



'EASTWARD'

The newsletter of the
RAF Butterworth & Penang Association



Chairman: Tony Parrini Treasurer: Len Wood Secretary: Rowly Christopher
(Formed: 30th August 1996 at the Casuarina Hotel, Batu Ferringhi, Penang Island)



CHRISTMAS 2009



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.





'EASTWARD'



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CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

I have just returned from the dedication of the new RAF Association Memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum. HRH Princess Anne did the honours and with about a thousand of us seated all around. What a splendid occasion it was.

I took the opportunity to meet with the man who was responsible for the tiling of the RAFA Memorial and having him remove all the tiles from the FEAF Memorial to see what the problem was underneath!! Simply, the reinforced concrete under the tiles was rough and undulating in all directions, the grouting had broken or softened and moisture had got underneath. A solution to the problem has been agreed and with the help of funds from the RAF Seletar Association and the RAF Changi Association, plus our own funding, the FEAF Memorial should be restored to the condition we originally intended by Spring 2010.

As I write this page, many of us are involved in the Poppy Appeal. You will see that the focus this year is on today's armed forces and the operations in Afghanistan. The images they are using are so evocative – perhaps upsetting for some. I just hope the public will respond generously again this year.

As Christmas approaches and another year comes to an end, we must remember the families divided as a result of current operations. Divided because serving members are away from their families, divided because those left at home can't cope, worse still, divided because a member of the family has been killed in action.

We were so lucky during our tours in the Far East – let's be grateful to those who serve today in the cause of Peace and Freedom.

Best wishes to all members and those that read this message on the website.



Tony Parrini, Chairman, RAF BPA

From the Editor

Ron Abell – Accounts November 1963 to May 1966, RAF Butterworth

Ron Abell passed away on the 12th September 2009. Both Ron and Freda sat at the same table with me at the 2009 reunion dinner held at Kenilworth where Ron gave me a set of copies of photographs of Lancaster G-ASXX taken at Butterworth when on its way to the UK.

Ron approached me a couple of years ago to ask if I was interested in photographs of the aircraft and if so he would get copies made for me. Finally, at the dinner table, during the reunion he handed over a set of copies of the aircraft, some of which are included below as a tribute to a member and good friend of the Association. Thank you Ron.



New members

John David, SAC: Station Workshops, Mobile Oxygen Plant, RAF Butterworth, March 1957 to August 1959.

Keith Denney, Jnr Tech: Gen. Fitt., Grd Equipt Flight, Sep 1964 to Sep 1967.

John Miller, SAC: Eng Mech, Far East Training Squadron and 33 Squadron, RAF Butterworth, 1953 to 1955.

E J Pinkney (Ted). RAF Butterworth, May to Dec 1956, 1125 MCU, Dec 1956 to Nov 1958.

Robert (Bob) Saunders. Corporal: Engine Fitter, 52 and 60 Squadrons, RAF Butterworth, January 1964 to June 1966.

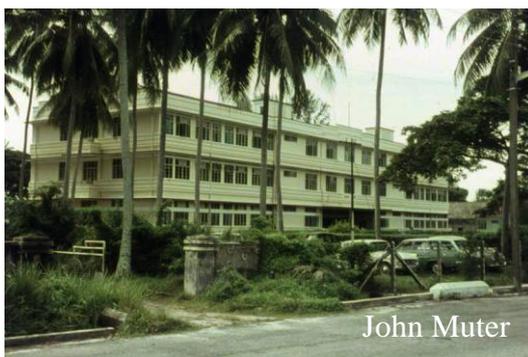
Keith Martin, Cpl/Sgt Ground Elec, 33 Squadron (SAM) RAF Butterworth 1965 to 1967.

Dave Croft

Letters etc

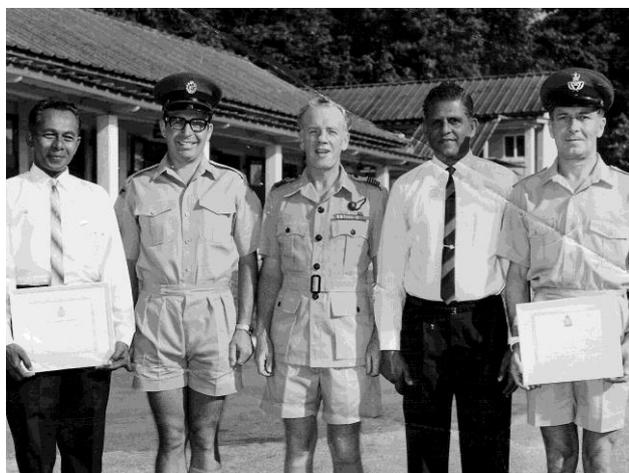
From: **Rod Hartley (Curly)**.... ‘Another good issue. Looks like the reunion was a great success this year. Sorry I had to miss it but the family took over as you know. (*Rod had explained to me earlier...ed*). I was interested in Jim Roberts’ article. Some of his experiences obviously took place before I got to Butterworth, but I also had a dog. I picked it up on the way back from Prai on one of the stores runs. It was cowering in a ditch being stoned by some locals. I jumped out of the lorry and grabbed the dog. There was some altercation and I smacked one of them before taking the dog back to camp. When I came home, a couple of years on, one of the sergeants who was a big wheel in the Penang RSPCA found a home for it with a Eurasian family (I wanted to bring it home but couldn’t afford the freight or the quarantine). I will see if I still a photo of the dog, if so I’ll send it for you to publish next time.’

From **Richard Harcourt** regarding the demolition of the RAAF Hostel on Penang. ‘Just read a note on the RAF Forum from Laurie Bean in Penang that the “Hostie” is no more! The building and site has been cleared for redevelopment. For many, and I certainly include Daphne and myself, the “Hostie” introduced us to Penang with its strange sights, sounds and smells. With two young children we visited the “Hostie” Medical Centre many times with time always available to feast on the ‘Hostie’s Nasi Goreng’. Oh! Happy Memories’.



An e-mail from **Tony Parrini** indicated concern over the length of the last issue of *Eastward* in terms of extra postage weight and cost! A good point and as editor I have attempted to adhere to an agreed maximum number of 30 pages to fit in with the posting price band. What was not taken into account were other possible factors that might have contributed towards exceeding the usual large letter costs we normally incur! Certainly some members ended up paying extra for postage on delivery and I can only pass on my apologies. Those members who did contact me refused to be reimbursed and for this, thank you.

Tony also refers to the photograph on page 7 from the last issue (*shown below*):



‘The Indian gentleman 4th from left is Mr Narendran. He was already a BEM or MBE and managed all the sea freight bookings in Tech Supply Flight at RAF SU Butterworth. He had been a POW, possibly at Changi, and I recall something about him defecting in order to engineer the release of others-returning to the British when it was safe to do so. Bit of a hero apparently. As the “Manager” he was present when the other civvy, far left, was receiving his AOC’s Commendation for all his work in the same section. I can’t remember his name but both were on my staff at RAF SU.’

The picture, with Wg Cdr Ron Sparkes, was taken at Glugor when RAF Penang was formed there. The MCU had been disbanded.’

An e-mail from **David Brivio** (SAC 5027035) mentions among other things the ‘famous’ gibbon belonging to the CO of the time. David writes ‘I have been perusing the Butterworth

website with great interest. I was attached to RAF Butterworth two or three times, from RAF Changi, as well as to Kai-Tak and Little Sai Wan. I moved around quite a lot, which suited me, as I have always loved travelling. Butterworth was my favourite posting!

I was a Dental Assistant and worked in the Sick Quarters with a Flying Officer and others. Don't ask me names as I haven't a clue! Most of my times at BW were in the middle of 1956 until 1958. I remember the Gibbon that was a pet of the CO that was tethered to a palm tree opposite the Sick Quarters. The Australian nurses always gave it a wide berth as they arrived for work as it used to charge at them. Don't blame it as most of the nurses were crackers. I remember also that the Gibbon nearly bit the ear off the CO once.

There was also a Chinese girl whom I got to know named Joanna Koo who worked in the quarters. Really good looking, I used to give a lift to and from the bus stop on the crossbar of my racing bike as I also used to grass track race locally, also in KL.

I would like to chat, or meet those who remember me.

Should anyone want to contact David please contact the editor so arrangements can be made.

A series of e-mails has passed between **Geoff Smith** and myself, with inputs from both Laurie Bean and Dennis Pateman regarding information in respect of Geoff's late father, **Robert Smith** of Carlisle, who enlisted in the RAF in 1943. Geoff says, 'His service record shows he enlisted on 26.11.1943 at 3 RC . He went on to RAF St Mawgan on 5/2/1944 and onto SPDC on 14.9.1944. He was posted to ACSEA on 27/9/1944. Nothing is shown on his record from 27.9.1944 to when he was PDC for release on 11/3/46. There is nothing on his record which shows where he went in ACSEA, or with which squadron or echelon he served. I know from talks we had that he was at Chittagong (India), Rangoon (Burma) and in Sumatra.

My father said he was involved with air supplies to troops on the ground but I never asked him if he was in the aircraft when supplies were dropped or whether he was ground crew loading aircraft so I missed a golden opportunity when he was alive to find out.'

To date Laurie and myself have been able to give Geoff an idea of what might have been his father's squadron and movements throughout South-east Asia, also copies of a couple of *Flypast* articles relating the conditions experienced by both aircrew and ground crew involved dropping supplies to troops in Burma.

If any member can help Geoff further please contact the editor.

Forwarded by **Tam McCrorie** is a tale of RAF supremacy over the RAAF at Butterworth. The piece was written by **Chad Adlard** who was a serving member of the RAAF at Butterworth and is today a recognized author in Australia.

