



RAF Butterworth/Penang Association

www.raf-butterworth-penang-association.co.uk



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

NEWSLETTER

Spring/Summer 2003

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

It is very hard to believe that it's almost 7 years since the first Reunion group that I put together for a trip to the Far East in 1996, decided to form the RAF Butterworth and Penang Association. It's equally difficult to understand why I'm still allowed to be your Chairman! We seem to be holding our own against "old father time" although I'm sure that old age is creeping up as I near my next retirement date and receipt of my second pension!

Pete Mather continues with a great deal of background work as new applications for membership roll in as a result of people visiting various websites that cross refer with us. I believe now that most people have paid their subs for 2002/03 – if you haven't paid since the AGM last October – please send multiples of £5-00 to Len Wood. Dave Croft has produced most of the content of this newsletter – I only have to add the twiddly bits! So thanks to all the team that continue to keep the Association afloat.

We would be particularly encouraged with another large attendance at the Reunion in October at Solihull. Please put 11th and 12th October in your diary as Reunion Weekend, put some pennies together and come and enjoy the weekend with former colleagues. Bring other ex-Butterworth or Penangites with you even if they aren't members. We have enclosed a first booking form to get your commitment and will send further details in August to sweep up the undecided.

I am having plans for the FEAF Memorial for the Arboretum drawn up at the present time and will be liaising with the other Associations to try to reach agreement for the structure so that we can have something in place this year for final completion in early 2004.

It is with some relief that I record the safe survival of all but a single RAF Tornado from Gulf War 2 – hopefully we can win the peace in Middle East and get back to normal. Oh for a bit of jet noise over the Lakes again!

Have a good Summer – see you in October at the Reunion!

Tony Parrini

While we were in Ceylon we learnt that a Valetta had crashed into the sea at the end of the runway at Car Nicobar. We had mail on that flight which was later delivered to us in Ceylon. On our return flight as we approached the runway at Car Nicobar we passed over the Valetta lying spread-eagled in the surf. Sadly, we didn't bring any beer with us but the Indians had either forgotten the promise or were too well mannered to mention it.



I got the photograph of R for Robert from Richard 'Bart' Bartholomew, ex A.T.C. Changi 1956 -1957, who now lives in San Francisco. He seems to remember getting it from a F.E.A.F. comms fitter who went to Car Nicobar to see about salvaging the aircraft.

'Does anybody out there know any more about the aircraft and what happened to it?'

DON'T FORGET.....



REUNION – Solihull 11th and 12th October 2003

AVA: An ill wind blows her to Butterworth



9th December 1944.

FILM star Ava Gardner spent last night in Butterworth and Penang instead of the \$12,000 luxury suite prepared for her at Raffles Hotel, Singapore.

Arrangements for a Hollywood-style welcome in Singapore fell flat when the CPA airliner bringing Ava from Hong Kong could not land at weather-bound Kallang airport.

Big crowds had been expected at the airport for a glimpse of the star and 12 policemen were there to provide an escort to the city.

But the only fans who turned up were 12 rain-soaked girls. They waited hopefully until 6.30 p.m. when the plane had been due to land, then drifted away.

Ava's plane flew into Mata Kuching airport at Butterworth at 6.45 p.m. and sent R.A.F. men scrambling for her autograph.

She looked cool in white blouse and fawn skirt as she stepped down from the plane.

Passengers from three other airliners which had flown in earlier joined in the rush for her autograph.

Very tired

Miss Gardner put down her handbag and signed about 50 autographs.

An R.A.F. admirer, searching frantically for something Ava could sign, finally brought out a photograph of his girl friend.

"Won't she be jealous?" Ava laughed as she signed the back of the photo.

Followed by her fans, she walked to the passengers' waiting room and received the Press.

"I'm very tired," she confessed. "I got up at 5.30 this morning but I must say the trip was very pleasant all the way. I found Hong Kong a lovely place and its girls no less lovely."

Miss Gardner then begged to be excused and went in for a drink at the R.A.F. officers' mess.

She will spend the night at the E & O Hotel in Penang.



Eastward



ASSOCIATION TIES

We have a very limited stock of Association ties still available on a "First Come – First Served" basis. When these go there will be no more!!

Price £11.75 (including postage) from:

Rod Hartley
4 Suthmere Drive
Burbage
Marlborough
Wilts. SN8 3TG

This could be your last chance to obtain one of these unique "first edition" items!!



