



Eastward

Christmas 2016



RAF Butterworth & Penang Association

Issue 46



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

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Merry Christmas

Cover: Butterworth 1957 Bob Barrett 487 SU



VC10 XV109 'Arthur Scarf VC' landing at RAF Gan

Chairman's Corner



During one of the various events held in Carlisle recently the Mayor of Carlisle, a former serviceman in 2 Parachute Regiment, recounted his service in Cyprus and Aden. Rather than dwelling on the unpleasant aspects of his service he told of the joy of looking out at the scenery as he parachuted down from the aircraft, the happiness of comradeship, the good times he had on the beaches of Cyprus and now how he looks forward to reunions with those he served with for six years. 'Funny' I thought, 'That's exactly how I feel about my times in the Far East'. I know many service personnel could tell horrendous stories of their times in the services, but equally, most of us enjoyed our times in the Services and would 'do it all again' if we could.

When dealing with young people, encouraging them to join the Forces or to support the various services charities, it is often the 'lighter' stories that they will want to remember. On 11/11/11, I was fortunate to be with a 94 year old veteran who served in Normandy, Arnhem and other parts of the world, including Malaya. He was being quizzed by children wanting to know whether he had ever been wounded? "Well I thought I was once" he said. "In a forest in Belgium we came under fire from the Germans at lunchtime. My Major and I dived into a trench as shrapnel rained down from the trees above us. All went quiet with me on top of the major in the trench". He asked "Are you OK Staff?" "I'm fine" I replied. "Well one of us has been hit because I can feel warm blood running down my neck from under my helmet". "I got up to check who had been injured only to realise that I had dived into the trench with my mess tin full of compo dumplings and custard and that it was the custard, not blood, running down the Major's neck".

We must never forget those who have given their lives whilst serving in the Armed Forces. The Royal British Legion is asking us to rethink remembrance and to include more about recent conflicts other than WW2. That's us! The Malayan Emergency, Confrontation and the years to the final withdrawal in 1971. We all have our stories to tell, perhaps not so dramatic as WW2 or Afghanistan, but when the opportunity arises we all have stories that will add to the need for Remembrance.

I have hoped that by now the Trust Fund for the long term upkeep of the FEAF Memorial at the Arboretum would have been signed off. The National Memorial Arboretum has recently been inundated since the reopening of the Armed Forces Memorial and new Visitors Centre, and also recent Remembrance events. Between the three associations I am confident that the agreed sum is in place, and hopefully, during the quieter winter months the establishment of the trust Fund will be finalised.

As Winter and Christmas approaches, I ask that you all look after yourselves and your loved ones. Don't be afraid to seek help if you need it; take the opportunity to be with others rather than be alone, especially over the long Christmas period. Equally, if you know of someone who will be on their own at Christmas or the New Year consider inviting them round for an hour or so; you'd be amazed at the difference it would make to them. Finally Anne and I wish you all a peaceful and restful Christmas, and good health for 2017. We look forward to meeting with many of you once again in May for our 21st RAFBPA Birthday Reunion.

With our sincere best wishes,

Tony and Anne Parrini.

