

# EASTWARD

RAF Butterworth & Penang Association

Christmas 2014



# *'Eastward'*



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

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*HERE'S WISHING EVERYONE  
AN ENJOYABLE CHRISTMAS  
AND NEW YEAR*



## Chairman's Corner



I am sure that many of you were involved, as I was, in various Remembrance events and the Poppy Appeal in recent weeks. Here in Carlisle the turn out on Sunday (9th November) was much bigger than normal and it was significant that the focus has been on the commemoration of the centenary of the start of the First World War. There were two other members of the RAFBPA on parade at Carlisle with me; Bill Wardle from Keswick laid the RAFBPA wreath for me this year and then joined John Muter and myself in the march past. Unfortunately I was without a phone or camera and didn't get a photographic record of the occasion.

As I watched the replay of the Cenotaph Parade on Sunday evening, hoping to catch a glimpse of our small contingent participating in the parade, I couldn't help thinking whether the Malayan Emergency and Confrontation will be remembered 100 years on? No doubt our successors will commemorate, or celebrate, 100 years since the Fall of Singapore, the 100th anniversary of the Victory over Japan and the end of the Second World War. But I wonder whether historians will document and highlight the centenaries of the 'lesser' campaigns?

With these thoughts in mind I once again remind you all of the importance of documenting your 'war stories', putting captions on those old photographs and making sure that when you are 'pushing up the daisies' your off-spring don't put the whole lot in the skip before giving archivists the chance to check them through. Very recently a friend of mine had the task of emptying a relative's belongings from a loft. Amongst the collection of material was a case containing an album of captioned photographs taken during the First World War, including photographs depicting 'Chocolate Hill' with the names of some of the personnel in the photos written underneath. To cut a much longer story short, the archivists of the Border Regiment and the Sherwood Foresters had never seen the likes of these pictures before, and they are possibly the sole photographic records of the Battle of Chocolate Hill in Gallipoli in 1915. You never know what treasures are hidden away!

Our Association has sowed the seeds with the National Memorial Arboretum and our colleagues in the Changi and Seletar Associations to start working on a long term funding arrangement for our Far East Air Force Memorial at the NMA. This will need to be discussed amongst the committee and ideas aired at next year's AGM and Reunion. We have already agreed to ring fence 20p per member per year for a maintenance fund, but a paper received from the NMA appears to suggest more will be required. That said, there will be a need for some repair work to be carried out on the brickwork next Spring.

This newsletter also comes with details of the 2015 Reunion and AGM being held at Stratford on Avon on 18th and 19th May. Once again Len Wood has managed to negotiate very favourable rates for everyone and the event really does give value for money. I hope everyone will consider clearing their diaries of other engagements and book early to ensure that 2015 results in a record attendance.

Finally, Anne and I wish everyone a peaceful and very Happy Christmas and a healthy and prosperous 2015.



*Tony Parrini*

## From the Editor



Long term readers of '*Eastward*' would have noticed small changes in the newsletter presentation. Although not always possible to maintain, they are all part of the trying out of ideas to keep the newsletter interesting. Another change is that the charging process for printing the pages has been changed by the printers...to be cost effective under the 'new rules' I need to submit copy in multiples of four, which removes some of the freedom in numbers of pages used that I have previously enjoyed. It also means I have to concentrate more on doing a balancing act with the newsletter content, but I won't sacrifice members articles etc for the sake of page numbers....I am not a believer in reducing an individuals contribution just to meet page numbers per issue - I don't consider it to be fair to the contributor and I will continue to spread lengthy articles over several issues to meet this promise. Naturally, I am able to be more flexible with the e-copy versions of the newsletter, and for those who receive the printed copies and also have internet access I would ask they consider changing over. Should a member in this category want to try out the newsletter in this form, just send an e-mail to me and I will send a copy of the latest newsletter to try out.

In respect of the above, news that didn't make it in the printed copies of the Summer issue was that of the award of the Arctic Star to Alan and Bill McKern, sons of Group Captain R. N. McKern, on behalf of their father. Gp Capt McKern became the post war owner of his deceased father's (Dr Albert McKern) property, *Elysian*, under the conditions of his father's will and for a time *Elysian* became the RAF Leave Centre on Penang.

Of those members (and non-members) who have contributed to this issue, and previous issues, I give my thanks. Without contributions I would have to do some thinking, and work! Also my thanks to the team involved in the production and distribution of copy, and also George Gault, the RAFBPA Webmaster who is always on hand when I need help with the website issues. And if I've missed anyone out, my apologies.

Other matters. Since 'how to eat an egg banjo in the traditional manner' was featured in the Christmas 2011 issue intensive research as been carried out to make it an acceptable activity for today's company. The most favoured method for eating the traditional egg banjo would be to present it in a large shallow bowl set down on a table. To eat it, a knife and fork is suggested, the diner being seated and leaning forward for each mouthful. Any spilt egg can be wiped up with the remains of the bread roll at the the end. Further to prevent any possible mishap to the diner's shirt, it might be suggested he removes it before tackling the egg banjo...perhaps not adviseable if dining with the High Commissioner if you want to be invited back!

Talking with Frank Hemsworth (45 Squadron c1957) and John Rutland (1956-1957) over this Summer revealed that 45 Squadron flew operations against CT's in the hills of Penang. John mentioned the Penang Hill Railway was 'out of bounds' in his time. So delving further into the story of Penang having a 'nest' of CT's in the interior revealed that in the Balik Pulau district on the western side of Penang, CTs were using the central jungle spine as a training ground. Some thing I wasn't aware of.

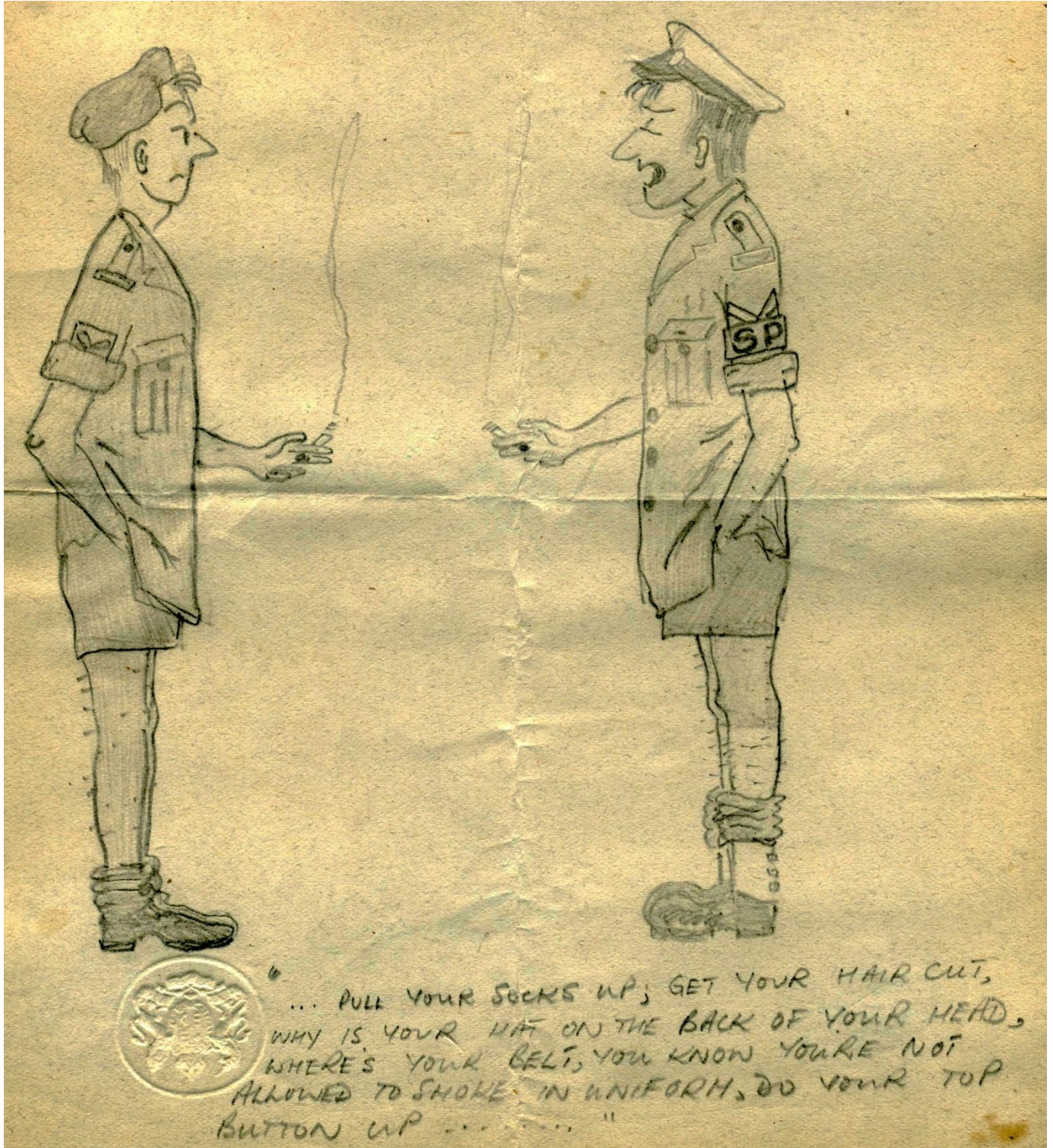
Chin Peng in his book, *My Side of History*, states that in 1958 it was decided to withdraw the 30 or so CTs from the island. Ten went to Singapore, the remainder to Sumatra by way of regular smuggling runs between Penang and Sumatra. Apparently those relocated to Sumatra found life made difficult for them by the Indonesian rebels they were with...