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Association Website –

Thanks to a great deal of hard work by George Gault, for those on the internet, the Newsletter and other useful links and materials are now contained on our own website.

www.raf-butterworth-penang-association.co.uk

Webmaster - george.pgault@ntlworld.com to whom any useful or interesting snippets can be forwarded.

IN MEMORIAM

Flight Sergeant David Alan Lees of Stafford

R.I.P

As we go to press, we have just received notification of the death on 26th April 2003 of David Lees who served with 52 Sqn at RAF Butterworth in 1962-63. He served from 1952 to 1968 and finished his service in the rank of Flight Sergeant. He leaves behind his children Karen, Susan and David.

Any messages of condolence may be sent to his son David I Lees on 01782-846127 or by email to davejet@easy.com

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ANNUAL REUNION

Please spread the word, book the date in your diary, start saving your pennies, tie a knot in your hanky and put aside the weekend of 11th and 12th October 2003 for the Annual Association Reunion to be held at the Jarvis Ramada Hotel (Usual Haunt – new name) in Solihull. We will be sending full details in August with costs, timings and “what’s going on?”

Please remember that friends, especially ex-Service colleagues are welcome to join the proceedings – provided they pay!

The cost will be £73-00 per head for Dinner, Bed, Breakfast and Buffet Lunch– no single room supplements. The cost for Saturday Dinner only, will be £20-50p. A reduced rate for those arriving on Friday is being negotiated.

The Committee would welcome ideas to vary the weekend. Some have asked for more time together on Saturday afternoon to show the slides, old cine-films and photographs. Others would prefer to go to the Arboretum or the Cosford Air Museum. We will happily oblige if we have any indications as to your preferences. Contact tony@parrini.co.uk or 01228-674553 with any comments.

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HAVE YOU SEEN.....?

Did all the RAFA members read the letter from A L PARRINI on page 45 of the May/June Air Mail Magazine? If not, why not? Please send any comments, FOR or AGAINST to the Editor of Air Mail for the next edition.

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WELL – I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

I served nearly 3 years at Butterworth and Penang and only learnt this week that a holder of the Victoria Cross is buried in the cemetery on Penang Island. His name and any reminiscences, stories about him, the exploit that won him the medal and any other information about him to Dave Croft for the next edition.

Best input wins a free drink from the Chairman at the Reunion. TP Chairman.

A Paradise Called Bidan

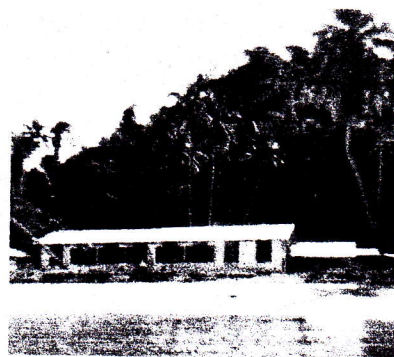
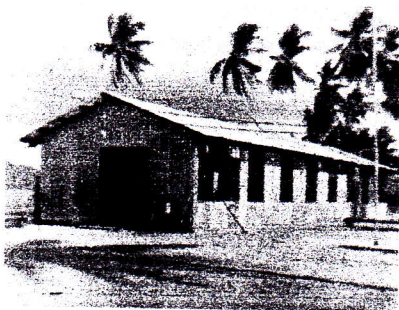
by Brian Banks

I was based at Butterworth from early 1956 to late 1957 and I notice we have some ex Glugor personnel who were there during that same period. I'm sure some of them will remember doing the twice weekly trip up to the target range.

I was an operations clerk, working in Air Traffic Control.

The aircraft from the base used a target range which was based on a group of islands about 17 miles north and 5 miles from the coast. This required a small detachment of men to be stationed there, two of whom had to be operations clerks. Having heard a little about the place I decided to do the unthinkable and volunteer to go there. In due course I was posted off.

The base of operations was on the first island you reach – Bidan. The launch which carried us there could only get within 200 yards of the beach and a rowing boat, which was kept there for the purpose, came out to take us and the supplies to shore. The site was composed of two huts in a small fenced compound, just above the high tide mark.



There were four main islands in the group: Bidan, Telor, Song Song and Bunting. Bidan and Telor were used as triangulation points to locate the position of flash bombs dropped on a target moored at sea and Song Song was used for gunnery and rocket practice. These exercises were carried out every six weeks or so. The rest of the time was ours to do as we pleased.