From the Editor

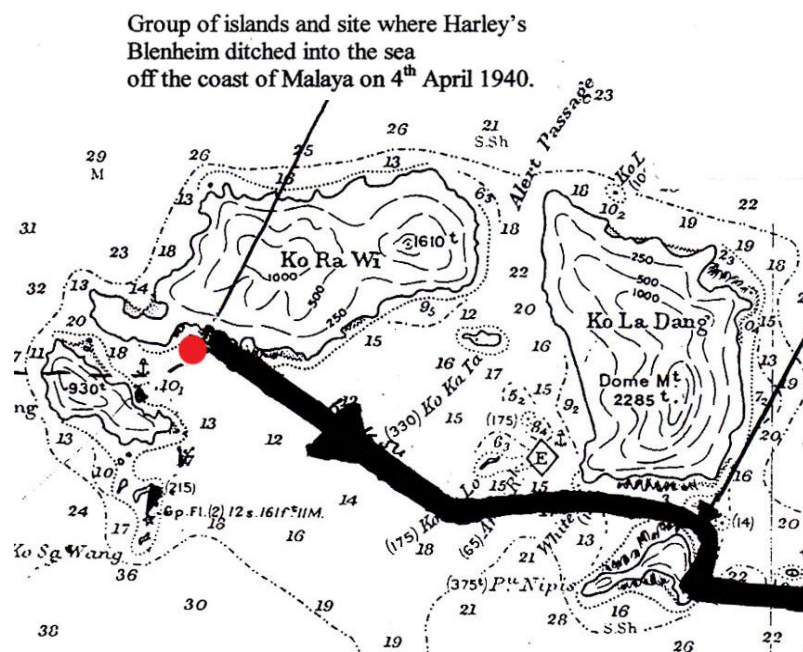
What a year 2016 has been for the RAFBPA, our 20th year as an association, a new venue for the annual reunions and the climax.....our Chairman celebrating his 70th birthday in September. He now joins the ranks of the seniors, the elders, the wise ones etc!

In this issue of 'Eastward', being the Christmas copy where I try for a 'Christmas based story', the story I have used is taken from one that caught my interest a few years ago after I purchased a secondhand book written about the discovery of the Coelecanth in the Indian Ocean. The book tells of the involvement of the South African Air Force in flying the fish to South Africa. However, the story in this issue is the one told by the aircraft's navigator at the time, Duncan Ralston. OK, it's not about Malaya, but as I'm the editor..... We also continue with the story of 45 Squadron when at Butterworth by Wg Cdr C G Jefford, this issue covering the period when 33 and 45 Squadrons amalgamated to become 45/33 Squadron....not a happy time for two active squadrons apparently?

Also in this issue comes a superb piece of artwork by the aviation artist Colin Parker. Colin (previously Senior Illustrator at Rolls Royce UK) has kindly agreed to us placing a copy of his picture, 'Hornet Sting', in the newsletter. He has also agreed to the picture being placed on the Association website where the newsletter will appear for all to see after a year's 'rest'. Colin said that, along with the Mosquito, the DH103 Hornet has been a favourite aircraft of his for many years, a view echoed by many of those who flew the aircraft in Malaya.

The second Hornet in the picture, WB898, was written off during an armament practice north of Butterworth on 15 July 1953 when it dived into the ground. The pilot, Flying Officer B P H Lacey, is buried at Western Road Cemetery, Penang .

On a different subject, a recent e-mail received from our Canadian member, Sallie Hammond, was initially sent to Joe Bamford, co-author (with Harley Boxall, Sallie's father), of *Devotion to a Calling*. The e-mail



from Alan Leary refers to Blenheim L1131 (piloted by Harley) which made a forced landing in the sea off the island of Ko Ra Wi, 83 miles west of Alor Star, on April 4 1940 when returning from a photo reconnaissance flight to Sabang. Harley and his two crew members were stranded on the island for six days before being rescued by local fishermen and taken to Langkawi. In his e-mail Alan says that being 'ever on the research trail, one being Blenheim L1131, flown by Harley Boxall on April 4 1940' he noted a map of the location of the aircraft when reading the book. He added that he has located a diving centre on a neighbouring island where some divers

confirmed the wreckage of an aircraft in the spot marked on the map. There is hope that some photographs of any recognisable wreckage may turn up.....but early days yet!

Finally a message to all from our Chairman. 'The three Far East Associations (Butterworth, Changi and Seletar) march together at the annual London Cenotaph Parade as **Units of the Far East Air Force**. If any member would like to join the contingent in November 2017 please advise Tony Parrini as soon as possible, and certainly by 1st August 2017.' Contact details for Tony are on page 2.