The annual Remembrance Day, 9 November 2015, at the Cenotaph was attended by members of the RAFBPA and a report from them is given on page 28.





## A peaceful moment off duty - by John Gibson



**Reminder: 2015 RAFBPA Reunion, Falcon Hotel, Stratford upon Avon. 17th, 18th, 19th May.**

## General RAFBPA News and Short Stories

The Association extends a warm welcome to the following new members:

**Les Featherbe.** LAC MBC RAF Butterworth September 1949 - February 1952 (Butterworth 1949 to 1950, Glugor 1950 to 1952).

**Ivor Williams,** Sergeant 60 Squadron 'C' Flight January 1964 - August 1966.

The Association has recently been informed of the death of **Bill Still** on February 28th 2014. Bill was SNCO i/c Signal and Cypher Section at Butterworth, 1952 to 1954.

### Members (and non-members) Correspondence.

An e-mail, via Tony Parrini, was received from **Adrian Walker** asking about the NAAFI Leave Centre he visited in December/January 1964-1965. Adrian was based at Labuan and Kuching (1963 to 1965) and he kindly sent some photographs of Penang taken from his time there.

**Simon Gifford** sent a request for help with a book he is writing: 'I'm writing to ask for help with some research I'm doing. I've written a book, due to be published by Fonthill, on the Middle and Far East areas of the postwar period 1945-1948. One chapter looks at Malaya and I was lucky enough to include contributions from air and ground crews out there at this time. For the next one, would it be possible to put out a request for help from your members who were in the Far East during the Emergency? I would be happy to hear from those who served in both the air and on the ground about what they did and what life was like in Malaya at the time.

My interest comes from my family, including my father who was on Beverleys and now lives on Penang.'

A reply was sent to Simon and the following answer received: 'I'm looking to try and get information from the period 1948 to 1960 to produce a follow up book to the one soon to be published (above). I'm in the process of starting to gather information and putting in the request in the December newsletter would be great'

Simon adds that he is very happy to cover reasonable expenses e.g. postage, and that his father was on 30 Squadron, which was based in Kenya, but flew out to the Far East (slowly) fairly often, which also included trips into Vietnam.

Contact details for Simon are as follows:

Simon Gifford  
95 Corsebar Road  
Paisley  
PA2 9PY

Tel: 0141 847 1310 e-mail: s.renfrew686@btinternet.com

**Bill McKern**, grandson of Dr Albert McKern of Elysian fame has e-mailed to say that he is in contact with descendants (in Australia) of civilian internees of the Japanese and that they are creating a museum/memorial at Muntok (Sumatra). Dr McKern was a prisoner at Muntok and Belalau internment camps and died on 16th June 1945 of amoebic dysentery in the latter camp. Bill asks if, among our members, there are any descendants of civilian internees that were captured and interned by the Japanese in 1942 so their name(s) may be recorded? Should there be any names that are wanted to be forwarded please contact me (Dave Croft) and I will sent on them to him.



Following the issue of the Summer 2014 newsletter, member **John Gibson** asked about the Skynotes band featured by **Tony Blankley**. Tony followed this with three pictures of the Skynotes members and added: 'I have attached three photos of the Skynotes at various stages of my tour. The first (*right*) is the first gig we did at the Officers Mess 1953 Christmas ball, but as you can see, no bass player. The five piece shot (*below*) was a gig we did for the Army at Taiping, early 55 I think.'



Ray Keeley (bass),  
Ginger Upton (piano),  
Tony Blankley (drums)  
Bob Husband (trumpet),  
Eric Backhouse (clarinet)



'The final photo (*left*) is probably of my last appearance with the band. maybe early 56. The only names I can recall in addition to Ginger Upton (here playing tenor saxophone) is the guy playing alto saxophone sitting next to him who was an Australian from the recently arrived Airfield Construction Squadron, whose name I believe was Cecil.'

A message from member **Brian Lloyd**, also RAF Changi Association. Brian has taken on the role of Assistant Publicity Officer for the National Service (RAF) Association and says the contact for membership details of the Association is John Kent, tel:- 01538 371622 e-mail:- jk34@talktalk.net

**Tony Parrini** received an e-mail request from **Tony Catherall** who was stationed at Butterworth\* (1959-62) with 11 Independent Field Squadron Royal Engineers, just a few miles down the road from the air base. Tony is asking if anyone has an aerial photograph of his camp as he is attempting to draw a plan for his association's website? If you can help please contact Tony via me (Dave Croft) and we'll take it from there.

\*Further details appear on page 11.



## Scenes from historical Butterworth and area.

New member **Les Featherbe** (page 7) was based at the 'old' domestic site of RAF Butterworth before moving to Glugor and has provided the archives with historically interesting photographs of the 'old' site as well as others, some of which are featured on this and the following page (10).



*Top left:* Bagan - Dalem slipway, Butterworth 1949, also serving the best fresh coffee in the area.

*Middle left (two):* RAF Butterworth 'old' domestic site.

*Bottom left:* Shanghai Cinema, Butterworth town, featuring Cuban Pete (film 1946).

*Top right:* RAF bombing range.

*Bottom right:* Another view of the Butterworth domestic site. Note; the 'dhobi'.