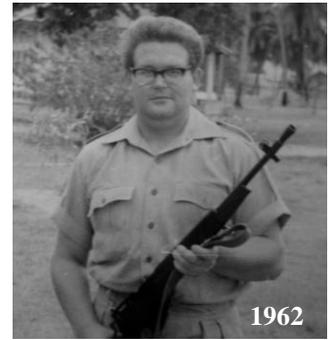
'**Lightning Fast**'..... 'As one we hit the concrete and our only Vietnam veteran beat us by a millisecond. He'd been there, done that. Realising we weren't under attack we rose, with a little dignity, to our feet and rushed to the front of the Butterworth Fire Section. The shockwaves were clearly visible but the aircraft had vanished for a new home at Tengah Air Base, Singapore.

Those Pommie "Lightning" cowboys had left their mark and then some. Several of the tower windows had broken on the staircase and most of the Base, like us brave Fairies (*electronic trades I presume...ed*), had eaten dirt. The 74 Squadron English Electric Lightning had vertically stacked (staggered) engines that boasted an amazing climb record of 50,000 feet per minute. Recently, an unclassified report suggested a ceiling height of 87,000 feet had been achieved in this aircraft.

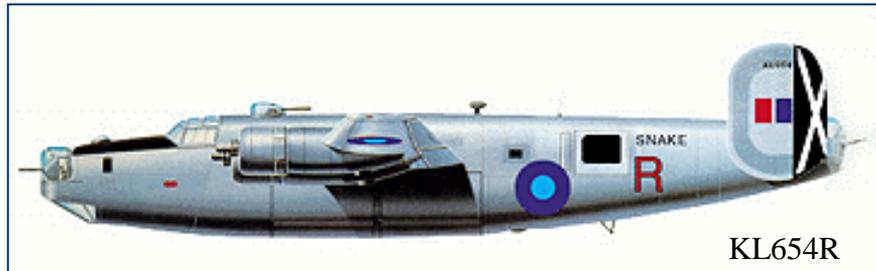
So when they left Butterworth they had simply "stood on their tails" and headed for altitude. The sound barrier had just got in the way. What a great "supersonic" way to say "Hooroo"!

We featured 74 Squadron Lightning F.6 XR768 in the Christmas 2007 issue of 'Eastward'.

A series of telephone calls and e-mails have been made between **Peter Munson** and myself with Laurie Bean being brought into the equation. Of the stories told by Peter, one, his expedition is featured in this newsletter. Peter also asked about the 1960's Straits Times photograph of the Victor V-bomber that dropped a full bomb load at the Song Song Range. Through Laurie's efforts results were achieved! Photographs of Lancaster G-ASXX were also forwarded to Peter as he recently visited East Kirkby with a friend, an ex-622 Squadron Lancaster Flight Engineer who had completed 30 missions on Lancasters.



Arthur Mace has drawn my attention to the plight of RAF Liberator KL654R that went missing on the 23rd August 1945 during a supply-dropping sortie over Malaya. Liberator KL654R was from 356 Squadron stationed on the Cocos Island and the flight was to be the



crew's final mission before stand down. Among the crew were two members of Force 136 who were to try to locate isolated groups of British and allied POW's from the air, parachute down and liberate and assist them to freedom. They left the aircraft before the crash.

The aircraft crashed in heavy jungle and today (2009) the focus is on the battle to recover the remains of the crew and give them a Christian burial. An expedition (2008) was launched by Shaharom Ahmad MHG and both the history relating to the crash and expedition findings can be found on the internet. Just type in Liberator KL654R to get on-line.

Should there be anyone further interested in the story of the expedition etc., who does not possess a computer or is not on the internet then please contact the editor (in his archivist role!)

Ken Plant writes 'The enclosed photograph was taken at RAF Cosford on the 28th June 2009. (Unfortunately too late for the Summer 2009 issue of the newsletter). We were all stationed at Butterworth at the same time and it was nice to see them again after fifty one years. They are, left to right: **Don Brereton**, ATC, **Dave Martin**, Station Flight, **Ken Plant**, Fireman, **Phil Ford**, 45 Squadron, **Norman Harvey**, Armourer and **Roy Street**, Air Movements.



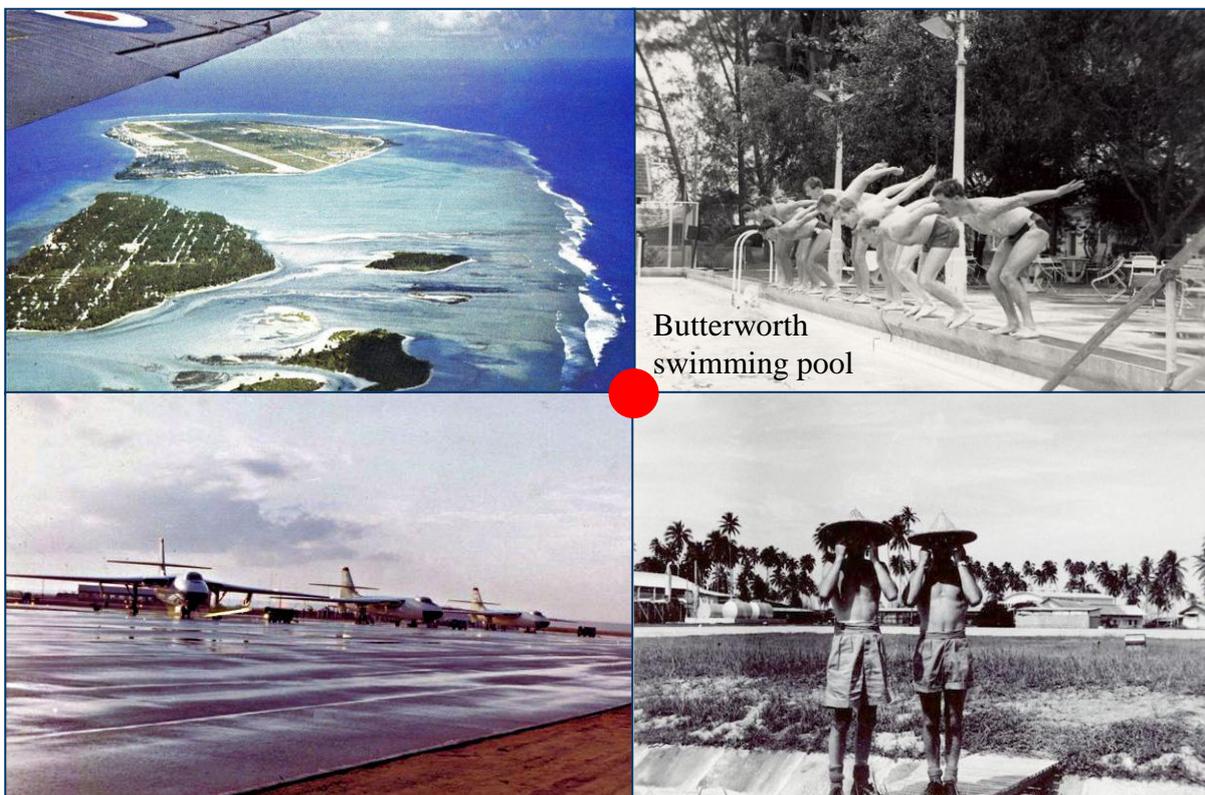
Members might remember **Dave Martin** as the piano player in the NAAFI. Also enclosed (if any use to the Association) are a few memory joggers.' *The 'memory joggers' consist of cash and bar chits from places such as the Boston and Broadway cafes and Wellesley Hotel and make a very welcome addition to the archive; the price of a fillet steak at the Wellesley was \$2.00.*

From our Secretary, Rowly Christopher, the following via e-mail: ‘I mentioned in my opening spiel in Christmas 2008 that Sgt Robbins was an instructor at the accounts course I attended at Changi in 1956. But I was not aware, until I read Mike Ward’s notes, that he was a water polo player, although I agree with Mike that he certainly had the build for it. I also mentioned F.O. Deas (Donald Turnbull Deas) in the accounts section at Butterworth and he was a keen water polo player. I believe he also played for his national team (Scotland). I also played a few times at Butterworth but did not take to the sport.

More on the Valiants at Butterworth

In response to the last issue of ‘*Eastward*’ mentioning Valiant XD865 (P11), **Nobby Unwin** of 138 Squadron (Valiants) Association informs me that the captain of XD865 was Flt Lt Phil Goodall of 90 Squadron RAF.

Continuing with Valiants at Butterworth, **Tam McCrorie’s** neighbour, **Len Brown**, loaned some photographs for Tam to copy for the Association archives. The photographs are an assortment showing ground crew and Valiants of 18 Squadron on detachment in 1962. Also included are two postcard copies of RAF Gan (one shown below).



It would seem the ‘coolie’ hats were ‘must have’ headgear for visiting ground crew ref: August 2009 issue, p12.

RAF BPA Badged Goods etc.

Just a reminder, and for new members, Association ties are available at £10.50 each from Tony Parrini (Tel: 01228 674553), RAF Butterworth history Cd’s at £10 for the set of two from Lee le Clerq (Tel: 01977 798765), RAF Butterworth badged goods from Terrain Ltd at Lincoln (Sales hotline Tel: 01522 697000) and the Penang badge is available at £9.00 each on a blue pocket patch, or embroidered onto garments such as fleeces and polo shirts from Andrew Parrini (Tel: 07818 411011).



IN GENERAL

Kenneth Williams and the Far East.



A recent programme on television featured Kenneth Williams talking of his acting career and his time in Hong Kong as a member of the Far East Army entertainment troupe.