Brian Prior

It is with great sadness that the Association has learned of the death of member **Brian Prior** on Sunday 9th



October 2016. Brian had been ill for some time but still maintained his cheerful outlook on life as was evident on the occasions we talked on the telephone. Brian became a member of the RAF Butterworth and Penang Association in April 2008. He served at Butterworth in 1956, attached to 101 Squadron (Canberras) as the Supply Squadron NCO and, as a reward for always having ice cold drinks available for aircrew on their return from sorties, he was given a flight in a Canberra on a practice bombing mission - a flight that 'ranked as one of the

most memorable times of his RAF service'.

On leaving the RAF Brian joined the Suffolk Fire Service, eventually rising to hold a senior position within the service. He remained with the Fire Service until retirement. His stories of the some of the humorous 'shouts' were a pleasure to listen to when given in his gentle manner interspersed with intermittent chuckles....occasionally I had to ring him back at a later date for him to relate the story again!

Perhaps when our time comes Brian will be there to greet us on arrival with a refreshing drink?



RAFBPA Matters and Stories

There is a correction for the New Members list that appeared on page 8 of Issue 45 of '*Eastward*'. Anthony (Tony) Palmer should read Anthony (Tony) **Parker**. Apologies to those concerned.

RAFBPA member **David (Tug) Wilson** collected the Association 'Boogaloo' boat from Mike Ward at the beginning of July in order to overhaul the rigging. On completion by David, the boat was 'set off with a temporary flag'. A thank you has been sent by Tony Parrini and Don Donovan on behalf of the Association.

How did the boat get the name *Boogaloo*? Nobody seems to know - the definition of Boogaloo meaning 'Latin music and dance', originated in the mid-60's does nothing to explain why that name was given to the boat.

Further to the re-rigging story which started at least a couple of years, or more, back, we also give our thanks to member Don Walton who initially took on the job but due to ill health was unable to complete the rigging. Now the boat is out of dry dock and ready to sail *Eastwards* once again.



Responses to items in the last issue of '*Eastwards*'.

From **John Muter**: 'Reading about the presentation of the Unit badge to 487SU in October 1957 rang a bell and reminded me of a tale I was told by a RAAF friend at Butterworth in 1965. In 1957 the then AVM Hancock was a member of the RAAF and at the time was AOC 224 group RAF in Malaya, and responsible for all Commonwealth Air Forces in the region. Just before he retired in 1965 Air Vice Marshal Valston Hancock, who was then CAS RAAF and famous for the size of his side-boards, was inspecting a parade when he saw an airman who was giving him serious competition in that area. He ordered said airman "Shave them off." "But Sir," protested the airman, "You have them." Sir Valston retorted "On me they look distinguished, on you they look ridiculous. Get them off!"

Re photo No. 25 (Issue 45, page 29) taken on 19 July 1957 of Air Marshal Lord Bandon, then CinC FEAF. His formal address was "The Earl of Bandon." Informally he was known as "Paddy Bandon" or "The Abandoned Earl", clever! I remember that he had a reputation for being a little unorthodox at times. What I didn't know until I read recently was that he 'hijacked' Gan to be an aircraft staging post and was reprimanded by Earl Mountbatten for doing so. I flew to Penang via Muharraq, Bombay and Singapore, and returned to the UK via Gan and Istanbul. I preferred the return route!.

On a later communication about the Abandoned Earl, John adds that the requisitioning of Gan makes a fascinating story. 'I wonder who (he requisitioned it) from and for how much. It was certainly a stroke of genius to enable staging to and from FEAF, otherwise air movement would have been a lot different'.