Up in the morning and run out for a quick dip in the sea. Whose turn to make breakfast? The launch came twice a week with rations and supplies. This always included a joint of meat from which we would cut thin slices to fry on the Primus Stove – our only means of cooking. The rest we would throw away – it wouldn't keep. If we had only known, putting it in a sealed tin and leaving it in the sun all day would have cooked it perfectly.

We had a table tennis table, a bookcase full of books, a record player with a good selection of up to date records – courtesy of the W.V.S. Power was supplied by a diesel generator 100 yards from the huts. This had to be started in the evening and switched off last thing.

A bit of advice from the locals – always walk upwind of the palm trees to avoid any falling coconuts and always wear your flip flops so that snakes would sense you coming up and move away. The snakes incidentally were black cobras and pythons.

We had two dogs and the bitch became very adept at dealing with cobras. If she found one in the compound she would circle round it in its coiled striking position. Eventually it would try to uncoil and she would jump in and grab it by the back of the neck and would throw it in the air.

The N.C.O. in charge was a sergeant who lived at Butterworth and only visited us twice a week, courtesy of the supply delivery. It had, therefore, become standard practice that the airman who had been there the longest was in charge.

There was a small fishing village on the island. The fishermen would row out and lay a large circle of net around a shoal of small fish and then pull it in. The boat they used was long with about six oarsmen each side and sometimes for fun we would volunteer to help row the boat. They welcomed our help and would sit us at the end to act as stroke. The fish that were caught were then boiled and spread on mats to dry in the sun. Sometimes a large shark would be caught in the circle and would be drawn as close as possible to the beach. The fishermen would then all jump into the water and throw the shark up onto the beach (No Health & Safety rules here!!). These were real monsters up to 8 feet long. The one in the picture is a hammerhead.



Other hazards in the sea were sea snakes, extremely venomous, and sea anemones which were numerous just below the low water mark and whose spines would stick in your foot and break off. Impossible to get out because they were so brittle. There were also jelly fish which the fishermen would pull off the nets with no apparent discomfort to them but if a small piece touched you while swimming it would cause a nasty sting.

On a fairly recent visit back there, the locals tell me that there are no longer any large sharks and the fishing village has gone. Perhaps, like us, they are also suffering from depleted fish stocks.

In one of the huts there was a medicine chest full of all sorts of potions and pills. I hadn't a clue what they were all for but, fortunately, a visiting medical orderly obliged by writing out a list of the contents and their purpose. There was even morphine in containers like toothpaste tubes with a needle on the end. The idea was to stick the needle in the patient then roll up the tube to inject the morphine. It was common knowledge among the fishermen that we had this medicine stock so we were used as their local clinic. Their ailments and how we dealt with them would make another story.

Female turtles often laid their eggs on the neighbouring island of Telor but one night one came up on our beach and was obviously preparing to lay. We got a torch and dug a hole behind her. We were then able to watch her lay. Something we've seen many times since on film but we saw it live. I retrieved one and fried it – horrible; it tasted like cod liver oil!

When it came to disposing of rubbish we would put the dustbins in the boat and row out to sea about a quarter of a mile and tip them over the side. Not very environmentally friendly but the local birds of prey fed on the titbits.

I was up there for a total of nine months and look back on it as the best holiday of my life. If you ever holiday in Penang, looking north you can see Bidan and Telor on the horizon. It is now manned by the Australian Air Force.



Another Butterworth Reminiscence

by Rod 'Curly' Hartley

It was often the habit of the SEO, Sqn. Ldr. J. G. Fowler (John), to walk through the Stores in a morning bidding everyone, be they Airman, NCO, Civilian Clerk or Labourer, "Good Morning". One day, while in the R & D Section, with (for once) little to do, I decided that it might be an opportune moment to teach a newly appointed Civilian Labourer by the name of Hussain how to reply with respect to the "Boss's" greeting!

I duly spent several hours that day teaching him (he knew virtually no English) to come (a little) smartly to attention, give a (very) sketchy salute and reply "B-----S"! Came the next morning, the "Boss" walked through the Stores and Hussain duly obliged! About five minutes later "Chiefie" Robinson came into R & D, told me to put my shirt and hat on and accompany him into the Squadron Leader's office. I was duly dressed down by John Fowler who told me in no uncertain terms that he knew what was said, he knew who had said it and he also knew who had taught him to say it! I was instructed to spend as long as it took to teach him not to say it and to reply to the greeting of "Good Morning" in a suitable and respectful manner!