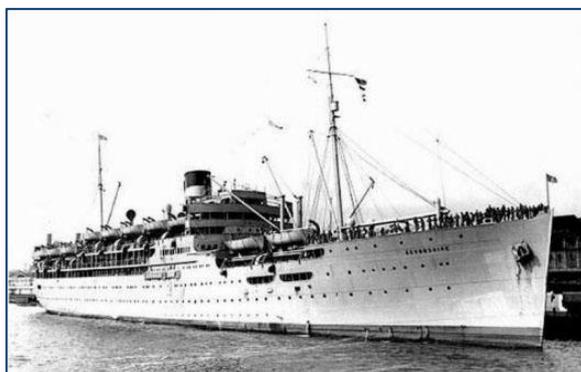
Kenneth Williams joined the Army during WW II as a draughtsman and was posted to the Army mapping complex in India via the transit camp at Nee Soon in Singapore. His mode of transport to Singapore was by the troopship TS Devonshire.

His preference for (serious) acting found

him in Hong Kong in 1947 where, along with others of the troupe, he was invited for cocktails on board HMS Belfast after the show. Even the sentries on the dockyard gates saluted him and his colleagues as they entered the dockyard!

During cocktails a very senior naval officer asked how, as ex-pats, they found postwar Hong

Kong (they were in civvies!). When they admitted to not being ex-pats but Army the reception cooled just a bit! When asked what rank and given the answer 'sergeant', the drinks were removed within seconds from them and straightaway they found themselves bundled out onto the dockside. Kenneth says as he left the dockyard the sentries did not salute them and one even blew a raspberry at them!



Brian Lloyd, in an e-mail, mentioned the absence of Labuan on the 'Confrontation in Borneo 1962-1966) map. A good point and after deliberation a 'new' map has replaced the 'old' one. Brian also passed on a selection of 'old' Penang pictures. The selection included the Boston Bar and trolley bus (single deck), double decker trolley bus, Waterfall Gardens, Batu Ferringhi, ferries, Hill Railway, Cold Storage Creameries, Broadway Café and Bar and Penang Road. Many thanks Brian.

The collection of Butterworth aircraft, until recently on loan to the Association, from **Norman Harvey** revealed many interesting items, among them a picture of 656 Squadron AAC Auster WZ706 which was based at Noble Field, KL. It is interesting because the aircraft was the subject of a David Shepherd painting (page 2) at the time the RAF flew him on a world wide tour of bases in 1960 in order to use his aviation skills for producing art in the messes.

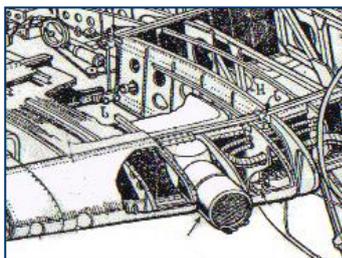
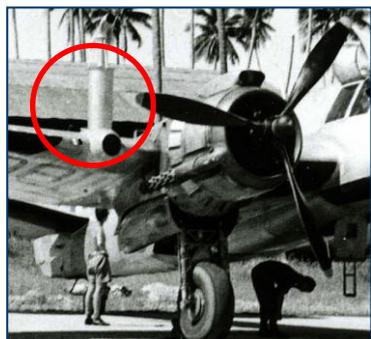
David Shepherd was awarded the OBE for services to conservation in 1979 and made a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts in 1986. Probably most famous for his African elephants studies he also has produced many fantastic paintings of steam railway engines and has donated a Zambian rail locomotive and coach to the National Railway Museum at York.

Auster WZ706 was delivered to 7851M on 4/7/55 and after AAC service became G-BURR when at Middle Wallop on 1992. The registration was cancelled in 1999 and re-issued as G-BURR in 2008. The aircraft is undergoing a major restoration at Eggsford Airfield in Devon and is expected to take to the air again in 2010.

Thanks also to **Tony Parrini** for his help in locating WZ706 G-BURR and members are welcome to visit Eggesford. From **Nigel Skinner** at Eggesford....'Dear Tony, Good to hear from you. Yes 706 is with us this time. Work has not started on her as yet but should commence in the Autumn to (restore her to) flying condition. I would estimate that the work should take at

least 12 months. If any of your members wish to visit us at any time to see what we do, they would be most welcome. We have a close relationship with 656 Sqn Association and value talking to members who served to build up a history of our aircraft.

Also among Norman's collection is a Beaufighter (below) undergoing some sort of test judging by the 'stovepipe' arrangement above the oil cooler. (Perhaps a member can enlighten me on this arrangement? ...ed).



The Auster and Beaufighter pictures are just two of the many unique photographs from the collection that have been digitally recorded.

Other photographs include York G-ANTI with what looks like a locally 'produced' Qantas-style kangaroo...unofficial as the kangaroo depicted is obviously of the male gender!

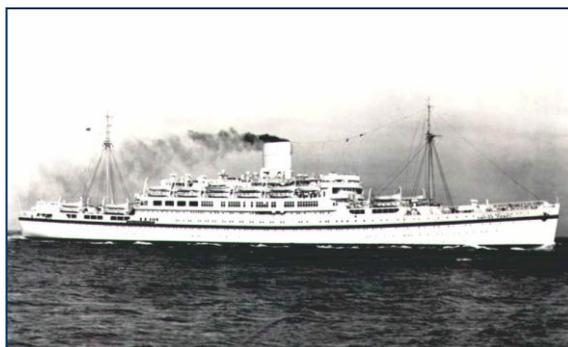
John Manny has sent me the remainder of his Butterworth photographs, which in time I will scan and, with other members' photographs, make available as a CD. A few of John's photographs have already graced the pages of '*Eastward*' and I look forward to adding the remainder to the (electronic) archive.

John has also presented his (handwritten) diary of his journey to Singapore by the troopship 'Empire Fowey'. A fascinating account that makes good reading, 'The Voyage' has now been typed with photographs from the Association archives added. Both the original and electronic copies are in the archives (thank you, John) and it is intended to include 'The Voyage' on CD at a later date. In the meantime I intend to serialize 'The Voyage' in the newsletter starting in April.

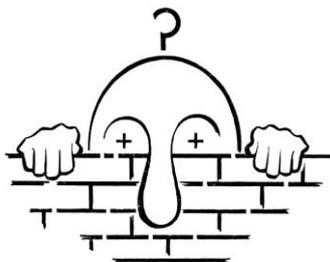
In his letter to me John mentions that the Empire Fowey* entered the (Suez) canal at 0300 hours on Saturday July 27th 1957 (that is how detailed the diary is!), having picked up enough scrambled egg in Malta, on July 24th, to feed the entire ship. He says this is at odds with **Peter Fowle**, who in his article 'Posting to the Far East in 1956', p18, Christmas 2008 issue of '*Eastward*' says 'his journey home in 1958 was on the Empire Fowey and we were the first troopship through the Suez Canal since the crisis.'

* The Empire Fowey was built in Hamburg, 1936, by Blohm & Voss for the North German Lloyd Line. Named 'Potsdam' it was used as a German troopship during WW II and also as an accommodation vessel by the German Navy.

Potsdam was 'captured' by the Allies at Flensburg in 1945 and renamed 'Empire Jewell'. The vessel was then taken over by the P&O Line to be fitted out as a troopship by Harland & Wolfe in 1946. Renamed 'Empire Fowey' the ship performed troopship duties for many years before being sold in 1960 to the Pan-Islamic Shipping Company to be used for ferrying pilgrims to Jeddah. Renamed 'Safina-E-Hujjaj', she was scrapped in 1976.



Members' Stories



WOT NO AUSSIES? by Peter Munson

In the first of two articles on RAF led expeditions into Malaya , Peter Munson's 1963 visit, led by Corporal Jack Hendren of mountain rescue fame, tells of climbing Gunong Kendrong in Grik, Upper Perak.

As reported in the Sunday Times: 'Ten adventurous airmen from the RAAF base at Butterworth set out today in a bid to conquer the 4,000-ft Gunong Kendrong, six miles north-west of Grik in Upper Perak.

"To the best of my knowledge, no one has ever attempted to climb this mountain before" (Cpl) J. Hendren, the leader, told the Sunday Times shortly before the party left in Land Rovers for their camp at Grik. The climbers - Cpl Hendren 33, Cpl K Ellis 27, Cpl P Munson 26, Cpl A Cooper 23, SAC J McGuire 24, SAC A Swinney 22, SAC I Lister 19, SAC J Whyte 22, SAC M Alsford 20 and SAC T Wilkins – hope to reach the summit in record time. *Picture, l to r: Jake Whyte, 'Geordie' Swinney (front), Peter Munson (back), Cpl Alan Cooper.*

The adventurers, all dressed in jungle green and wearing thick boots, will cut through estates and plantations, and try to follow as closely as possible the river Sungei Kendrong. To cut their way through bushes each man is armed with an Army parang in addition to a light signal gun and SARAH (Search And Rescue Home equipment). Each will carry a haversack containing four days food rations, mainly tinned provisions, and a water bottle.

"We do not expect any difficulties on the first leg of our journey" Cpl Hendren, an experienced mountaineer, said. "The most important thing is that we must not lose our track and we hope there will be no rain."

The main aim of the expedition Cpl Hendren explained was to provide the men with experience in jungle survival and to acquaint them with the Malayan jungle. "Not all of us are mountaineers. For all I know some of my men may not scale the mountain" he said. "It depends on how quickly we can reach the base of the mountain and how long it would take us to get to the summit and get back. If we cannot keep up with our schedule, five of the men will have to return home because they have to be back on duty on Tuesday morning."

Asked whether they had surveyed the area before, Cpl Hendren said he and Cpl McGuire, also a veteran mountain climber, had been on a reconnaissance expedition last January. They walked for about four or five miles on flat land and got to about four miles from the ridge of the mountain. " I think Cpl McGuire and I have quite a good picture of the area," Cpl Hendren said.