Note: From the above a search for information relating to the *de facto* 'hijack' of Gan by the RAF was undertaken. Nothing was really found to confirm the action but if true maybe the following explains how Gan might have come to be in the possession of the RAF? At the time of the 'hijack' (late 50s), Lord Mountbatten was in post as First Sea Lord and the 'Abandoned Earl' was Commander in Chief FEAF. Prior to the acquisition of Gan as a future RAF staging post it would appear the Navy (who were the present 'owners') had no further use for Port T as Attu Atoll was known to them. With post war changes in some British colonies it was thought that RAF air passage through them could be problematical, so the Navy was in the process of signing over the use of the atoll and fixed naval bits and pieces to the RAF. It might be the Admiralty wasn't moving fast enough for the RAF and the CinC FEAF authorised moving in before the necessary paperwork had been completed, hence the accusation of kidnapping of the site with, possibly some Navy assistance? Just guesswork, maybe some member knows the full story?

From the Royal Navy Research Archive (Tony Drury): Addu Atoll - post war military use. The airfield and former Port T remained virtually unused until January 1955 when 13 members of the Royal Air Force arrived on Gan to carry out a survey of the island, and at Hittadu in the NW of Addu Atoll, where signals equipment was to be erected. In 1957 the Royal Navy transferred the airfield into the control of the RAF for development as a staging post on the empire reinforcement route between its base in the Middle East and Far East. An advance party of 5001 Airfield Construction Squadron arrived off Gan aboard HMS Modeste at the end of January 1957....Maybe the speed at which 5001 arrived post transfer at the island was the catalyst that caused the First Sea Lord to reprimand the CinC FEAF?

In addition to Roy Jesson's article on 110 Squadron (Helicopters) on pages 26/27 of Issue 45. **Brian Lloyd** writes: 'I have enclosed an extract from our helicopter register re Sycamore XG538. Attached are pictures which I think identifies the helicopter in '*Eastward*' as the dates seem to tie up. Also included are three pictures (overleaf) of 848 Squadron (Fleet Air Arm), referred to as 'Navy' in the Summer issue, all taken via KL. 848 operated mid 1954 to December 1956 in support of RAF operations as the RAF aircraft were suffering from mechanical problems'.



Left: WV194 with troops waiting to emplane. These are probably Malay Police or Malay Regiment. The pilot stayed in his seat with the rotors turning and the crewman on the ground directing loading. Below left: WV192 lowering a tracker dog. Winches were used (occasionally) but were found to interfere with aircraft performance. Below: WV195 with guard in position.



The extract from Brian on Sycamore XG538 accidents (XG538 featured page 26, issue 45) is shown below:

1. After takeoff from 2 FIB, Ipoh on 13.5.58 Sgt C Tinkler heard the engine note change to a higher pitch and experienced a loss of power. After turning through 180 degrees to avoid near-by houses he made a forced landing. XG538 rolled forward some 15-20 yards with the brakes on and stopped short of a 3-4 foot deep monsoon ditch. As the two passengers were about to open the doors, the earth gave way and the helicopter slid to the left. The slowly turning rotor blades were destroyed when they hit the bank of the ditch. Repaired by 13.5.58
2. To 110 Sqn 28.4.60. **Post Emergency** Cat 4(P) after rolling over on take-off from Na Plang, Thailand. Re-assessed Cat 5(S) and 'Struck Off' on 28.9.60. Pilot: Flt Lt J D Bradley. A young boy was injured by a fragment of rotor blade but made a full recovery after being flown to hospital by Flt Lt H H J Browning who, following initial reports of the accident, had been despatched from Butterworth with what proved to be a somewhat inadequate spare tail rotor blade! The boy was later flown back to his home by 110 Sqn and presented with a fishing rod - probably a safer pastime than watching 110 Sqn helicopters attempting to take-off.

Annual subscriptions: members are reminded that these are now due on the 1st January each year.

Member **Ronald Ingle**, Station MO at Butterworth 1953 to 1955, in an e-mail, asked if the March 1954 'official visit' of Air Commandant Nancy Marion Salmon, Director of the WRAF (1950 to 1956) to Butterworth should be included with the list of official photographs listed on pages 28-29 Issue 45? The answer is yes, although this visit pre-dates Group Captain Baxters photographs, the photograph of Air Cmdt Salmon and Fg Off Ingle taken at Butterworth Sick Quarters seems to be one of very few taken that the Director of the WRAF appears in. A fitting addition to the collection of official photographs from the 50s.