*Top left: 33 Squadron Tempest PR853 5R-K. Details page 25.*

*Top right: RAF Leave Centre (Elysian).*

*Middle left: RAF Leave Centre from the air.*

*Middle right: Armistice Day. 1949*

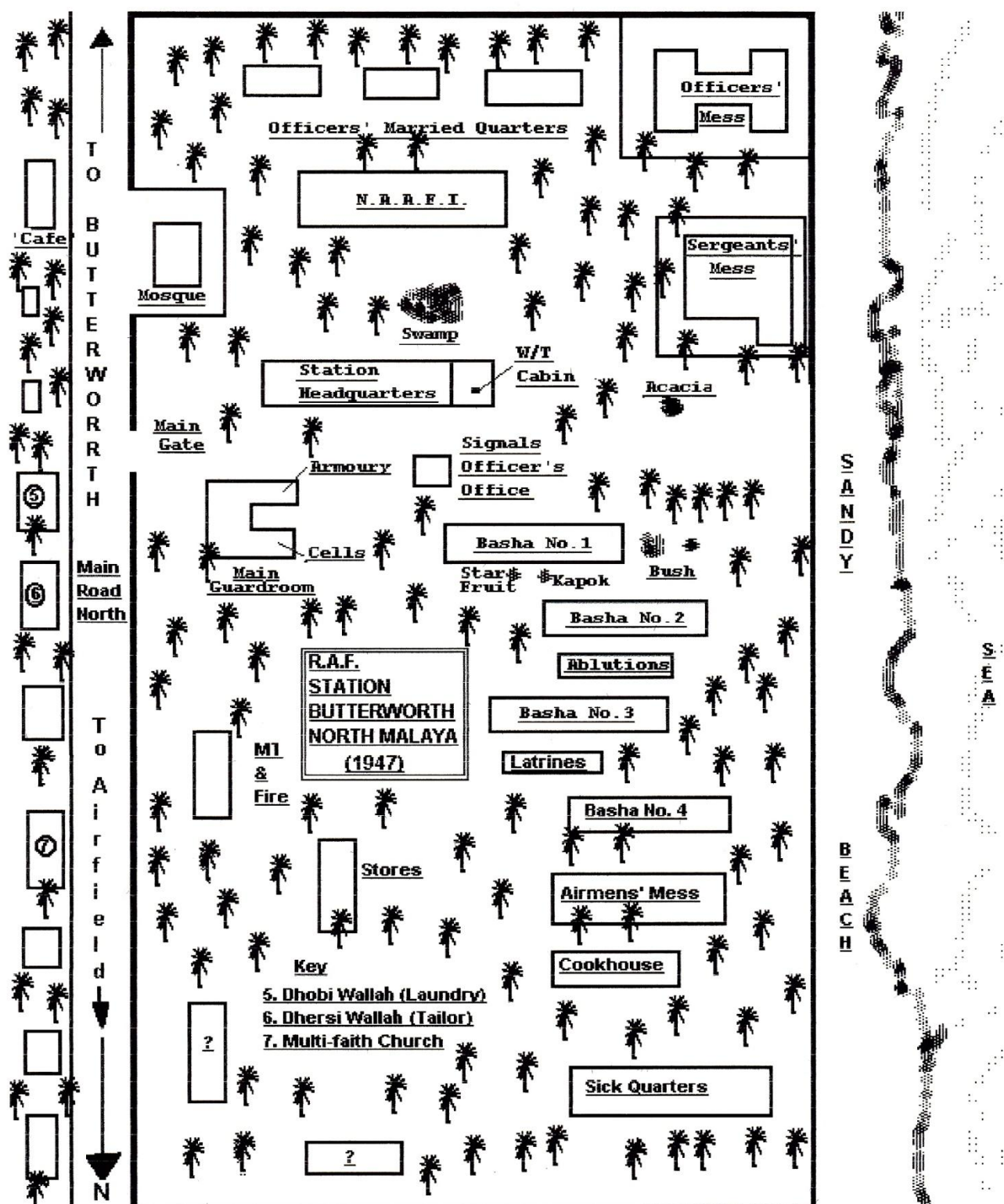
*Bottom: APC 1949*





## Plan of RAF Butterworth c1949

This plan of the 'old' domestic site was drawn by Ray Brett (from memory) with input from Duncan Gray.



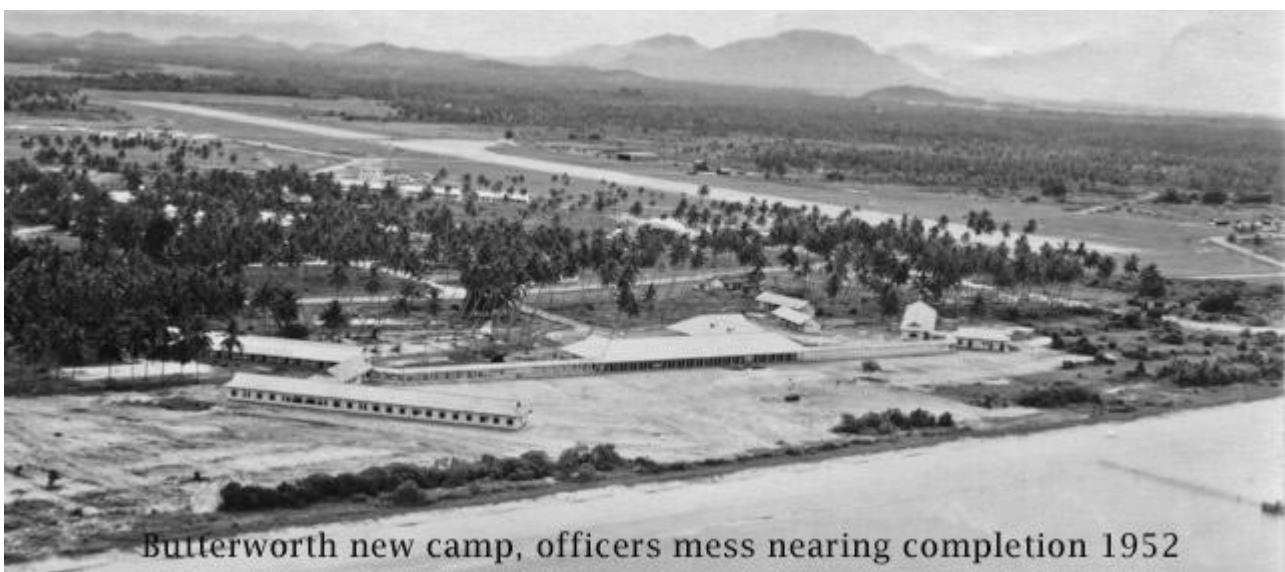
**Tony Catherall** (based at Butterworth Camp during Army ownership following the RAF moving out) has suggested a joint written feature covering the 'history' of the original camp, recorded through the experiences of those who served there, both Army and RAF. This might appeal to our members who were at Butterworth from the immediate post war period until the RAF leaving. If so, your written accounts will be very welcome. Ref: pages 8 and 15.



Member **Keith Ordish** (1951-52) also provides interesting photographs of a similar time scale to Les Featherbe. Keith writes: 'I was at Butterworth late 1951 and again in the latter half of 1952, originally at the old camp then one of the first to be billeted in the new camp next to the airstrip. I was a photographer with 81 (PR) Squadron based at Seletar, but did detachments to Butterworth and Labuan (British North Borneo).'



*Above: Keith Ordish (81 [PR] Squadron, RAF ), centre back row with RAFBPA member Geof Myatt (JAPIC [FE] Intelligence Corps, Army) in front of him.*





Waterfront, Penang circa 1952



Georgetown - circa 1952

## The Journey Home by John Rutland

John was with 487 SU 1956 to 1957 and describes his return to the UK onboard the *Empire Orwell*: 'When I received the Summer 2014 issue of *'Eastward'*, many memories came back to me when I read Mike Gregory's article about the *Lady in White* and also of my journey home.

I boarded the troopship at the beginning of June 1957 after leaving Butterworth where I had been with 487 Signals Unit since 1st January 1956. By chance, something like a dozen of us had been together throughout this time and were now returning together to the UK. We were joined in Singapore by an army regiment, also returning, and a large number of married families. My memory is not sure but the 17th/19th Royal Hussar's rings a bell.

In 1957 our route could not use the Suez Canal because of the Suez crisis. This meant it had to be round the Cape. Soon after leaving Singapore we were told the first port we would dock at would be Durban. Here residents would take small numbers of us on a tour of Durban, have a meal and then return to the ship. The same would also happen in Cape Town. This was worth looking forward to. We were also told the 'Tidiest Deck' would be rewarded with a large cake. We all had little jobs to do and one of our chaps was helping in catering - we were a bit surprised when he returned one day, about a week into the journey, and told our RAF deck 'Would Be' the tidiest because he had already seen the cake.

At this time word was going round that a number of people were reporting sick! As the days went by we knew a lot of people were unwell and parts of the ship were out of bounds - the medical section was very busy! As we entered Durban harbour there would be no tours as we were flying the 'Yellow Duster', the quarantine flag. Large numbers of people were on the dockside and on hearing the news some went away, but soon returned with newspapers, magazines, fruit, sweets, biscuits, anything to make up for not being able to go ashore. Wonderful thoughts of the people.

After Durban we continued with people still going sick, which we now knew to be Asian flu. We arrived in Cape Town early on a Sunday morning after being tossed about most of the night in a force 11 gale. It was very cold and penguins\* were swimming in the harbour. At this point we could hear a lady singing, not any old voice, but a beautiful voice. Arriving on deck we could see this lady dressed as Britannia, all in white, and although singing through a megaphone, it still sounded wonderful. It was the famous *Dame Perla Siedle Gibson*! Our farewell from Cape Town was wonderful with various boats in the harbour sounding their klaxons on our departure.

A few days out from Cape Town we were told that the law allowed us to go ashore after being at sea for so many days. Arrangements had been made that this would take place at Dakar in West Africa where the quay would be cleared of all local people so as to allow us to go ashore. After a few hours of being able to walk up and down the quay we continued our journey. A day or so before we reached Southampton we were told the winner of the tidiest deck was the RAF...we all received our slice of the cake.

Southampton was reached on a Friday evening, the quay was packed with people, including an army regimental band.

After disembarking on the Saturday morning we were taken to RAF Innsworth and demobbed on the following Tuesday. A few weeks later my girlfriend, Ann, who would become my wife (56 years ago) felt unwell....she had got Asian flu. Somehow I managed to avoid it completely.



Quay at Dakar 1957

\*The penguins John refers to are Jackass Penguins, also known as Cape Penguins and found only in South African waters.