As I left I heard "Chiefie" say: 'That should teach young 'Curly' a lesson, Sir', to which John Fowler's reply was, 'I doubt it!' They then both burst out laughing! Happy days!!

DOES ANYONE KNOW OF JOHN FOWLER'S WHEREABOUTS? I also had the pleasure of working for him. TP Chairman

JOTTINGS ABOUT RAF BUTTERWORTH, MALAYA 01/1954-03/1955

by 3515116 J/T GEOFF HELM, 33 SQUADRON

Travel to BUTTERWORTH from RAF LYNEHAM. 3 attempts to take off due to ice on wings, CASTEL IDRIS first stop, HABBANIYAH, KARACHI, NEGOMBO, CHANGI. Hastings freighter, 2 x Hercules engines, 2x crates, 3x I/T's in Blues (i.e. MOONMEN) Hit large air pocket, blue lights on wings, mid Indian Ocean.

ARRIVE R.A.F. CHANGI--Change to KD's, search for younger Brother, now a seasoned "knees brown" erk of 7 month's tour de works. The other 2 x J/T's names began with W, They stayed on "Treasure Island" mine is H so I go "up country".

TRAVEL TO B/WORTH--Given shooting stick+50. Stand on platform with light above head moving at slow walking pace with "ulu" 20 feet away! Stop in K.L.

BILLET and COLLEAGUES--room and furniture best I had in R.A.F. Also dhobi and Amah, food-British menu-ok. Four to a room - Scoucer - Grimshaw - Jock - Yorkie (me) + geckos. Separated from main road by monsoon ditch and 40 feet!

A.S.F. AIRCRAFT--Assigned to ASF - de H Homets ie RR Merlins of 33 SQDN. Later had Harvard and Vampire. Visitors were Vampires of 45 Sqn and Lincolns of R.A.A.F -but they had their own ground staff

KEY ORDERLY--each week someone was nominated as KEY ORDERLY. On one of my weeks I unlocked the side door and was putting lock on hasp when one keen person pushed past me, opened the door went in -- and came shooting out backwards! He was white and shouting "snake". It was a five-foot Cobra with flared hood. We all shouted for "Cbiefie" (see below) who chased said snake with a suitable bamboo cane.

CRASH CREW--my first one had three crashes!

1. Ambitious pilot did tight turn on finals and was still turning when his wheels touched-- ergo no undercart!
2. Newly arrived, newly winged P.O. very carefully and thoroughly checked his aircraft. Had good T.O. then overshot into yam field, and flipped onto his back, bursting into flames. We all gathered round, flames hot, curious rumble noise, someone ran so we all ran. Chiefie shot past me--he was 5 foot nothing I was 6 foot (and in the Station Rugby Team). Regrettably we could not save the Pilot.
3. Squadron Hornet coming in to land with a rocket hang-up, which detached, whizzed along the runway but did not explode.

NB. I cannot recall anything about the Control Tower.

FIRST NIGHT GUARD--out on flight area, pitch black, mossies hungry no one near. Even when I put the searchlight on to do a sweep. Suddenly drums began to the North, more to the South. Then straight across-in the middle. PANIC!!! "Should I have one up the spout?". I later learned it was "" Ramitin!

GEORGETOWN--Payday (fortnightly) Geordie and I would catch bus to ferry. Go into a cafe for a drink, wander round markets, go to Cathay cinema (air-conditioned) Perhaps have meal in restaurant. Ferry back, taxi to camp. One time we missed last ferry and hired sampan to take us back. A very hairy ride in the dark! If we knew the SAS were in town we would not go. Around 1630hrs. we noticed that locals would lie down in doorways, alleys ready for the night.

TANJONG BIJNGAH--A holiday camp on Penang Island. Run by W.V.S. Georgie and I went for Christmas 1954 and New Year 1955. Christmas carols and games, New Year was a dance. The Army lads had been invited from next door. My main memory is a broken beer glass going over my shoulder into the neck of someone behind me! The WVS girls were in like a flash to defuse the situation. Very brave. The colour of the sand and the fluorescent colour of the sea are better memories.