Air Commandant N. M. Salmon

Flying Officer R. Ingle

Charlie Tagg tells of the time 45 Squadron paid a visit to Butterworth: 'Reading the article in the last *'Eastward'* magazine I was reminded of something that occurred at Butterworth. I'm not sure if it was in 1953 or '54, but 45 Squadron flew into Butterworth to use the ranges for some practice. When I was at Butterworth, it was basically the old Jap airfield, with improvements! The runways were (one) in from the seaward end inland and the other running north to south with a T junction joining both. They could be used in both directions.

45 Squadron landed from overland towards the sea. They all got down alright and taxied back to the other runway where 33 Squadron Hornets were parked. It was at the T junction where they had to turn left that the trouble started. The first nine aircraft did the turn correctly, the last three thought they would be clever and cut across the grass. Unfortunately it was rather 'boggy' and they got stuck. So they had to be towed out by tractor, which caused much amusement to all in 33 Squadron.

One of my fellow armourers, name of 'Rocky' was very good at drawing so we found a sheet of paper about 12" square for him to draw a 45 Squadron badge (with 45 written on it) and a tractor in the middle. I can't remember what was written for the squadron motto but it was something to do with tractors. We pinned it up on the canteen notice board where it caused more amusement. When the duty officer came round, he turned

out to be a 33 Squadron pilot. He looked at the drawing, then took it down. The last we heard of it was that it was on display on the notice board in the Officers Mess.'

Rob Lewis adds to the Singapore Riot Squad story, and more, from the last issue....'One item which leapt off the page was contained in your address on page 5 of Issue 45. I well remember the Singapore riots episode. Late one afternoon, practically the whole unit was jerked into action and issued with garb as depicted on page 12. We were marched to the armoury and issued with rifles and ammo, and then put on two hours standby for flights to Changi. As stated in page 5 Plt Off Symondson was our immediate boss. As things turned out, the riots melted away and we were stood down.

I have no recollection of the events mentioned by my two colleagues, Bill Wardle and John Rutland. Were there two similar incidents? I was on leave at Tanjong Bungah at the time. However it was nice to see some of my old friends again, and I hope to see you all at next years reunion.

The item by Air Commodore Cooper OBE was most enlightening. I used to wonder what 45 Sqn were up to when they weren't engaged in practice interceptions with 487 SU. At the time Air Cdre Cooper was Sqn Ldr Cooper and he provided HRH The Duke of Edinburgh with an armed escort when HRH stopped over at Butterworth en route to Melbourne to open the Olympic Games in 1956.'

Mata Kuching & Dear John Letters by **Don Brereton**. 'From the Mata Kuching story in the last newsletter the words in Malay could mean, in English, *eyes* and *cat*. In the fifties it was believed that it meant *Eyes of the Cat*, the cat being a Tiger. The name was meant to be the area where RAF Butterworth existed. Somewhere I remember there was a badge showing two eyes surrounded by black and yellow stripes (tiger) but where it was I can't recall. Dear John Parties - 'These have never been mentioned in the newsletter before! The subject was brought up by a non-member, Roy Street. He says when anyone got a *Dear John* letter a party was called for in the NAAFI bar. The offending young lady's photograph was pinned up on the darts board and partakers were invited to throw darts at the target. But it was really all about drinking large amounts of Tiger beer and falling down the monsoon drains on the way back to the billet. Do any other members have experience of receiving the dreaded *Dear John* letter?' Don goes on to say they were fairly common with regulars who were out there 2 to 3 years!