## The 'Old' RAF Butterworth Site

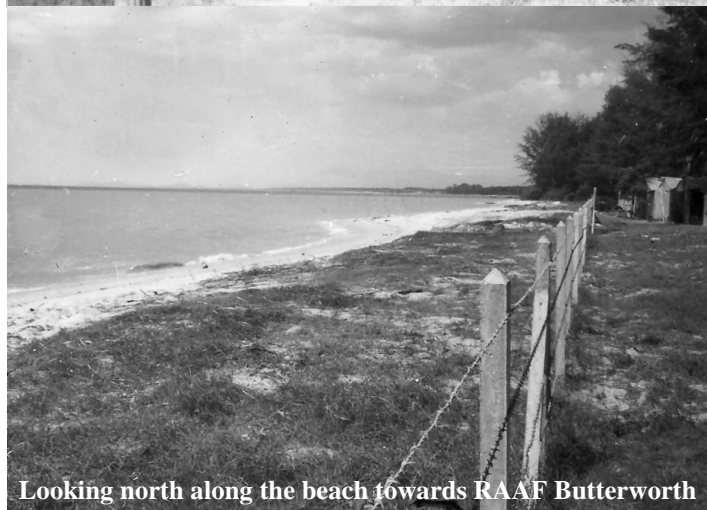
Further to the request regarding the 'Butterworth' camp of 11 Independent Field Squadron Royal Engineers (page 8), a description of the location later given by **Tony Catherall** fitted the description given by RAFBPA members who were based at the 'old' domestic/administration site of RAF Butterworth prior to 1952. An exchange of photographs confirmed that the 'previous Japanese camp' had in fact been RAF Butterworth 1941-42, and 1945-52. The Japanese had 'borrowed' the site for the duration of the war. The following photographs are from Tony (except for the first), taken of the camp circa 1960.



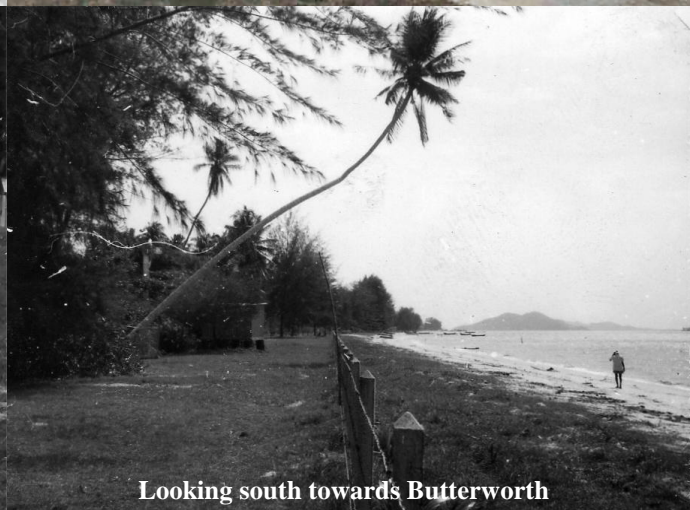
RAF Butterworth Guardroom 1947



Army Guardroom c1960



Looking north along the beach towards RAAF Butterworth



Looking south towards Butterworth



Views within the camp



## The Last Man Standing

Following the recent amount of information regarding the 'old' Butterworth site came an e-mail 'out of the blue' from a non-member, **Val West** ( LAC 3103643) now living in Canada, who was based at RAF Butterworth from 1947 to 1948. He writes: 'I have been searching the net for references to Butterworth during the period I served there. So far nothing has emerged. We came to Canada six years after my release to the Reserve in 1955. This seems to be the time when the history of Butterworth begins again.

From accounts the place had been made over quite drastically. We lived in bashas in an encampment a few miles south of the runway, which had been built by the Japanese. The conditions were, to say the least, primitive....no running water, latrines emptied by the locals in a *honey wagon* every few weeks, the huts infested with bedbugs and ghekos, and also a type of termite that seemed to enjoy eating KD. When a change became necessary, pulling clothes from the shelf was sometimes accompanied by a shower of these pests!

The local wells had dried up so water was trucked in by bowzers. The plumbing in the wash houses was absent so 'O' type dinghies had been inflated near each wash area and filled by the bowzers. Within hours they had become a sea of moving creatures. The NAAFI did a good business in bottles of Lysol which we used to sterilise the *soup*. Drinking water came from a bowser nears the OR's mess. I don't know how the Officers and NCO's fared? Were it not for Tiger Beer, most of us would have dried out.

There's not much more....do any of your members recall HMS Amethyst? A story in itself. In the unlikely event that any of your members recall Butterworth at that time I would be pleased to hear from them..I'm beginning to feel as if I'm the last man standing!'

*Should any members wish to contact Val would you please contact me for Val's contact details. At the time of writing I have only his e-mail address and I am aware not everyone is on the internet.* Dave Croft

Following a reply to the above, a further e-mail was received: 'About the Amethyst....she dropped anchor in the roads off Penang following the Yangtze incident. The usual signals were exchanged and visits quickly arranged. A couple of truck loads of sailors turned up the next day for an impromptu game of football. I've no recollection of the outcome! I think a few officers and NCO's also came? We retired to the mess hall or NAAFI, I can't remember which one, but quantities of Tiger Beer were definately consumed with yarns exchanged as is fitting on occasions such as this.

The crew members finally left in the small wee hours and what passed for normality returned.

Amethyst upped hook the next morning with several cheerful hoots of her whistle. We of course had learned of her encounter up river. A Sunderland (from 88 Squadron Kai Tak) had gone to her aid...her run to the sea was cheered to in the NAAFI.

Months later I was going home for discharge. We had been two days out of Singapore when a number of very pale looking men appeared on deck. All wore that odd blue military garb and a closer look showed missing arms, legs and bandaged heads. They were from Amethyst!'

Val concludes his e-mail with 'I feel there are stories out there that should be recorded or all we shall be left with are the *Official Histories*, and we all know how inadequate they can be?'

One of the reasons we have a newsletter (*Eastward*) is to record members stories for both the present and future, so please keep your stories coming in.

*Reminder: the 2015 Annual RAFBPA Reunion is to be held in Stratford upon Avon (at the Falcon Hotel), 17th, 18th and 19th May.*



## Main stories

### Shackletons at Alor Star

With thanks to **Brian Lloyd** who sent the following feature with permission from the Shackleton Association to use it in '*Eastward*'.

This account relates to the period of the Indonesian Confrontation of 1963 to 1966: 'In the middle 1960's, "Confrontation" between Indonesia and Malaysia was threatening to escalate into war. The Indons, as we called them, had mounted some unsuccessful airborne night attacks on Malaya, scattering paras across the central jungle. Most of the action was confined to Borneo where the two sides shared a land frontier. As things heated up, an operation was planned which would make the Indons either come out and fight or back down and shut up. A combined UK/Australian carrier task force would transit the narrow Sunda Strait between Java and Sumatra. In case this induced an aggressive response it was decided to disperse our aircraft, normally concentrated on Singapore Island, across the Malay Peninsula. The Changi based 205 Shackleton Squadron had been reinforced from the UK and Alor Star was selected as a deployment base for these aircraft. I (J G Middleton) was chosen from a very short list of eager applicants to go ahead and set up the operations organisation.

And so it was that I found myself, my baggage and one corporal radio operator decanted from a 48 Squadron Hastings at this rather decrepit airfield at the other end of Malaya, near to the Thai border. I was greeted by a jovial Squadron Leader Hayward who was CO of the only unit there, the RMAF Flying Training School. He explained that we could have a classroom in the ground school for accommodation, but that a tent had been erected on the airfield for our commcen. Security and airfield defence against any surprise Indon attack was in the safe hands of two RAF policemen and Police Dog Harvey - a delightful animal but permanently reduced to a state of soporific lassitude by the hot, humid climate.

I gathered the airfield had been built by the Japanese, well allied POW's actually in WW2<sup>1</sup>. It lay close to the Thai border. It was ideal for the Piston Provosts of the FTS (*left*) which were lined up daily on a fair sized



concrete parking area. We soon got the comms tent up and running on the far side of the airfield. The corporal had brought a massive array of HF equipment, a portable aerial mast and a petrol generator. The snag was that it didn't work very well. Our intelligence and orders from Air HQ in Singapore seemed only to arrive at night. Something to do with the frequencies we had been allocated I think? This meant that I was often aroused from my slumbers to collect classified signals. This entailed mounting the ancient rusty bicycle, which was what a fighting service deemed adequate for my needs, and riding round the taxiway for about a mile in the

moonlight. To make an otherwise boring trip more interesting, the RMAF allowed some local water buffalo to graze when the aircraft were not operating. Normally placid, lovable creatures which delighted in giving rides to small children, these particular beasts became enraged at the sight of an RAF officer riding a bike in the moonlight and would give chase with much snorting and puffing<sup>2</sup>. Having collected the signal and returned safely to the ops room, I would find that I was an info addressee to an intelligence summary some two days old.

<sup>1</sup> Alor Star was an aerodrome used by Imperial Airways pre-war. Also home to 62 Squadron RAF.

<sup>2</sup> From the Jungle Book by Rudyard Kipling: "The very cattle that would trample a white man to death allow themselves to be banged and bullied and shouted at by children that hardly come up to their noses."