The expedition expects to reach an abandoned hut about 200 or 300 yards from Kampong Tanjong Kala before tonight. After spending the night in the hut the team will split into two parties and ascend the mountain tomorrow morning. Cpl Hendren will lead the advance team and Cpl McGuire the second party which will set out one hour later.

"We don't know at this stage how many men will actually climb the mountain." Cpl Hendren said. "Some might be too tired and may want to back out. "Personally I should like to attempt the climb but not alone. It could be dangerous and I hope I will have some companions." Cpl Hendren estimated the summit could be reached within two or three hours-by noon tomorrow. "I do not expect the climb itself to be too difficult" he said. "Height is no problem if we can get on to the right path. We might spend Sunday night on the summit."



A helicopter equipped with SARAH will attempt to locate the climbers on Monday morning.

Three members of the expedition successfully climbed the mountain. On reaching the summit Cpl Hendren found an ordnance survey marker in place proving, as the Straits Times succinctly wrote “ that the mountain has earlier been climbed.” ’

Expedition Training 1966-1967 by Ben Zaccardelli

The second expedition to be described in this issue of the newsletter involved air, walking and river travel and also had Australian members, along with RAF, in the team.

Ben takes up the story: ‘In 1966 I started getting a team together for expedition training. Being unable to go too deep in the jungle due to the Indonesian problems we started in Penang showing the personnel how to make basha’s out of bamboo, canvas and strong plastic sheeting, all of which can be folded into a small space.

We wanted personnel to be fit enough to walk twenty miles with their fifty pound packs, everything which would be needed for a jungle expedition of two weeks maximum.

I had been in the Royal Signals in Malaya*, 1954-55, spending a lot of time on patrols with a number of regiments. During that period we were taught jungle survival by the Orang Asli** and Dyaks, who were our trackers.

My friend and neighbour who lived across the road from me was a Flight Sergeant, Logistics, who because of the problems getting permission for the expedition, did most of the general organizing. No one would listen to a mere SAC! I was the only fireman on all the expeditions!

We filtered out the ones who couldn’t complete the training and as you can see from the photos they all looked fit. Not one officer made the grade. Two Aussies joined our team, making eight men in total, four to each bamboo raft plus six Orang Asli, three to each raft.

We tried to assist them in the making of the raft at Chabang Tiga after walking from Fort Kemar, about 10-15 miles through the jungle. Our guides were good at their job, we didn’t get lost once. However a few unwelcome passengers (leeches) attached themselves to us, a drop of iodine moved them on. We all carried a small bottle of iodine for this reason.

1967

It wasn’t only the C.O. and different departmental officers who had to give permission for the expedition. The Malaysian Police, Orang Asli Dept and Military had to be contacted to get their ‘go ahead’. It took many months and we only got permission in 1967 after the Indonesian Confrontation had ended. Most weekends we went walking into the hills of Penang so by the time we got the go ahead we were fit and had a good idea what was expected of us.

Day 1

Packed all our kit on to the twin pin and left for Fort Kemar. We left a few cans of Tiger Beer to be taken by our Malaysian Liaison Officer to the finishing base by his long boat. It was a bit low in the water with all the booze. We had a drop or two that night!



Day 2

We left for Chabang Tiga with our guide and the camp dog, who followed every team from one camp to the other and back again. We reached Chabang Tiga late afternoon after crossing a number of rivers, walking over log bridges (a bit dodgy with full packs). A couple of lads crawled across as it was one hell of a drop over the waterfall. We had a nice welcome on reaching Chabang Tiga. Our Malay Liaison Officer had brought some of our booze up for us in his powered long boat, and a very pleasant evening was had by all....



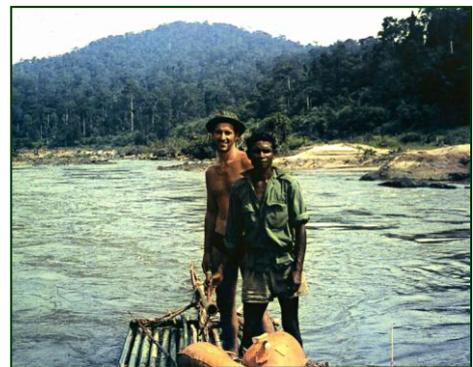
The next few days we assisted our Orang Asli guides to make two rafts, cutting down the bamboo and dragging it to the river. It was a long drawn out job but worth it when we had finished. We loaded all our equipment on the raft early to make sure it was well covered and secure. The first day (afloat) went OK, we camped near a sand bank but it was unsuitable, too near the water with no means of putting up a suitable camp. A patch of ground, about ten feet

above the river, was cleared, with plenty of trees to make up our basha's. My neighbour set about making some dumplings, complete disaster! The alternative, rice in a piece of bamboo, a drop of water and salt, a few leaves stuffed in the top and put on the fire. Curried sardines and jungle mushrooms collected by our guides made up the rest of the meal. We shared all our food with them, a nice pot of tea and plenty of sugar.

Our camping sites varied every night. The Aussie contingent made a basha for four, more like a hotel than our one-man accommodation.

It was a great journey, we took it in turns to work the rafts giving our guides a break at times. They were a good team. *Right: Ben tries his hand at steering the raft!*

We were all a bit sorry when we got to our destination. We gave the rafts to our guides and all the rations we had left. Our Liaison Officer gave the guides our sincere thanks for their help.



We found out later that one of our team had typhoid through drinking the water like the Orang Asli.

Our journey made the RAAF newspaper, but only the Aussie contingent were mentioned. Afterwards, we did many short expeditions but none like the fourteen day one.

** Ben has been persuaded to write of his experiences with the Royal Signals in Malaya for a future issue of the newsletter.*

** *Orang Asli*, a Malay term used for the groups of the 'original people' of Malaya. Three predominant groups with a number of separate tribes are recognized, with the oldest group being the *Negrito*. The largest group of *Orang Asli*, the *Senoi* are comprised of the *Berok*, *Che Wong*, *Jah Hut*,

Mah Meri Temiar, *Semat* and *Semok* tribes. Next is the *Orang Melayu Asli* comprising the *Jakan*, *Semelai*, *Temok*, *Temuan* tribes and the *Orang Laut*, including the *Orang Kanak* and *Orang Seliter (Seletar)*. The third group, the *Negrito*, is made up of the *Batek*, *Jahai*, *Kensiu*, *Kintak*, *Lanoh* and *Madrik* tribes. Interestingly, the *Orang Seliter* tribe was indigenous to the NE coastal area of Singapore. 'Seliter' in Malay means 'all around' and the RAF Seletar badge bears the motto 'We watch all around'. Coincidental?

Neville Shorrock, in his 1960's book on the history of RAF Seletar mentions the *Orang Laut* of Singapore, of which the *Orang Seliter* is a sub-tribe, being moved to Johor State on the authority of Ibrahim bin Almarhom Sultan Abu Bakar, Sultan of the State and Territory of Johor around the time the Seletar base was being constructed.

Far East Reminiscences by Sam Mold, Butterworth 1953-54

Sam addressed the following account to me personally and I have (mostly) left it as written.

RAFBA readers may be interested in the piece of paper that enabled my entry into RAF Butterworth on 2nd May, 1953. Full details of my flight on a FEAF "Valetta" transport plane flying out of RAF Changi can be seen on the copy of RAF Form 1256F: it was my passport to happiness! Prior to that auspicious day in my RAF history, I was enjoying a pretty, cushy number working in the Technical Stores, at RAF Tengah's Equipment Section. Life was quite enjoyable; but needless to say, I was absolutely livid when I heard that the Sgt i/c Air Movements at RAF Butterworth had been allocated an AMQ at Tengah, and that I, a Supplier 1, being the only single Sgt in the same trade group, had been detailed for an unwanted exchange posting. Why on earth would anyone in their right mind willingly swap the delights of Singapore for the rural backwaters of Province Wellesley in North Malaya? Not me!

At RAF Changi, waiting in Air Movements for the "Valetta" transport flight to take me on to my new posting: RAF Butterworth, I was thrilled to be witnessing for my very first time a jet airliner (the world's first passenger jet aircraft) taking off. Its destination was Calcutta, the next scheduled stop on its return journey to London. The aircraft was a BOAC "Comet" (G-ALYV), operating out of Changi, rather than Kallang Airport, Singapore's first international air terminal. Kallang was the local civil airport, jutting out to sea, with insufficient runway length and limited facilities to handle the new commercial jet aircraft.

Ten months later (13th March, 1954), a BOAC "Constellation" aircraft took off from Hong Kong to Singapore, via Jakarta. On coming in to land at Kallang Airport, its undercarriage hit the sea wall at the end of the concrete runway. With its collapsed undercarriage the aircraft careered down the runway before a wing broke off, causing the plane to turn over and catch fire. Of the 40 occupants on board there were only seven survivors. It was, and I believe it is still true to this day, Singapore's greatest aircraft disaster. Resulting from this tragedy, together with Singapore's need for a new international air terminal, a modern airport was designed and built at Paya Lebar, and that's where it stayed until the RAF withdrawal from Changi in 1973. This massive RAF complex was taken over by the Singapore government who re-designed and upgraded it into one of the finest international airports in the world.

As events turned out, my posting (2nd May, 1953) happened to be by far the best move I had in all of the 25 years I had served since passing out from my RAF training. Over the next quarter-of-a-century I endured 27 postings (surely worthy of an entry in the "Guinness Book of Records"), so to nominate that posting over all the others says an awful lot of what I thought of that tropical hot-spot called RAF Butterworth.