Another communication from **Don Brereton** who writes about the FEAF tie he owns that was previously in



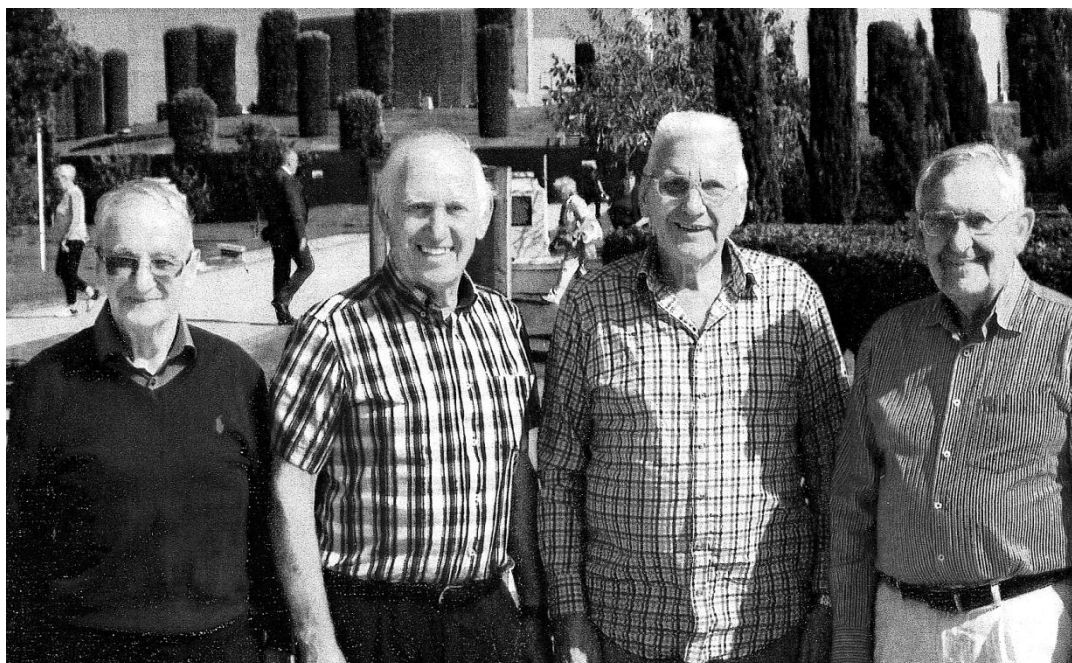
the possession of the late Dave Martin: "The tie was acquired (by Dave Martin) from Gieves of London 20 plus years ago. When I enquired about them I was told they had stopped selling them. It would be interesting if anyone can tell me anything about the motif/history of the tie?" The design (left) features silver coloured junks on a deepblue background and is compared to the present day RAFBPA motif (right) of a junk and hornet/kris on RAF colours background. If



anyone can help out Don with his request please let Dave Croft know, who in turn will inform Don.

Annual subscriptions: members are reminded that these are due on the 1st January of each year.

Don has also written about the latest meeting of his local group from the class of 1956-1957 at Butterworth, meeting up on the 1st September (2016) at the National Arboretum where all did the tour on the train. Don remarks there were 300 monuments, all very well sighted, followed by a meal in the restaurant and a good chat about the old days and a personal recommendation to visit for anyone who hasn't been to the Arboretum yet. He also recommends that the best part of a day be given in order to see everything.



Cpl Roy Street SAC Hill-Baldwin SAC Don Brereton Cpl Bill Boulton

Mike Gregory writes from his home in the USA: 'Having represented the RAF Benevolent Fund as their welfare liaison and advocate for some twenty-six years (since 1990) in the USA, the RAFBF nominated me for membership of the RAF Club in London.