Eventually, losing patience with the whole signals organisation, I begged the use of Sqn Ldr Hayward's telephone and called my CO at Changi on his home number. He promised to do something straight away. True to his word a Hastings arrived next day and I was presented with three shiny aluminium suitcases bearing the name "Collins". The corporal became immensely excited. He had heard of Mr Collins, an American radio manufacturer. We opened the cases, inside were a couple of boxes with dials and knobs and a large spool carrying a metal tape measure...there was even an instruction book! There was one three pin plug to connect the whole gubbins to the mains.. The corporal explained that the apparatus worked on a wonderful new system called single side band or SSB. Using the microphone supplied I would be able to talk to HQ with words and thus avoid all those problems associated with dots and dashes and wobbly reception. The metal tape measure was the aerial - the markings corresponded to the frequencies available. We attached it to a palm tree outside the ops room, inserted the three pin plug and switched on. The corporal twiddled a few knobs, pressed some buttons and then picked up the silver microphone. After the obligatory transmission of call signs and "over" there was a pregnant pause. To our amazement a voice issued from the speaker and there we were in instant and fluent communication with Air HQ some 400 miles away. By a master stroke of initiative I had circumvented the whole bureaucratic signals organisation. My operations centre was at the cutting edge of 1960's technology! When my Shackletons arrived, I would be ready for them with the latest intelligence. I left the corporal happily chatting away with his new toy and went to bed.

Of course my elation was short lived. The next morning the corporal presented me with the first signal to come via the magic SSB. It was a largely incomprehensible seven page list of equipment, mostly consisting of reference numbers and the only items I recognised were something like "Boots, canvas/rubber, jungle green". Blow this I thought. "Let's ask Air HQ when we can expect our Shackletons, how many of them, crew numbers etc, etc." I asked the corporal, he gave me a pitying look "Sorry sir, we can only send and receive unclassified r/t messages on SSB." Slowly the awful truth sank in. Everything, but everything of interest to an Ops Officer was classified, the weather, ration strength, fuel requirements etc, etc. The wonderful new kit was useless to me. I thought I might transmit a last desperate "Goodbye everyone" should we be subjected to a surprise attack - even that, though, would be a breach of security.

Naturally we resumed cycling round the airfield for out of date signals. I became quite skilled at evading the water buffalo and over the next few days read several good novels loaned to me by Sqn Ldr Hayward. It so happened then that the first we knew of the long awaited arrival of the dispersed Shackletons was a phone call from Air Traffic. They had received some flight plans and, incidentally, they were already talking to the first aircraft which was about 15 minutes away! I fell back on the last resort of the stunned Ops Officer, that of total inaction and a vague hope that something will provide.

The first aircraft landed and I took my bicycle to greet it on the Provost dispersal. As it turned off the runway and came towards me along the taxiway it seemed to be using rather more power than was usual. When it turned onto the concrete it suddenly accelerated, and nipped smartly to its allocated parking slot where a smart RMAF marshaller was standing. The three remaining aircraft had also landed and were taxiing in when I noticed that the first one had left two deep grooves in the taxiway. The tarmac had broken into small pieces and water was bubbling up to fill the deep grooves.

Somehow the other Shackletons hauled themselves on to the concrete and it was then that the true awfulness of the situation hit me...these aircraft were lightly loaded and if they did this at this weight, what chance did they have when fuelled and armed for operations? It was soon established that we had practically destroyed the airfield, the runway and taxiway were all deeply rutted.

Airfield engineers arrived with with apparatus to determine the true load-bearing capacity of the tarmac. The runway presented the first shock! Much of the surface was so weak that it did not even register on the scale of the test apparatus. The situation was desperate. In effect, half the Shackleton force was marooned on a

small island of concrete with war possible at any time. Amazingly, the entire road building capability of northern Malaya was pressed into service and in no time at all ribbons of steaming tarmac were being spread around the airfield. The aircrews of course seized the opportunity to disappear into town while the poor Ops Officer sweated away day and night keeping HQ informed of progress.

Just as soon as enough tarmac had been laid to allow the Shackletons to move, the Sundra Strait was forced, the Indons laid low and we all went home.

Some time later I had the chance to ask the Staff Officer responsible for the deployment why the load bearing capability of Alor Star had not been considered? He told me that the information available at the time of planning - some years previously - had shown the surfaces to be weak, but "capable of sustaining limited operations."

## **Memories of National Service by Trevor Coy, 45 Squadron April 1955 - October 1956 (Part 2)**



In Part 1 (Issue 39) Trevor describes his National Service training days in the UK before his posting to RAF Butterworth where the food was excellent and billets were a luxury after the hutted camps in England.

Being only yards from a nice tropical beach complete with palm trees I was determined to learn to swim, which I did quite quickly. A swimming pool was being built at the time next to the beach, but before the hole was backfilled there was a high tide which floated the tiled concrete pool and broke its back. It was some weeks before it was repaired and operational and it always had a slight ramp in the bottom where the two halves had not quite settled together. However, I did make good use of the 'repaired' pool.

After a time the squadron restarted ground attack operations against the communist terrorists in the jungle and we had very busy periods arming and refuelling the Vampires. Vampires were replacing the Meteors by this time. The Meteors never used their guns while they were with us so were never much trouble to the armourers, a pre flight inspection took only a minute, check there was a safety pin in the ejector seat and count four gun muzzles and that was it. When on operational strikes the Vampires normally used their four 20mm cannon and eight 60lb HE rockets or two 500lb bombs and as the targets were mostly quite close they usually returned to be rearmed and refuelled within thirty to forty minutes.

The 500lb bombs, one under each wing, carried by a Vampire aircraft were winched up onto bomb carriers (*right*) which in turn were fitted to a hook that was connected by a Bowden cable to a lever in the cockpit so that the pilot could jettison the whole lot together in an emergency. One day a bomb was being winched up when, through a fault, or an error in fitting the carrier, the fused bomb and carrier fell to the ground with a bump. It was funny to see one of the armourers, standing about a yard away, promptly put his fingers in his ears.



When doing armament practice the aircraft carried concrete headed rockets or small practice bombs. A T11 two seat Vampire came back from a practice bombing sortie one day with its eight little practice bombs still under the wings and the pilot fuming about the armourer not doing his job properly. I was the armourer! When I checked out the release mechanism and told him it was all OK he said the ground crew should fly in the bloody things sometimes and then we would know that all was not as it should be. I said "alright", and that was how I got my first ride in a Vampire.

Not knowing what I was letting myself in for I borrowed flying overalls and a helmet from one of the pilots who was about my size and went on the next trip with the same load of bombs on. It was a different pilot this time, a South African, Sergeant Doudy. It was not until we were over the bombing range that I realised we were to do dive bombing practice. On the first dummy run I was intent on looking at the target and had my head forward so when we pulled out of the dive I blacked out. The pilot told me to keep my head back and I did not black out again after that. We did another dummy run and then followed with eight bombing dives. I was feeling ill by now and after completion of the the bombing dives was sick, but I do remember the pilot saying to the people in the launch who plotted the bomb strikes that "My copilot has got his head in a paper bag". When we got back to Butterworth I climbed out of the aircraft looking sorry for myself with my full paper bag in my hand to be greeted with a big cheer from all the ground crew who, as we normally did, had been listening to the radio.

There was no fault in the electrics, or the way the bombs were fitted, the original pilot had probably forgotten to switch on the selector switches.

The Vampires, apart from two T11 two seaters, were gradually replaced by Venoms which were very similar but having more powerful engines and thinner slightly swept back wings. They normally flew with wing tip fuel tanks fitted and were able to carry two 1000lb bombs. They also had ejector seats.

Later, just after S/Ldr Cooper had taken over, and everyone seemed to be very wary of him, he came out to fly an aircraft that I had armed and after being being strapped in his rigger shouted for the armourer. When I arrived he asked me to explain the armament selection procedure, which I did. I, and several others, thought he was checking up on me but when he came back he sent for me again, asked my name and thanked me and said everything had worked OK and that he had flown Venoms before but not used the armaments. What a relief that was.

I was on duty crew one weekend with Corporal (Geordie) Burnage and we were checking over the armaments of a new (to us) Venom when we found a fault in one of the bomb pylons so we removed it and I took it on the Monday morning to the Base Engineering Officer to explain and get a chitty to get it replaced. I found the building and went down a corridor. past several doors to one with 'Squadron Leader, Engineering Officer' on it, knocked and in a few minutes had got it all sorted. On going out into the corridor all hell broke loose. I was supposed to have seen a corporal first, who would have taken me to a SNCO who would have checked if I could see the Engineering Officer. I had short-circuited the system, which was not the done thing in the RAF.

There were quite a lot of armourers on the squadron who were all needed when we were doing ground attack or armament practice, but had very little to do if the aircraft were not using their armaments. This was a bit boring and I was pleased when there was a set of guns to change or a pre flight inspection to do. Some of the lads were happy to sit playing cards, sometimes for days at a time, but I had to do something and I sometimes helped the riggers to clear tar off the aircraft wings. Our squadron was parked on what was reputed to have been the Japanese runway and the tar melted in the sun and got on the top surface of the wings from the ground crews shoes when they were refuelling. Sometimes when we arrived for work in the morning we would find a snake stuck in the tar; they basked in the sun after we had left in the evening and as the temperature dropped the tar set and trapped the snake.