LEAVE--I scrounged a flight to Changi and had some time with my Brother. The swimming pool was well used, and walks along the row of native shops, mostly Chinese and Tamils. I stayed at the Union Jack Club. Awakened at 06.30 by noise from Bata Shoe factory nearby. Had a look at Raffles Hotel but it was shut for redecorating. Georgie, Norman (my Brother) and I had a week at Sandes Homes, but I cannot remember anything about it.

VISITOR--Due to flooding in Singapore the aircraft carrying AVA GARDNER was diverted to us, Caused a huge stir-but we never saw her. She was whisked away somewhere. (See George Blood's newspaper article in this issue)

RUGBY--I played a few games, one a Cup match in K.L., but the one I remember the most was against THE PLANTERS at TAJPING. The pitch was cut out of the ulu, an armoured car at each corner, they came into the changing room, took off their gun belts, knocked seven bells out of us, thanked us, put belts on and went! I perforated my ear playing rugger, it did not heal in the six weeks, so I was sent back to the U.K.

That was the end of my time at R.A.F. BUTTERWORTH. (C. March 1955)



From Mrs Margaret Cheeseright:

Dear Pete (Mather)

Thank you for the latest Newsletter. I was interested in the Memories of Malaya by Fred Hoskins. I was going through some cine films, anyone who knew Ian (M. Plt Ian Cheeseright, 33 Sqn) knew he was a keen photographer. I came across a film and it was marked 'Wedding of Fred Hoskins'. I remember going to the wedding. Unfortunately, I couldn't get the projector to work. The bulb had 'bust', but my son has managed to locate a bulb, so we hope to have a Film Show. Then if Fred would like the film I will be quite happy to forward it. Somewhere among the reels of film I am sure there is one of the time they put about 50(?) Hornets in the air. Happy Days.

Sincerely,

Margaret

Does anyone have contact with Fred Hoskins???? - Ed.

The footage of aircraft at Butterworth is of great historical value. If anyone has any more, PLEASE DON'T DISPOSE OF IT. Please put it in your Will that it should be passed to the Association for safe keeping.

Margaret - How about a Film Show at next reunion? - Chairman

Car Nicobar by Don Brereton

In August 1956 three of us, Brian 'Bunk' Banks, Derek 'Spike' Wright and me, Don Brereton, all LACs left R.A.F. Butterworth in a Vickers Valetta for a six week detachment to R.A.F. Negombo for exercise J.E.T. 56.

As well as the crew there were two sergeants from Singapore, also on the exercise, and the pilot's wife and their new baby.

As we circled the island the beehive huts of the islanders could clearly be seen. Then we were over the airstrip that ended just before the beach. The waiting fire engine and ambulance were World War II vintage!

The Valetta taxied to the dispersal point and we all got out to stretch our legs. However, the engines weren't turned off as the aircrew seemed to think there was something wrong with one of the engines. A decision was made to spend the night while the Indians fixed the problem. Two jeeps appeared out of the jungle via a narrow track. These were loaded up with the crew and sergeants and disappeared. They came back shortly and took the three LAC.s up to the camp.

The news about the little white baby spread fast and a crowd of natives was soon looking in through the open doors and windows of the Air Movements hut. Meanwhile the aircrew were doing a nice line in buying little crossbows from the locals for resale in Singapore. We got friendly with the I.A.F. guys but when we asked about beer on sale we were told there wasn't any. However, they did say that they got a ration of rum and after a little persuasion agreed to share it. It came in the shape of a small barrel with a bung at the bottom that they set up on a chair. It was, to say the least, very strong and tasted awful, so we had to water it down. Two hours later we were telling jokes and singing the latest rock and roll hits. Bunk's purple suede shoes were very much admired by the Indians.

Suddenly on that dark island a fire alarm rang out very loudly. Looking out of the door we could see that the cookhouse was on fire. Spike, Bunk and I raced over the grass towards the flaming building followed by the Indian Air Force lads. Spike was the first into the flames where, with great presence of mind, he grabbed a fire extinguisher from the wall, got it working in a vast cloud of spray and very quickly the fire was out.

We were immediate heroes and the cooks who were woken from their sleep insisted on cooking up an incredible feast of Indian cuisine. We got to bed very late and woke up hardly believing what had happened the night before. We took off shortly afterwards promising to bring the Indians some beer back with us on our return journey.