I recently received official acknowledgement (dated 8 September 2016) and look forward to receiving the induction information package illustrating the available amenities....and the fees and dues! I was under consideration many years ago when nominated by two AVM's who were my guests in California, but at that time eligibility was restricted to commissioned personnel only. Since that time the regulations have been amended to include O/R's who have given dedicated service to the RAF in some significant way and this time my nomination was accepted. Thus a National Serviceman, demobbed with the exalted rank of SAC, will be bending elbows at the Club bar with staff rank officers, some of whom have been my guests in California for various RAF commemorations over the years.



I am pleased with the recognition and that I have somewhere to stay in London when visiting other than spending the nights *Under the arches, I dream my dreams away.....*'

Congratulations Mike, from all at the RAFBPA.

The Red Spot on the Wall.....by Don Brereton

In honour of the return of the RAF Butterworth photo album, originally in possession of Group Captain R. E Baxter (Station Commander RAF Butterworth 1955-57), to its RAFBPA spiritual home prompted member Don Brereton to put pen to paper and write the following account:

Ronald Edmond Baxter was born in Ellesmere Port on the 3rd May 1913. The family already had a daughter, Audrey Ellen, who had been born in 1910. Shortly after his birth his parents, Canon and Mrs A. Baxter, moved to a church in Chester, and that's where Ronald attended his first school, Kings School. Later he attended St Edward's School in Oxford, and from there he went to King's College, Cambridge University, where he gained a BA, followed by a MA in Classics. During his time at Cambridge he also joined the University Air Squadron.

He joined the RAF in 1936 and trained to be a pilot, eventually progressing onto multi engined aircraft. As a Flying Officer he was posted to No. 104 Squadron which converted to Blenheims in 1938. He was promoted from Flight Lieutenant to Squadron Leader on 19th October 1940, the same year that he had the privilege (on one occasion) to pilot the Duke of Kent.

In May 1943 he was promoted to Acting Wing Commander and appointed Commanding Officer of No. 106 Squadron, flying Lancaster bombers. No. 106 Squadron was based at RAF Syerston and later at RAF Metherringham. The squadron was previously commanded by Wg Cdr Guy Gibson followed for a short period by Wg Cdr Searsby before Wg Cdr Baxter 'dropped' in.

Much detail about R E Baxter is hard to come by but a rare insight into him when with No. 106 Squadron is given by the aviation author Martin Bowman in the story of Lancaster pilot Warrant Officer 'Ted' Robbins and his crew - *'27/28 May (1943), 518 aircraft, the majority being Lancasters, were detailed to raid Krupps of Essen, the most hotly defended of all targets. Fate took a hand, Ted Robbins mid-upper gunner reported sick with a throat infection. Ted Robbins was keen to go and he asked Wing Commander Ronnie Baxter for a spare mid-upper gunner. The Wing Commander was not flying that night so he offered the services of his own regular mid-upper, Sergeant Howard John 'Spud' Taylor, adding "he's a nice boy from Birmingham, only nineteen so make sure you take great care of him". The offer was accepted but 'Spud' came in for some leg-pulling because some of 'Ted's' crew thought he was 'disgracefully upper-class'.* Unfortunately the aircraft and crew failed to return from that operation, the stricken Lancaster making a text book crash landing in Holland, skimming over water and a dyke before ploughing through a field of barley. All the crew survived and became POW's...the Dutch farmer whose field was ploughed up by the skidding aircraft later made a claim against the RAF for the loss of his crops! I don't know if the RAF paid up?

Wing Commander Baxter was awarded the DFC in January 1944 and left 106 Squadron during March of that year. A month after he left the squadron, an aircrew member of the squadron was awarded the Victoria Cross. Flight Sergeant Norman Jackson (Flight Engineer) had climbed out on the wing of 'his' Lancaster to put out an engine fire...while the aircraft was still flying! Badly burnt, with no chance of getting back into the aircraft, he was forced to use his parachute and became a POW. After the war he was awarded a pension of £2 a week. Following his death his medals were sold at auction for £235, 250 and are now in the Imperial War Museum, London. Norman Jackson VC was adopted at a very early age - the same family adopted another boy, Geoffrey Oliver Hartley, later awarded the George Medal (1951) while serving as a Police Lieutenant in the Federation of Malaya Police at Kuantan.