After I was promoted SAC the lad in the squadron armoury finished his tour and went home and I took over his job. This suited me as the armoury building was quite a distance away and I was my own boss. I had a small workshop, an ammunition store and an office; my job was to service the belt feed mechanisms for the 20mm cannon and make sure we had a ready supply of ammunition. The BFM was a clever drum shaped



mechanical device with a big clock type spring which removed the rounds from the clips of the belt and fed them into the breech of the gun. These had to be cleaned, serviced and tested, and some had to be kept loaded and tensioned to be ready for immediate use. When the gun was firing the spring pushed the round into the gun and the recoil of the breechblock rewound the spring ready for the next one.

The armoury was among several other buildings, including the Army Intelligence Unit, squadron offices (where some very attractive Chinese girls worked) and the flying wing Wing Commanders office. Wing Commander Gundry-White (*right*) was a caricature RAF officer with a moustache, and I got to know him quite well as he sometimes came into the workshop. I reckon he must have got fed up with being in his office, but otherwise seemed to be having a pretty good time as he ran the base rugby and riding clubs, and the Station Flight Harvard seemed to be his own personal plane. He tried to persuade me a number of times to play rugby and help out with the horses but I usually managed to find an excuse not to do so. One perk of the job was that being the only one working there was that of key orderly, and as such did not have to



go on any parades...not that we had many parades, but it was nice on occasion to sit in the shade of my workshop in my shorts and watch all my mates parading in their best uniforms under the hot sun. I still worked on the flight line when they were busy but had my regular jobs on the armoury so never got bored.

We had three or four station defence exercises during my time at Butterworth. Those of us not already allocated a task assembled at the squadron buildings. At the second to last one, someone called for an armourer NCO to man the anti aircraft gun. Both the armourer corporals had been sent off to their locations with the Bren guns, so being an SAC was the next best and I became the anti aircraft gunner. Not knowing until now that we had such a gun, and being a bomb armourer anyway, did not seem to matter. I was told that the concrete post with a bit of iron pipe at the top in front of the squadron buildings, which I had never noticed before, was its mounting, and to go to the station armoury the next day to familiarise myself with the gun, which I think was a Vickers machine gun.

The next day I went to see the armoury sergeant who showed me a pile of crates and said "It's in one of those. I will let you know when we have got it out." That was the last I heard of it.

A couple of months later the alarm went, so I got on my bike and went to the station armoury only to find the gun had not yet emerged from its box. So I went to my post in front of the squadron buildings, and when people asked me why I was hanging around doing nothing, I just replied "Anti aircraft gunner sir", which seemed to satisfy them.

It was a long time ago, and I could be wrong, but I do not recall any of them noticing there was no gun. I never did see that machine gun and wonder if it is still lurking in its box in the RMAF station armoury?

When I think about it now it is surprising how few people could drive a car in the fifties. I had passed my test when I was seventeen and got a Malay driving licence when I was at Butterworth. Some of us used to hire a car when we were in Penang, but it was always me who had to drive. The squadron had a three-ton Bedford, a Land Rover and a David Brown tractor, but as far as I remember only one driver so the MT sergeant came and checked me out on the tractor and authorised me to drive it. So, occasionally, I was called upon to fetch bombs or rockets from the dump and also do other jobs with the tractor.

We often got Saturday afternoon and Sunday off and when we could afford it we would go to Penang which was a bus or taxi ride and twenty minute ferry ride away. There were a number of air conditioned bars and cinemas, and the Boston Bar restaurant and City Lights dance hall that catered for a large number of troops in the vicinity at the time. We could always have a good day out! We sometimes hired a car and went round the island or to one of the beautiful beaches. It really was a good place to be.



City Lights, Penang

Trevor Coy

I also went on leave twice while I was at Butterworth, two weeks in Penang at the Tanjong Bungah RAF Leave Centre and two weeks in Singapore at the Sandes Soldiers Home. When Bert Hickin and I went to Singapore we arranged our journey for the day after the regular weekly Valetta flight from Singapore to Car Nicobar in the Indian Ocean, which stopped at Butterworth on the return flight to refuel. A visit to Air Movements got us a lift on it and we were in Singapore in about two hours as opposed to

about twenty four on the train, and we did the same on the way back and so got two extra days holiday.

We had to be armed when travelling and so Bert, who worked in the Station Armoury, got us two Sten guns instead of the normal .303 rifles. We put these these, and the magazines, in my holdall which was a lot handier than carrying rifles. We arrived at the leave centre late at night and next morning had to hand in our arms to the nearest military base for safekeeping. This was at an Army camp just down the road that turned out to be the Queens African Rifles with very smart soldiers marching about and white painted kerbstones, and the usual Army 'bull'. When we went in there in our shorts and T-shirts, with the Stens still dismantled in the holdall, we had to see the Orderly Officer who wanted to know 'whose bloody army do you two belong to?'. When we told him the RAF he calmed down and was quite a nice chap after all. We collected our Stens the day we were going back to Butterworth and thought we had the wrong ones...they were both cleaned and oiled, even the ammunition had been polished! That's the Army for you.

After about a year at Butterworth it was my turn to go to RAF Fraser's Hill on what, as far as I can remember, was a 'jungle warfare training course.' It was for two weeks and there were about a dozen of us with a new course starting each week. I can only remember two sergeants and one officer on the permanent staff, plus a few civilian cooks and cleaners. It was a bit like being in the boy scouts again when one day we went quite a way down hill, then had to make a stretcher out of tree branches tied together with creepers to carry one of us, the lightest, back up to the top. Another time, one of the lads carried an enormous frying pan instead of his rifle and after a long trek to a very nice waterfall, we had fried sausages and eggs for lunch. We also had a few lectures, but it was all fairly free and easy.

We were woken up one night by the dustbins being tipped over and on looking out saw an animal running away. The next morning, it was said it was a tiger scavenging in the bins but I still don't know if I saw a wild tiger or if it was just a dog?

The one good thing about Fraser's Hill, and I think this was the main reason for the course, was that it was in the mountains where it was a lot cooler and we got a break from the constant heat and humidity. This was the only time while I was in Malaya that I recall wearing a pullover. The journey to Fraser's Hill involved getting the night train south to Kuala Lumpur and then the next train back north to Kuala Kubu Bahru where we did not arrive until daylight, probably because a bunch of airmen hanging around a country railway station for a few hours in the dark would have been a good target for the terrorists. This was followed with a hectic journey in a three ton truck about twenty odd miles up narrow mountain roads, mostly with a steep drop on one side. The road was only open during daylight and then it was for one hour up, then one hour down. This, apparently, was to keep traffic moving as fast as possible to reduce the chances of being attacked by terrorists. When we returned it was a bit easier as it was in the daytime and we caught the northbound train from KKB without going via KL.

*(To be continued)*



## AS I REMEMBER IT (Part 2)

P.M. DAVIES (S.R.N.)

Patricia Davies was an Australian nurse of the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Nursing Service at Alor Star General Hospital when the Japanese attacks on Malaya started. She married S/Ldr Harley Boxall (62 Squadron, RAF Alor Star) on the 19th May 1941 at the Kedah Registry Office and was present at the hospital on the 8th December 1941\* when 'Pongo' Scarf was admitted after being wounded by Japanese fighters when attacking the Japanese occupied airfield at Singora in Thailand. This is her story.....

*Continued from Issue 39....*At Taiping and booked into the government Rest House, and feeling that I could not stand the aimless waiting, upon hearing that the temporary war hospital was short of nursing staff, I applied to work there, was interviewed and accepted.

The hospital, converted from a former school, was short of equipment as well as staff, and was a full time job. We had Australian airmen who had been shot down, and Indian troops and officers - the latter very arrogant and aloof (to us) as we were regarded as coolie labour. They arrived in frequent convoys and included representatives of the many regiments we had stationed on the border at Alor Star.

One young Australian airman I nursed was not at all well, flushed, lethargic and running a temperature, I felt that the injuries he suffered, including one to his eye, did not merit his condition. "When did you last have your bowels open?" I asked. He wriggled uncomfortably and muttered "Oh, about eight days ago I guess." "Right" I said, "Then you're for an enema." That roused him, "Oh, I say Sister, no you can't, really I'll be alright." Nevertheless, he got the enema, after when I left him to the nursing orderly's tender mercies. When I came on duty that evening his temperature was down and he was much better.

That night I slept fully clad in the empty maternity ward of the general hospital nearby, but was awakened in the very early hours by a Sister who informed me that the Japs were getting close and would I come and help her pack up the operating theatre?