My cushy Tengah number was soon forgotten when I found that it was more likened to slave labour when compared to my new role as deputy i/c AMS at my new station. Both locality and Sgts' Mess life were superior to what I had experienced at Tengah, and things got even better when I heard what task awaited me. The Air Movements staff consisted of one F/Off and three airmen (all National Servicemen), with two Malay labourers and myself completing the team. As we were the staging-post/refuelling stop for FEAF "Valetta" aircraft flying to RAF Negombo, via RAF Car Nicobar, you can see how busy we were having to deal with two scheduled flights a week. The two return flights due in on Wednesday (sports p.m.) and Saturday (day off) afternoons obviously doubled the workload. Phew! How did I cope? Not that I'm complaining, but I soon learnt the opposite meaning of the words: hard graft.

The same date of my posting proved a fateful day for the "Comet"; also for both the De Havilland Aircraft Company and BOAC. As I witnessed "Comet" G -ALYV departing for the first leg of its flight, I could never have guessed that its' landing at Dum Dum Airport would be its last stop. Shortly after its take off from Calcutta's airport the "Comet" broke up in flight. Coincidentally, it was exactly one year to the day when BOAC inaugurated the world's first

2nd MAY, 1953 R.A.F. Form 1256F.

TRANSPORT COMMAND
R. A. F.

To PASSENGERS PLEASE PASS ROUND

From CAPTAIN HITCH KISS Aircraft VX 509

Time 0010 G.M.T. 0740 MALAYA Local Time

Our position is 45 MILES NNE OF KUALA LUMPUR

Altitude 8500 feet. Temperature +17 deg. Cent.

Ground Speed 190 miles per hour.

Our Flight Plan estimated a 2 hrs. 00 mins. Flight.

We are 13 mins. ahead of behind Schedule.

Our estimated time of arrival at BUTTERWORTH

is 0100 G.M.T. 0830 Local Time.

In 13 mins. we should pass our Starboard Port

THE TOWN AND AERODROME OF IPOH

Remarks: THE WEATHER SHOULD IMPROVE TOWARDS BUTTERWORTH

Navigator.

(*33) W.L. 17513-883 20W Pads 8/50 T.S. 839

commercial passenger jet airline service, the route being London to Johannesburg. G-ALYV was the first jet aircraft to disintegrate whilst in flight. Within the space of 12 months a further two BOAC "Comets" met the same fate after disintegrating over the Mediterranean Sea; one on the 10/1/54 and the other on 8/4/54. From then on all "Comets" were grounded for investigation. Once it was established that metal fatigue caused the disasters the remaining aircraft were re-skinned and the near-square windows replaced by rounded windows.



Above right: G-ALYV, the second Comet to disintegrate in mid-air.

This upgrade to Mk 2 made for a much safer aircraft, but by this time, civil airlines had lost confidence in the "Comet" and were ordering the new American "Boeing" 707. Airlines were not placing orders for the new Mk 2, but the De Havilland Company were favoured in having the Government place an order for ten aircraft (eight passenger C2 transports and two T2 training aircraft) for RAF Transport Command. On reflection, those three "Comet" crashes turned out to be a blessing for the RAF, for who knows how long it would have taken the RAF to order modern jet transport aircraft to replace the ubiquitous Handley Page "Hastings"?

The "Comet" Mk 2 and its later replacement, the newly designed Mk 4 introduced in October, 1958, shared an incredible safety record with no fatalities suffered either by the RAF or BOAC. The "Comet" 2 aircraft first entered Transport Command at the beginning of 1955. At that time, not many people had experienced passenger jet air travel, so I did feel rather privileged in July, 1957, when I stepped aboard a RAF "Comet" at RAAF Edinburgh Field for my return flight to the UK - my first ever jet flight. What a contrast in speed compared to the Qantas "Super Constellation" which flew me



from London to Sydney on a scheduled four day flight, including stops at Rome, Cairo, Karachi, Calcutta, Singapore (over-night stop), Jakarta and Perth. Quite a journey: a reminder of wonderful long-distant flights from years gone by. *Above: RAF Comet C.2 XK671*

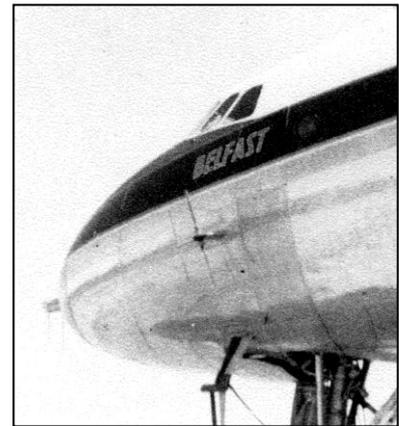
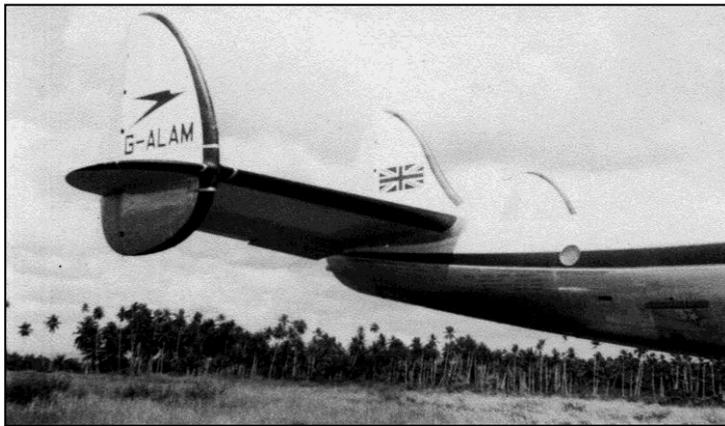
Having mentioned the "Constellation" airliner, my memory was jogged by the John Manny photographs published in your "Eastward", Spring 2009 newsletter, depicting two Qantas "Constellation" (VH-EAM and VH-EAN) aircraft which flew daily provisions into Butterworth for the RAAF. The pictures reminded me to check if either one of those aircraft was the "Super Connie" that flew me from London Airport to Sydney on 6th May, 1956. On looking through my memorabilia I find that my "Connie" was registered VH-EAF - as listed on the flight log of the Cairo to Karachi stretch of the journey (*copy in the archives*).

Sorry, Dave, that I've rambled on and on so much about the history of "Constellation" and "Comet" aircraft, Singapore airfields and other matters, none of which has anything to do with our RAF BPA; plus the fact that you already know about what I've written - if not, you do now! Had I not witnessed at Changi the take off of G-ALYV, I would not have mentioned it, but coincidentally, that happened on the same day I was posted to Butterworth, so there is a tenuous link no matter how small that may be. Just say, the events were entwined. However, there is one story that happened towards the end of my Butterworth tour that I do remember.

February, 1954, saw the troopship HMT "Empire Windrush" in Japan, boarding ex-Korean war veterans for their return to UK. On the way home it was scheduled to stop at Singapore to pick up more troops. Of all the UK troopships then operating, the "Windrush" was renowned for its engine breakdowns and other defects, giving it the well earned reputation as the slowest troopship afloat. Travelling out to Singapore on HMT "Dunera" in September, 1951, I can well remember our ship overtaking the "Windrush", and whereas our voyage to Singapore took four weeks, the "Windrush" took five weeks. On the positive side, everyone I met who had sailed on the "Windrush" all praised it for its entertainment value, something I found sadly lacking on the "Dunera". Nonetheless, as my FEAF tour ended in March, 1954, I certainly had no wish to return home on the "Windrush", One of the passengers boarding at Singapore was F/Lt "Dick" Barton (with a surname like that there was no better nick-name), who was returning home after his tour at Butterworth as the Air Traffic Controller. It was unfortunate for him, and for everybody else on board, that on 30th March, 1954, the "Empire Windrush" sank whilst travelling through the Mediterranean Sea. Those on board lost everything. Back in Malaya and Singapore, the local Straits Times newspaper reporting the event, described as heroic the action

carried out by F/Lt Barton, for after leaving the sinking ship he climbed back on board to rescue his daughter's doll. Was he brave, or did he put other lives at risk if he needed to be rescued as a result of his action? Back at camp, the rumour soon spread that the doll was stuffed with contraband goods. Was that fact or fiction? We all know that had it been Dick Barton, special agent, he would have had the doll stuffed with top secret documents! Luckily, I returned on the "Empire Fowey" - one week after the "Windrush" sank!

Looking forward to next year, I was hoping to find you amongst those of us travelling to Malaysia with the RAF BPA tour on 10th April. After visiting with the 1994 tour I spent every successive year from then on, up until 2007, wintering for three months in the tropical delights of Penang. Not being able to afford a lengthy stay at a hotel for such a long-stay sojourn, I used to book myself an apartment in the complex opposite the "Bayview" hotel at Batu Ferringhi - that's where the 2010 group will be staying to end off their tour. During those months of winter contentment, I made many friends, including Laurie Bean. In June last year I returned, staying at the "Bayview" for three weeks, just to say good-bye to them all, unaware that the RAF BPA was planning a tour in 2010. Ah well, this trip will definitely be my definitive farewell. Until our next contact, carry on enjoying the good life. Best wishes and take good care!



The Constellation that crashed at Kallang, 13 March 1954, was G-ALAM 'Belfast'. The above Association archive photographs are of 'Belfast' when at RAF Butterworth prior to 1954.

The Qantas Super Constellation VH-EAF that flew Sam from London to Sydney during 1956 was named 'Southern Wind'.

The Army at Butterworth in 1957 by Don Brereton

In February 1957 I was posted for a short spell to Station Operations at Butterworth. There were three of us: Squadron leader Camp, DFM, Flight Lieutenant Lawrence and now me! We worked in conjunction with the Army in the shape of 56 GLS (Ground Liaison Section). The other two had their own offices, my desk was with the brown jobs.

