches to cry out, “Where are the RAF?” Thereafter, in Malaysia the fighters were required to formate on the wing tips of the bombers until their target had been overflowed to assure the population that the bombers had indeed been intercepted.

But time was running out. The British Government had decided that Great Britain could not afford to defend the whole world and the decision had been made to give up Far East bases. By the time the radar unit closed in 1971 the Belvedere helicopter was obsolete and out of service; but most of the equipment was lifted off the Hill by RAF ‘choppers’, though Royal Navy helicopters were called in to lift three or four loads too heavy for our Whirlwinds. We only dropped on load, into the Hill septic tank area, fortunately not of any great importance. Otherwise, the “Teeny Weeny Airways” (TWA), the RAF Whirlwinds from Changi, were employed flying from the Hill to the Malaysian/Australian base at Butterworth, employing some very efficient Mobile Air Movements personnel. However, I was ‘toux’ before Western Hill closed down and by August 1971 I was on the strength of the C&R Evaluation Team, (the ‘Trappers’) at Bentley Priory.

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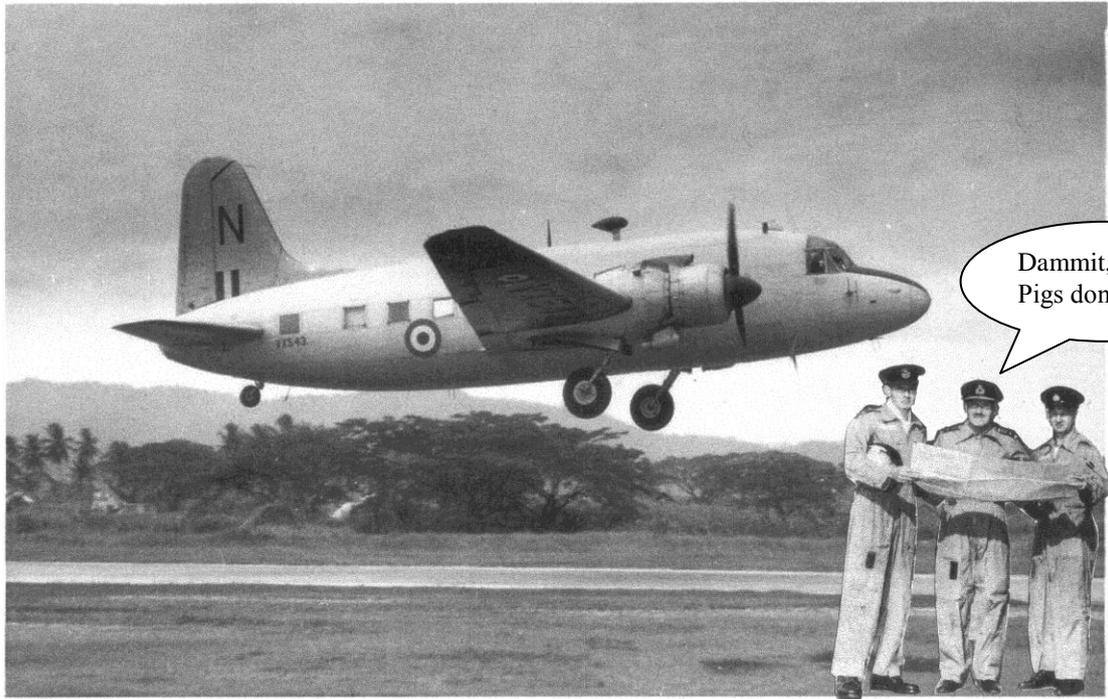
Vulcan caught in the sights of a RAAF Mirage



Vulcans lined up at Butterworth



Victor and Lightning at Butterworth



52 Squadron Valetta, commonly referred to as the 'flying pig'.