When I got back to the Rest House, I found Amah Ah Fong with two of my suitcases, thankfully containing some of my uniforms, and weeping buckets because the transport on which she had got a lift had refused to take the other two she had packed, making her leave them by the side of the road.

I had to take the car Harley had left and dear Althea Gentles\*\* (Nursing Sister, transferred to Bukit Matagem before the Japanese attack, her place at Alor Star being taken by Phyllis Briggs) announced she would come with me. Amah sat in the dickey seat at the back of the car, and before we left Taiping I bought a new tyre.

The night before Jimmy Fish had come to the hospital to tell me that Joan had gone into premature labour and gave birth to a daughter, which had a spina bifida disorder and would not live. The lady doctor there decided to take Joan on in her car while Jimmy stayed behind to see the little one buried, Despite large doses of morphia it was another day before the baby died: she was buried after being baptised 'Joan'.

By this time the Japs had reached the outskirts of the town, and Jimmy got out by the skin of his teeth. We had in the meantime left, accompanied by Phyllis Briggs in her car. I had never been allowed to drive Harley's precious Ford V8 and the first thing I did was knock down a Chinese cyclist on the very crowded road of a fleeing population! At Phyllis's instigation I gave him \$20 and we hurriedly pushed on. We finally reached Ipoh, just after a bombing raid.

\*Differing accounts of the day give it as either the 8th or 9th December. It was a chaotic period for those present at the time and the dates given in Pat's account are the ones used.

\*\*Althea (also known as Mary) Gentles, the daughter of a clergyman was killed in an enemy strafing attack on the SS Kuala off Pom Pom island on 14th February 1942.

The hotel we stopped at for a meal was practically empty of staff as all had fled. I cannot remember having any food there, but we pushed on in the afternoon towards Kuala Lumpur.

It was getting late, and Phyllis suddenly remembered friends from a nearby rubber estate where we could at least have a bath and something to eat. Alas, when we reached it the manager was just pushing off, his wife and children having gone on ahead. He told us to help ourselves to whatever we required, and then left us. The estate house was just as the owners had left it; standard lamps, lounge furniture and cushions still in place, beds still made. The tiled bathroom below the level of the bedroom still boasted bath salts, soap and talc. In the kitchen we found tea and biscuits, but did not attempt to cook on the typical charcoal stove. The electricity was still on, but as it was bright moonlight and Jap paratroops were still being mooted we did not turn any lights on, but undressed and slept as best we could until 5 am. While it was still dark we took to the road again.

This time the road to Kuala Lumpur was really crowded with refugees of all colours streaming down the winding mountain roads, nose to tail, whilst passing us in a never ending stream were Army trucks, troop carriers and all the paraphernalia of war on the way to the Front. It was on one of those stretches that the door on the right hand side of the car flew open, owing to a faulty lock that had never been repaired. Unable to stop in time, I leaned over to pull the door closed (*the Ford V8 door opened out from the front into the slipstream*) and in so doing turned the steering wheel to the left. We veered off the road, down a drop of 20 feet or so before the never ending mud and a rubber tree stopped our fall. As we went over I thought "So this is the end", but I was too tired to care, and I still had my foot on the accelerator. Gentles, ever British, remained calm, but poor Amah in the dickey seat had hysterics. We crawled out and up to the road above us where Gentles produced a packet of Callard & Bowers nougat, with its silver foil sections. Phyllis suggested the idea of obtaining a breakdown van in KL, but as we were sitting at the side of the road, with Amah clambering up and down rescuing the contents of the car, two young police lads from Alor Star came by and suggested we continued the journey with them. Amah, the ever thrifty, rushed back to the car and to my horror emerged with a large packet of Kotex, a royal blue package with the name written in large white lettering. There was no mistaking it! My embarrassment was lessened by catching the eye of one of the police and we both burst out laughing. Harley's Ford V8 was left at the side of the road, along with the new tyre, we never saw it again.

The police lads dropped us off at Kuala Lumpur hospital where we were received non too graciously by the staff who were having troubles of their own with the influx of nursing refugees from up country. We were allotted beds in an empty ward and given a meal, which Gentles greatly appreciated. She was not a glutton but food was very important to her and I often wondered about her possibly lean rectory childhood. Anglican clergymen, then as now, (*the date when this account was written is unknown but is pre-1984*) have never been well off.

Having heard the Army were looking for Nursing Sisters, and owing to the inadequacy of Q. A. supplies (the Q. A.'s were the Army nurses), I reported to HQ, was interviewed and accepted, and given a rail warrant for Amah and myself to leave for Singapore that night.

When I got back to the hospital I found Harley had arrived and somehow he had found us...I had to break the news about the V8 to him. He took it with unusual calm.

Amah and I left on a terribly crowded train and arrived in Singapore early next morning. We obviously had Jap prisoners on the train because I remember seeing British Tommies treating them non too gently on the railway platform. Unfortunately the roles were all too soon to be reversed.

I took Amah to Robinsons (a very large Singapore department store) and ordered breakfast in the dining room. I waited for them to make a fuss about serving Amah there and was prepared to go into battle over it, but nobody said a word. After we took a taxi to the Singapore hospital where I had to report (it must have

been 12/13 December) and after being treated to the usual British indifference, was shown upstairs to a bedroom on the second floor of the nurses home. On opening a window, my complacency was somewhat shattered when I saw big drums of petroleum on the ground below. However we were not allowed to unpack, but were speedily sent off across the Causeway to the Johore hospital, a many storied edifice of immensely long stone corridors. Here, for a day or two, Amah and I shared a room until I rebelled at the



pickled and odiferous Chinese delicacies she stored there. A room was found for her in the servants wing. Despite being one of 'Queen Alexandra's Young Ladies', the hours were very long, the work hard and the food just abominable. The pay was likewise, but in the chaos and mismanagement I was lucky to sample that. My Australian airmen caught up with me again, also a couple of members of 62 Squadron. Then

one morning when we came on duty they had all been spirited away and new occupants arrived.

Our equipment was pathetic, and asepsis was of the 'by guesswork' variety. Our ward had one tiny steriliser, and two sandbags! Everything had to be flamed in spirit but I don't recall any deaths. Sallie Scarf, formerly a Q.A., was enrolled again and once more we crossed paths in Johore.

When the Japs started getting close to Johore, Harley insisted on my coming over the Causeway into Singapore, but before that I spent the Christmas of 1941 in Johore, (with a visit) on Christmas night, with Harley and some RAF types, to Raffles Hotel where we witnessed the 'Bright Young Things' in full evening dress, and dancing!

*(To be continued)*

### **'Grounded' Tempest PR853 5R-K**

Laurie Bean has added further information for Les Featherbe's photograph of Tempest PR853 shown on page 10. In his e-mail Laurie writes: *30 September 1949. Having completed an air to ground firing practice, the aircraft was climbed to 9000 feet to start a dive bombing practice.*

*Although the pilot had detected some rough running of the engine, all the instrument indications were normal and so he started a dummy dive to 2000 feet and then begin to climb again. At 3000 feet there was a loud bang, white smoke filled the cockpit and the propeller fell off. The pilot climbed the aircraft to 3500 feet, informed base of his intention to bale out but then decided to attempt a forced landing on a golf course, which was successful.*

*Golfers among the readership will probably have thought already of some comment about natural hazards on the course or some such!* This would also include the bullock mentioned by Les, the only casualty of the accident.

### **Another new member.**

**Malcolm Worsnip** (known as Bron). J/T Airframe Fitter, 60 Squadron, March 1966 - October 1966.



## Tales from the Emergency

*'Sir....The Secretary of State has directed me to inform you that your request (to join the RMPF) has been noted. Unfortunately, Malaya is temporarily under the administration of the Japanese Government, but when this situation has been rectified we will consider your application.'*

From:Smashing Terrorism in the Malayan Emergency.

A selection of short anecdotes adapted from publications associated with the Malayan Emergency and suitable for Christmas enjoyment are included below.