Other army units involved were the Air Support Signals Unit (ASSU), Army Photographic Interpretation Unit (Far East), known as APIU(FE) and the Joint Air Photographic Intelligence Centre (Far East), also known as JAPIC (FE).

The army personnel was made up of two captains who I never saw do anything other than move paper and several OR's, one who was Corporal Peter Plasket who also seemed to do nothing. Two clerks sat opposite me, one a 'Geordie' Lance Corporal, 'Driver' Hooper from the RAOC and a Malay Regiment Private who also didn't do anything.

There was a tall thin young man from the Intelligence Corps and an oldish plump officer with a bushy moustache who was a photographic expert who, it was said, could find a cigarette end in an aerial photograph of a ploughed field. And of course there was the famous private 'Jock' Wright of the Royal Scots Fusiliers, he of the NAAFI bar and immaculate wardrobe layout. Also not forgetting 'Pop', the Indian bearer who kept the place clean and made the tea and did other essentials for our well being, also he knew everything there was to know about walking on hot coals.

The section had a one-ton Morris Commercial wireless truck, Land Rover, Ferret armoured car (which always seemed to have a wheel off) and a motor bike which I never remember actually working. I had a RAF pushbike, complete with roundel, which went with the job! What a status symbol, or so I thought! As well as the bike I was issued with the keys to the section.

Both Camp and Lawrence were easy to get along with Lawrence being a bit of a boffin whilst Camp was blunt and practical.

The job was explained to me by Marty O'Keefe before he went back to the (airfield) tower. He showed me around the map room and the very interesting and secret cupboard within it. Also how to keep the Ops room in good working order with its maps and Notams, and most importantly, how and who to deliver the station sweep to. Camp had somehow been given the responsibility of organising it but he relied heavily on the 'resident' airman in office.

About this time I got into the habit of having a doze after the midday meal, always waking up after twenty minutes. Until one day I didn't! I was woken up by someone screaming in my ear that Squadron Leader Camp was 'storming' around outside his office unable to get in. I grabbed the bike and raced off to open the office.

As I arrived to unlock the office door Camp shouted at me "You are on a charge." I was really upset as I had a clean sheet up until then. However, during the afternoon Camp called me into his office. On the desk in front of him was the bag containing the sweep tickets. "Oh Brereton" he said, "I think I was a little hasty earlier on, but don't let it happen again. Oh, by the way, would you deliver these for me?" as he pushed the bag of sweep tickets towards me. I reckon they saved my bacon.

But our business was air strikes against a ruthless enemy. Once an area was suspected of CT activity a PR flight was organised to fly over it. The PR flight was flown by an 81 Squadron PR 10 Meteor from RAF Tengah who covered the suspect area then delivered the film to Butterworth for forwarding to JAPIC for developing.

As soon as a CT camp was identified an air strike and subsequent ambush was arranged to happen as soon as possible. I produced the required maps and marked them as instructed by Flt Lt Lawrence and then folded them so they fitted the pilot's map pockets.

The briefing was given in the afternoons with the strikes taking place early the following morning. I used to love watching the Venoms taking off in pairs in half light, fully armed and struggling to rise in the thin air. The results of their efforts would not be known for several weeks.

In Ops we used to look forward to our weekly 'Situation Report' (Sitrep) from the Police and Army to find out what was happening. Strangely enough, from interviews I have read about captured terrorists, the planes they feared the most were the big birds, the Lincolns.

I did enjoy my time with the Army, it made me appreciate how much better life was in the Air Force. Little did I know, not long after my return to the 'tower' that I would be posted to the island of Bidan. But that's another story.

And sure enough a Bidan story arrived from Don...

On the 14th January 2009, Dougie Owens and some of his family, Brenda and I had a get together at the Cheshire Oaks in Ellesmere Port.

The last time I had seen Dougie was at Bidan in 1957 on an exercise. I nearly got him drowned in the morning and blown up in the afternoon, and he is still talking to me!

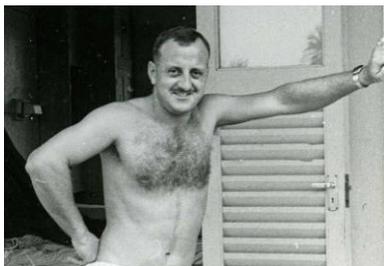
It happened like this. Early in the morning I took a party to Song-Song for a rocket and cannon firing practice. I overloaded our dinghy and four of us were sitting on top of the stores. We were rowing out to the pinnacle when the weather started to blow up. The pinnacle moved out from the bay and we had to chase her. Water was now starting to come over the gunnels and Dougie chose that moment to mention he couldn't swim! I shouted this to the skipper of the pinnacle (a sergeant), then I screamed at him, then I fired a red very (verey) cartridge but he still wouldn't come in. When eventually we got closer he came out of his cabin and according to Dougie, and I also remember it, he blew a whistle and shouted, "Come in on the lee side." I'm sure readers can imagine my answer? Anyway despite the near gale conditions we arrived safely at Song-Song and set up camp, and then the exercise started. Simple rules, we were controlled by a Flt Lt on the pinnacle now at anchor off the sand spit target area...green flare, go out and count the hits, red flare, aircraft on the range.

Halfway through the afternoon we saw a green very flare burst over our heads. It was Dougie and his mates turn to run out and count the hits and I watched them go towards the targets. Fifteen seconds later to our amazement we heard a Venom overhead followed by the whoosh of a brace of rockets being launched. The time span meant the lads would be among the targets. We all started running towards them only to see them running towards us. They were looking very white and were really, really annoyed. I was determined to have a 'go' at the officer when we got back to the pinnacle, and that's what I did. As soon as I had secured the dinghy I walked to the bow of the pinnacle where the young Flt Lt was sitting alone on the forward cabin. He knew what I was going to say. I told him in no uncertain way and he took it! I think he was worried about his career. His answer was he got the colours mixed up and the party were OK, weren't they? I guess I felt sorry for him.

So Dougie and his team survived and via 'Eastward' we eventually got in touch in 2008.

Snippets

RAF man fights with Machete!



Peter Munson tells of a heroic fight between MT fitter, Corporal George (*surname not known*), who ‘had the dubious honour of a punch-up with SAC Machete, the 52 Squadron mascot monkey.’ The Tamil grass cutters had let Machete loose, who then bounded in to George’s block and proceeded to destroy a model aircraft. Cpl George was not impressed by this destructive behaviour and dealt with the offending SAC in accordance with regulations!



Cutty Sark visits Glugor

Not the 1800’s Clipper ship ‘Cutty Sark’, but the Saro Cutty Sark of the 1930’s, a twin engine four-seat flying boat belonging to Royal Singapore Flying Club. Purchased from the Guinness family G-AAVX came into service on 18th October 1931. On the 7th November 1931, the Cutty Sark flew non-stop to Penang in just under five hours and moored overnight on the RAF buoy at Glugor. Prior to the RSFC British ‘G’ registrations being changed to ‘VR’ registrations when the Straits Settlements were included in the civil aircraft international registrations, G-AAVX was ‘struck off charge’ after sustaining severe damage when taking off in heavy seas.



G-AAVX, probably at East Cowes, Isle of Wight before going to the Guinness family.

BOAC AVRO York ‘Malmesbury’

From the Association archives is this photograph of Avro York G-AGJC *Malmesbury*, taken at Butterworth prior to 1952. Although the name and registration is indistinguishable in the photograph the camouflage gives it away being, according to the literature, the only BOAC York to be camouflaged.

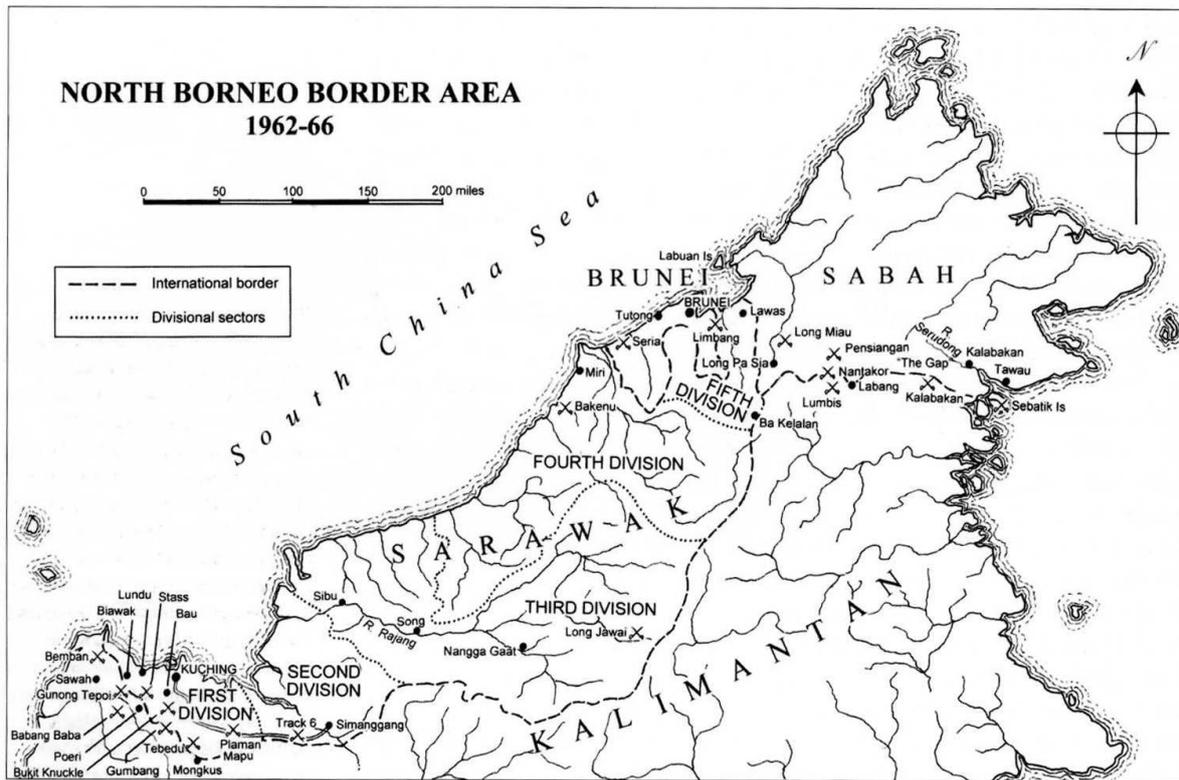


Apart from the camouflage, the name ‘Malmesbury’ was of interest and a brief search revealed the history of Malmesbury’s medieval aviator...Eilmer

of Malmesbury, an 11th century Benedictine monk from Malmesbury Abbey. In 1010, Eilmer flew a primitive hang glider from the top of a tower at the abbey (the medieval central tower was 427 feet high at the time), by fixing wings to his hands and feet. He ‘flew’ some 220 yards before crash landing and breaking both legs. Eilmer noted the cause of the crash was because he had forgotten to include a tail to help maintain equilibrium during the flight. Today Malmesbury Abbey is used as a parish church and a stained glass window commemorates this fine flight.



CONFRONTATION IN BORNEO 1962-1966

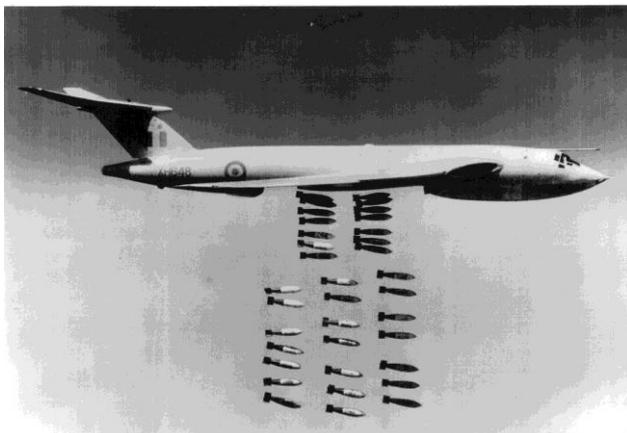


With this issue of **‘Eastward’** being the last for 2009 it might be the time to draw the series on ‘Confrontation in Borneo’ to a natural conclusion, at least for the time being! Ideas for a similar series relating to the Emergency are under discussion with Laurie Bean where members stories relating to those times can be shown under the banner and we have a mixture of history as seen officially and by members involved at the time.

However to conclude the present series the results of a search by Laurie of the Handley Page Victor V-bomber that gave a demonstration of its bomb-carrying capability, and also how the air war in Borneo was fought in the UK!

Going for a Song-Song (Malay: ‘to welcome’)

Denis Healey (ex-Royal Engineers, WW II, and now Lord Healey of Riddlesden), on



becoming Secretary of State for Defence (1964-70) wrote ‘Britain’s success in Borneo – where I refused to permit the use of bombers....’ was, naturally, upheld throughout Confrontation but just in case he changed his mind, Victor XH648 of 15 Squadron, RAF gave a demonstration of the potential bomb load a Victor could carry, and drop! .

As captioned in the ‘Straits Times’ at the time, ‘Victor B.1 dropping 35 1,000 lb bombs over the Song Song range, Malaya. Conventional bombs were loaded in groups

of four or seven into septuple carriers before being brought out to the V-bombers. The bombs

could be released individually, in groups, or all together by means of the “90 Way” bomb control installation, which allowed the dropping of bombs or photo-flashes in a variety of combinations.’ As a statement of what the RAF was capable of doing to Indonesian forces in the jungles of Borneo if the ‘go-ahead’ was given it couldn’t have been made clearer, without the need to actually say so!

In following up the (earlier) request of the Victor bomb drop at Song Song, Laurie contacted Vic Wise, a member of the RAF Forum who was a member of the ‘bombing-up’ crew (below). Vic writes, *‘Here is the photo of XH648 dropping its load. As I mentioned before I was on the team that loaded these bombs at Butterworth in early ’64. We were told it was the first time that a full load had been put on since the original Victor trials at Boscombe Down. Apparently it put the frighteners on the duty range officer who was an RAAF Sabre pilot!’* The ground crew team, from Central Servicing at Cottesmere, in support of the Victor attachment are shown below.



*Front row, seated, L-R: Cpl ‘Chippy’ Woods, Cpl Ron Lassam, Sgt Murray.
 Front row, standing, L-R: SAC Jack Adams, Cpl Brown, Flt Lt Gable (Armament Officer), Ch Tech Townsend.
 Third row (behind Sgt Murray): SAC Harry Fowler, J/T Frank Pountney.
 Back row, L-R: J/T Mike Peat, SAC Stan Carpenter, J/T Vic Wise, unidentified but believed to belong to the Butterworth bomb dump.*

Many thanks to both Vic Wise and Laurie for following up this story.

Chasing a Mustang

At the time of Confrontation, the Indonesian Air Force was made up of a mixture of operational aircraft that included B-25 Mitchell bombers and P-51 Mustang fighters with rumours of a Mustang being flown for the Indonesians by an American mercenary pilot, ‘Hank the Yank’.

Back in the UK Spitfire PS853 (of the Temperature and Humidity Flight) was assigned to the Air Fighting Development Squadron of the Central Fighter Establishment at West Raynham and (later) Binbrook during the period 1962-64 to enable Lightning crews gain experience at intercepting Indonesian Air Force Mustang fighters should the need arise. The Spitfire was the nearest aircraft in performance to the Mustang at the time and the AFDS gained valuable information for developing interception tactics by the much faster



Lightning. However the need to use the tactics in 'real life' low level interceptions in Borneo did not arise.

Jet Provost Trials Unit (Far East)

By Laurie Bean

During mid-2002, I purchased a book, written by Colin Cummings, that detailed all accidents to RAF aircraft for the period January 1959 to December 1996. Reading through the entries for 1966, I chanced upon one that recorded the loss of a Hunting Percival Jet Provost T Mk 4 aircraft near Alor Star, Malaysia. The entry mentioned that the aircraft was being used in Forward Air Control (FAC) trials and it immediately roused my interest. A Jet Provost in Malaysia? This was something that I had not been aware of and I have since been trying to gather more details of how this came about.

Just over a year ago, Dave Croft forwarded to me a copy of a photo taken by Tam McCrorie, an ex-fireman and Association member, when he was serving at Butterworth. The photo clearly showed two JPs parked on the pan at Butterworth and, as Dave said, Tam thought it must have been taken sometime early in 1966. That certainly fitted into the timeframe and was the first photographic evidence of the JPs presence in Malaysia that I had seen.



A further piece of evidence came from an Air-Britain book that I obtained in 2007. This book listed all the serial numbers of RAF aircraft in the XA100 to XZ999 range. Using the serial number of the aircraft that had crashed near Alor Star, XS221, as a starting point, I discovered that three aircraft, including XS221, had been allocated to the Jet Provost Trials Unit (Far East) straight from the stock of airframes at No. 27 MU, at the beginning of August 1965. The other aircraft were XS223 and XS224. However, that seemed to be all that I could discover about the unit. Questions posted on various Internet forums all drew blanks. No-one, it seemed, had heard of the unit.

During mid-2008, I got in contact, via an Internet forum, with a chap called Bob Clark. Bob, an ex-RAF Airframe Fitter, was in the process of writing a book on the JP and was interested to hear of this obscure unit in the Far East. In August of last year, Bob, while on a research visit to RAFC Cranwell, was put in touch with an ex-Sqn Ldr QFI, Mick Ryan. Mick, it transpired, had actually commanded the unit from its inception until the end of the first trial period in December 1965, and was able to provide a very full account of its activities during that time. What follows is, because of newsletter space constraints, a shortened version of the report written by Mick.

As readers will be aware, the period 1963 – 66, was a very busy time for FEAF. Indonesian confrontation was at its height and air operations were a major part of that campaign. Close air support for ground units operating in the forward areas was an essential part of those operations. However, the RAF at the time had very little experience of operations of this nature over the hilly jungle terrain that covered most of East and West Malaysia. Until then, most of the service's experience with FAC operations had been gained in Central Europe and the Middle East. The 250 foot jungle canopy presented a whole new set of challenges which had to be faced if effective operations in support of the ground forces were to be carried out.

With the aircraft selected, it was now the turn of the aircrew. As mentioned previously, the CO was to be Sqn Ldr Mick Ryan, previously an A2 QFI at CFS. Prior to instructing, Mick had completed a tour on 93 Sqn flying Hunters out of RAF Jever, Germany. Also selected were Flt Lts Roy Holmes, a Hunter QFI from the OCU at Chivenor and Bob Innes, another JP QFI with ground attack experience. These three were joined later, in Singapore, by Sqn Ldr George Ord, who had a lot of Hunter ground attack experience.

Now came the tricky part. There was no way in which the JPs could be flown out to Singapore. Because of the urgency of the trial, this meant that each aircraft had to be dismantled for transporting by air. Whilst completing this exercise, the technicians wrote their own dismantling and erection schedules. The latter was to be used to reassemble the aircraft after arrival in Singapore. With the wings, tailfin and elevators removed, and the fuselage on tilting blocks, it was possible to fit the aircraft inside the cargo bay of an Argosy. So it was that three Argosy aircraft left the UK with their cargoes, arriving at Changi around the 14th of August 1965. The aircrew flew out to Singapore separately by Comet aircraft, departing on 15 August. A volunteer ground crew, led by Chief Tech Baker, also travelled to Singapore.