1 In 1948, the State of Emergency in Malaya called for volunteers in Britain to join the Malayan Police to help deal with the Communist uprising. From one of those that volunteered and reported to Hounslow Barracks in September 1948, where he was informed he/they were to fly out by a BOAC chartered Constellation on the following day, the experience is recorded in the book *Smashing Terrorism in the Malayan Emergency*. 'At the airport (Heathrow) early next day, a BOAC official informed the group of volunteers that they would be shortly boarding the aircraft, and in the meantime invited them to make themselves comfortable - on metal folding chairs and backless benches! After two boring hours they were instructed to carry their luggage out to the aircraft, some half mile away. On approaching the Constellation, it became evident it had been well used in the past, proven on starting the engines, three fired up OK, the fourth struggled unsuccessfully. A walk back to the departure lounge and return three hours later. This time the fourth engine fired and caught fire! Back to Hounslow Barracks and another rough night on straw palliases with a successful take-off the following day for Singapore.'<sup>1</sup>

2 Another police officer tells of his experiences operating with the Gurkhas having spent three years with them on both liaison duties and combined operations. He found their fearsome outlook towards CT's who put up a fight to be a concern as they tended to abandon their firearms and, shouting war cries, charge the enemy with only their kukris at hand. His preference was to seek a tree to fire from behind but his concern also spread to possibly having to charge with them, without a kukri, to avoid decapitation in the general excitement of the attack. Worse still, he thought the British officers were as mad, or madder, than their men.<sup>1</sup>

3 In *Our Man in Malaya*, the newly appointed SDO ( Senior District Officer) Province Wellesley, John Davis, moved into his official residence at Butterworth in January 1954. The Butterworth residence had a 'dilapidated charm', with sea breezes and a view across to Penang Island. Of the first 'guests' to visit was an unexpected one by Lt Gen Sir Gerald and Lady Templar when the aircraft they were travelling in made a forced landing at RAF Butterworth with engine trouble (early 1954).The Province Wellesley Annual Poppy Day Dance, held in November, was traditionally held at the residence as a fancy dress occasion. At the 1955 festivity, the SDO appeared among guests wearing his wife's black skirt and stockings, black scarf, artificial red roses and white hat with a bow at the front. His (false) hair was a mass of string, his face was made up with makeup and according to his wife, he looked revolting! The SDO's wife wore his work clothes, a topee, walking stick and dabbed on moustache.<sup>2</sup>

4 Police Lieutenant Roy Follows (*The Jungle Beat*) always showed much respect for those senior officers fighting the jungle war from an office. In respect of Fort Brooke they proposed several practical suggestions to ensure the smooth running and safety of the camp. One such suggestion was to transport supplies by narrow gauge railway to the camp from a more superior parachute dropping point to the one in use, one that was some distance away! Small trucks, pulled by a miniature steam engine was one possibility suggested! Another excellent idea was to use geese as an alarm when intruders were a possibility, but the birds failed to differentiate between possible CT intruders and camp sentries. The noise problem was solved

(temporarily) by penning them in at night and then making them the main ingredient on the Christmas menu (permanent).

He also thought that the consignment of a supply of soap for the aborigines might have been at the suggestion of a 'desk-warrior' who had possibly experienced, on a visit, the smell and/or 'dancing dandruff' - head and body lice on the locals. Operation 'cleanup' involved instructions on use of the soap to a chosen few and off they went to issue soap to each of the aborigines. The next day there was a request for more soap...the soap had been used, once, and then thrown into the river. No more soap appeared in following parachute drops.<sup>3</sup>

5 Post-war, the first appointed Adviser for Aborigines in the Federation of Malaya was Major P. D. R.



Williams-Hunt, who produced a 102 page book *An Introduction to the Malayan Aborigines*. Written primarily for the Security Forces the book had, and perhaps still has, much to offer in understanding the lives of the original people of Malaya at the time it was written. Major Williams-Hunt was an aerial photographic interpreter for the Army in WW2 and brought his skills into his new post where he could access aerial photographs (taken from Operation Firedog sorties), assembling runs of continuous images for stereoscopic viewing. This was a useful tool for helping with recording Aboriginal distribution during, and after, the Emergency. In early June 1953, when crossing a bridge at a distant settlement, it collapsed impaling him on a wooden support. He died eight days later, on June 11, in Batu Gajah hospital.

Some snippets from the book includes the belief of the indigenous people that the jungle is haunted by awful ghosts and demons waiting for the opportunity to pounce on the unsuspecting traveller. Superstitions also abound, such as with the Negritos, where it is believed (the book was published in 1952) drawing water in a vessel blackened by fire will bring on a heavy thunderstorm as a punishment, as will 'wearing haircombs during a thunderstorm or laughing at butterflies' after a death! As Williams-Hunt comments, a rather strange thing to do at the best of times'.

Of the aboriginal rafts used for river travel he writes: 'In the swirl of the rapids, the whole raft may be under water and an observer on the bank is treated to the novel picture of a group of men up to the waist in water shouting furiously to disturb the river demons and working furiously on the sweeps to circumvent projecting rocks whilst apparently without means of support. In his book, Williams-Hunt makes a passing reference to the pre-war anthropologist H. D. (Pat) Noone and his disappearance into the jungle when the Japanese advanced through Malaya. He never reappeared at the end of the war and how he died was a mystery for many years, some believing he died at the hands of the communist jungle fighters. Others thought he might have been killed by the Japanese. His death was eventually described to his brother, Richard Noone (successor to Williams-Hunt following his death), many years later by an aborigine headman. This is a story for a future issue of 'Eastward' as it involves P/Lt Roy Follows, first commander of Fort Brooke and 'his' aborigines and a series of newspaper articles published in the *Reveille* June/July 1957, submitted by RAFBPA Member Don Brereton. In the mean time.....

<sup>1</sup>Smashing Terrorism in the Malayan Emergency by Brian Stewart

<sup>2</sup> John Davis: Our Man in Malaya by Margaret Shennan

<sup>3</sup>The Jungle Beat: Fighting Terrorists in Malaya 1952 - 1962 Roy Follows and Hugh Popham

The annual **RAFBPA Reunion** is to be held 17th, 18th & 19th May 2015 at the Falcon Hotel, Stratford upon Avon. Details were sent with Issue 39, and anyone interested in attending but being without the information, such as new members, are advised to contact Len Wood for details.

## Remembrance Day at the Cenotaph.

Several members of the RAFBPA represented the Association on November 9th at the annual Remembrance Sunday parade at the Cenotaph. Taking part were: Roger Hughes-Jones, Alan Beattie, David Bloomfield, John Rutland, accompanied by Mervyn Lyndsley and Alberet Parker of the Royal British Legion. **John Rutland** reported (via telephone) that this was his first visit and he found it very moving, both emotionally and in the spirit of camaraderie among those around him. He thoroughly enjoyed the experience and looks forward to attending again. From **Roger Hughes-Jones**: 'What a day! Sunny and fine for our third appearance at the Cenotaph Parade. It appeared to me that there were many more spectators than in previous years, no doubt due to three important anniversaries being commemorated. This year we marched near the front of the column under the umbrella of the RAF squadrons...we were shown on television marching past the Cenotaph. If I was to pick out the most memorable part of the day it would be the camaraderie shown by all participants. Each year we are located between the Mountain Rescue and RAF Yatesbury Associations so there was always a familiar face. When standing easy before the laying of wreaths we were next to the HMS Vincent Association and boy didn't they have some stories to tell. It was a wonderful occasion in which I am proud to take part.' **David Bloomfield** also wrote in: 'Albert Parker and myself left Oxfordshire as the sun was rising, the grass fields had pockets of mist hanging over them. We caught the Oxford coach to Victoria rail station and within minutes (of arriving) were whisked by black cab towards Horse Guards, but due to road closures and security had to walk the last 300 yards. Before entering the parade ground we had to go through an airport security type system. I soon found our name board and position. Then Roger arrived, and soon after Alan, John and Mervyn. At around 1020 hours we marched into Whitehall. After the service we proceeded past the Cenotaph, turning into King Charles Street, then into Horse Guards passing Prince Andrew, Duke of York, taking the salute and back onto the parade ground.' Finally from **Alan Beattie**: 'I would like to commend everyone involved in the parade which was an honour to attend. It exceeded all my expectations, professionally organised as usual, with a high standard of turnout by all participants. It made us all proud to be there, particularly meeting up with others we had not seen for many years. Too many to remember! Of course it made one really face the reality of the situation but at the same time seemed to have bonded all the different services who had so proudly served. It became evident from the enthusiastic reception of the thousands of people attending that we stand firm forever as a country.'





## In Addition

The picture below shows the newly formed RAF marching past the wood and plaster model for the permanent Cenotaph in Whitehall at the beginning of remembering on Peace Day 19 July 1919.



## RAF Fraser's Hill

Taken from *Paradise on a Mule Track*, pages 22-23 of Insight Guides - Malaysia , seventh edition 1981

' At the outbreak of the First World War, Bishop Ferguson-Davie of Singapore thought it his duty to find a fellow countryman who was working as a mule train operator and inform him of world conditions. Rumour was that the man had a shack somewhere in the hills north of Kuala Lumpur. With the help of a local constable the bishop found his way to 'The Gap' and from there struggled the last few kilometers up a steep trail only to find that the mule skinner had fled. No doubt his decision came the moment he saw the church and the law coming. The hideaway, it seems, was more than a mere rest spot for weary drivers and tired mules, The bishop found the shack all right, called 'Gambling Farm Number One', and another den called 'The Keys of Paradise' which capitalized on the local opium trade. The story is that adventurer and opportunist **Louis James Fraser** was never seen again, having vanished in the more glamorous byways of Singapore.