On arrival at Changi, the JPs were transported by road to Seletar for reassembly. At this point, problems arose. It was discovered that somewhere along the route, the boxes containing the erection schedules, and some critical tailplane bolts, had been off-loaded! One of the airframes had also been damaged with a screwdriver. It was also discovered that there were no trestles on which to assemble the aircraft. The OC had a copy of the tech manual for the aircraft and along with the dismantling schedule, which had arrived, Chiefy Baker's crew, with the help of some RAF Seletar staff, were able to put all three airframes back together. The first of these, XS224, flown by the CO, was air tested and then landed at RAF Tengah, during the afternoon of the 28th August, just 14 days after arrival on the Island. This was to be the Unit's home for the first six weeks of the trial. During that time, they would be hosted by 20 Sqn, the resident Hunter ground attack unit.

On arrival at Tengah, Sqn Ldr Ryan got more of a welcome than he bargained for. On that afternoon, 20 Sqn were celebrating their 50th anniversary. As soon as the JP parked, the pilot was besieged by celebrating airmen and not let out of the cockpit until he had, in his own words, "drunk copious amounts of Tiger beer"! I think we can all sympathise with Mick on this, knowing what an onerous task consuming any quantity of Tiger can be! Within a short period, the other two aircraft also arrived at Tengah ready for the start of the trial.

The trial was held under the auspices of the Chief Scientist's Dept at MOD in London and the FEAF Command Scientist. To set the tasks, a young scientist, Roger Noades, was attached to the Unit. It was his job to set the flying targets to be met, the balance of dual and solo flying, along with the airspeeds and heights each flight was to flown at. The aircraft were also specially modified for the trial. This involved the fitting of special Hussenot recorder units in the rear fuselage and gunsights along with the GR 90 gun cameras, items no standard JP ever used. Also fitted was the PTR 175 combined UHF/VHF radio. This was to ensure full communication with ground units also involved in the trial. Those units were two Army FAC teams already in theatre. The Army did not take too kindly to losing these teams as they were engaged in a real, shooting war, not too far away from where the trials were being conducted.

The area chosen for the initial set of trials was the jungle of the southern Malay Peninsula, not far across the Johor Strait from Tengah. The ground teams took it in turns to setup around 6 targets a day for the aircraft to locate. The first part of the exercise entailed the pilots flying to the general area of the target, looking for a "Day-Glo" red balloon flying above the jungle canopy. This balloon indicated the FAC's position. On reaching this point, the aircrew were

briefed on the targets position relative to the balloon, using bearing/distance from that point. They were also given other details of the target to further aide identification.

For the purposes of the trial, suitable targets had, as mentioned previously, to be placed in the jungle. These targets had to be portable, as well as easy to setup. They also needed to be something of a challenge to find. What was finally chosen was a six foot bivouac flysheet in jungle colours. This was certainly portable and, it proved, difficult for aircrew to spot and, later, identify on the gun camera film. This type of target was used throughout the trial.



Right: the bivouac flysheet is artificially shaded in on this copy of a photograph taken during the trial.

The techniques used in the trial had the aircraft flying up to, and outbound from, the balloon at various speeds and heights. These were set by Roger Noades, the scientist, in advance of each sortie. As the JP was a two seat aircraft, it was possible to add an additional pilot, if required, to aid in target identification. For this purpose, some Flying Officer second pilots from the FEAF Hastings force were attached to the Trials Unit. A completely different form of flying from that to which they were more used. The task set by Roger was for 6 details a day, involving two aircraft and 30 runs per aircraft.

One major concern for Mick Ryan during the trials was ‘target fixation’. As he reports, it would have been all too easy for one of the pilots, in the enthusiasm of trying to bring back successful pictures of the target, to forget about pull out heights. Luckily, this did not happen. However, there was one serious incident where one of the more experienced pilots climbing gently away from a successful attack did not see a lone tree standing above the jungle canopy but below the jungle skyline. He flew through the top of the tree but was able to fly his aircraft back to Tengah. There the damaged wings were replaced.



On the 11th of October 1965, having exhausted the suitable target areas in the south of the peninsula, the Unit departed for RAAF Butterworth. Here, one FAC team deployed full time into the mountainous jungle that runs along the central spine of the Peninsula. As there was still a possible threat from Communist Terrorists, the team leader, Capt Boulter, had them stand-to at dawn and dusk each day. The second team deployed from RAAF Butterworth each day to different locations in partly cultivated jungle. Each team again setup 6 targets a day.

One of the original aims of the trial was for the Unit to deploy to Borneo and fly over the terrain that the main part of Confrontation was being fought in. However, this idea did not go down well with the operators on the ground in Borneo. Instead, Mick Ryan flew into Kuching, Sarawak, to assess if the terrain in Central Malaysia was comparable to that in Borneo. On stepping out of the aircraft on arrival at Kuching he was met by his old Wg Cdr Flying from Jever, an Australian. This gentleman, not known for mincing his words, shook Mick’s hand and promptly told him to go away. Or words to that effect!!!

Shortly after arriving at Kuching, Mick was flying on resupply operations to forward areas in Sarawak. These flights were in Single and Twin Pioneer aircraft and gave him the opportunity to study the terrain at first hand. On one such flight, whilst following an ‘L’ shaped border between Malaysia and Indonesia, the aircraft that he was in suddenly came upon an airfield

which had a Hercules transport parked just off the runway. This sight caused the pilots of the aircraft to utter a few expletives and dive back the way they had come. Having cleared the airfield, they explained that it was an Indonesian base, heavily defended with AA guns. Luckily, it seems that the Indons were just as surprised by the encounter as no ground fire greeted them.

After several days of flights over Sarawak, Mick was able to confirm that the terrain in the areas that the Unit was using for training in West Malaysia were very representative of the type of terrain in the area of operations. There was, therefore, no need for the Trials Unit to deploy the 400 plus nautical miles to Kuching. It was highly unlikely that they would have been allowed to do so anyway.

This pretty much concluded the first trial period. Whilst at Butterworth, the Unit completed the number of runs that were needed for the statistical analysis to be made. Also whilst at Butterworth, several promotional flights were given to RMAF officers as it was hoped that Malaysia might buy the armed version of the Jet Provost, the BAC 167 Strikemaster. During the trial, Mick had flown 107 hours on 135 sorties, 64% of those sorties were actual trials flights.

On 30 November 1965, the three aircraft were returned to N0. 389 MU at Seletar for storage, the air and ground crews departing for the UK shortly after that.

Early in 1966, it seems that the trial was resurrected. On the 5th February, two of the aircraft, XS221 & XS224, were withdrawn from storage and reissued to the Trials Unit. The other aircraft, XS223, followed some four days later. It appears they were immediately flown to Butterworth to continue the trial and it is almost certainly around this time that Tam McCrorie took his photos of the aircraft arriving there.

Just five days into this second trial, tragedy struck. As was recounted earlier, during the first trial, one aircraft had struck treetops whilst engaged on target runs. On that occasion, the pilot had been able to recover and land safely. On this second occasion however that was not the case. The aircraft, XS221, struck trees and crashed in jungle near Alor Star. The pilot, Flt Lt P S Loveday, did not survive and is buried in the Christian Cemetery at Western Road, Penang.

This second trial was wound up on the 14th of March 1966 with the remaining two aircraft being returned again to store at No. 389 MU, Seletar. From there, they were returned to the UK and No. 27 MU. Early in 1967, on the 18th January, they were sold back to BAC and later converted into the armed export version of the JP and sold to the Yemeni Air Force.



Jet Provost XS223 as SYAF 101

Tom Harrison – a man of the people

Tom Harrison (who will be featured in a future issue of '**Eastward**') was, throughout his lifetime, an *ornithologist, explorer, mass-observer, ethnologist, soldier, museum curator, conservationist and writer*. In 1962 he played a key role in rallying the indigenous peoples of the interior to assist the British Forces during the Brunei revolt and initial stages of

Confrontation and at the same time helped the newly arrived troops to reconnoitre the Borneo interior. He achieved this by being flown around the country in RAF helicopters, single and twin pioneer aircraft and apart from playing a major part in helping contain the Brunei revolt he became a key adviser in military intelligence in Borneo.

In January 1963 Confrontation began in earnest and a squadron of 22 SAS, and newly formed Gurkha Independent Parachute Company, was brought into action by General Walker. The SAS 'liked Tom Harrisson' and set up their HQ in his garden in Pig Lane in Kuching. Tom was asked to produce a pamphlet on the *Background to a revolt: Brunei and the Surrounding Territory* for those British troops just arriving in Borneo.

Later, as chairman of the Sarawak Defence Committee working group, he floated the idea of establishing the 'Border Scouts', an auxiliary force using local knowledge to support the British Army and also provided advice on which communities and individuals to use. In 1964, when Indonesian uniformed paratroopers started crossing into Malaysian Borneo as 'proper military forces', Tom's role became inessential to the 'war plan' and he went back to his 'civilian' role as the Sarawak Museum curator.

How come a museum curator became embroiled in a Far East bush war? I'm afraid you will have to wait for the answer in a future issue of 'Eastward'.Dave Croft.

True or False?

In the 1930's the fledgling Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) was constrained in its spending on pilot training and equipment i.e., aircraft and engines. The training aircraft were a bit 'old fashioned' for the time but OK for the intended purpose. However, the original engines were clapped out and the RAAF had to save up to buy new ones. Whilst awaiting engines the RAAF did its best to continue with the pilot training programme by trialling different ways to get their engineless aircraft airborne. The picture below shows one way....



The question is 'was it successful'?

Merry Christmas