After the war Wg Cdr Baxter stayed on in the RAF and on the 1st October 1946, his rank became substantive. Where he was stationed and his posts were for the period 1946 to 1955 is not known at this time, but it is on record he was promoted to Group Captain in July 1953. In 1955 he became Station Commander at RAF Butterworth in North Malaya. He was in a war again, and with the help of Station

Warrant Officer Preston, he ran an efficient station.

Whilst at Butterworth he kept up his flying hours, regularly flying the Station Flight North American Harvard aircraft. Apparently the only set back at Butterworth Gp Capt Baxter suffered was when Louis, his pet gibbon, bit his ear. This happened when he brought it a banana, but it got stuck in his pocket! Unfortunately this happened in front of the meal queue outside the Airmen's Mess and he had a big white bandage over his ear for what seemed like weeks. To add to this, Mike Ward, in the Spring 2002 newsletter wrote that Group Captain Baxter used to swing his pet gibbon between his legs. Louis was a white-handed gibbon, the Malayan species most often kept as a pet.*

Another small part of daily life at Butterworth during this time was seen when ex-Corporal (but not then) Roy Street from Air Movements, was charged after he inadvertently entered an 'Out of Bounds' area. Before he was marched into the Gp Capt's office SWO Preston ordered Roy, when standing before the officer, to look directly at a red spot on the top right hand side of the wall directly behind him. He was told that on no account was he to look at the officer's face!. Roy got two weeks CB and came out of the office a little puzzled as to why he had to look at a red spot throughout the proceedings?

Ronald Baxter left Butterworth late 1957 or early 1958, taking with him the official visitors album of photographs taken during his time there, the zenith being that of Prince Philip's visit of 31st October 1956 (I was on the Guard of Honour for his visit). The album, measuring 18" by 12" and weighing 8lbs, has many quality photographs taken by the station photographer at the time.

Again knowledge of his movements within the RAF after Butterworth remain patchy, but 1960 saw him as Station Commander of RAF Uxbridge and retiring from the RAF (as a group Captain) on 30th May 1968. He passed away in March 1999, aged just short of 86.

Somewhere along the way the album came to ex-RAF Aero Fireman Derek Thomas who was involved with the running of the 106 Squadron Association. Derek died in 2014 and in 2016 his widow, Joan, passed the album to RAFBPA member John Crooks, who in turn passed the album onto Dave Croft, the Association Archivist.

So after 59 years, the album has ended up exactly where it should be. When Dave Croft told me about the album I couldn't help but find out a little about our old Station Commander, and I would like to think that is what I have done.'

** Whilst reading this account of Don's I (DC) recalled Tony Paley's article in the Easter 2013 Issue 35 of Eastward where he mentions a gibbon kept at the RAAF 'Beastie Club', which ended up in the UK*. I thought it might have been Louis so contacted Tony and he replied "The gibbon we assisted in packing in air/freight was destined for Jersey Zoo. Apparently Gerald Durrell had just started the zoo and was looking for help to build up their stock as it were. It was Mrs Fleming's connection with the Channel Islands that was the clincher. This was in 1959.*

I paid a visit to Jersey Zoo three years ago and was greeted with a short talk by a member of staff on the origins of the Zoo. The young lady outlined Durrell's aims and his way of gathering the animals. I mentioned the Butterworth gibbon and was promptly asked to attend the Admin Office where the staff were very interested in the story. They confirmed the arrival of the gibbon from their records, and not only that, the gibbon apparently lived happily for 40 years. I didn't know they could last that long, but there you go. I e-mailed the photo (that appeared in Issue 35) for their records and received a very nice reply."

** The gibbon was flown by a Bristol Freighter of 41 Squadron RNZAF, to Changi and then by RAF Transport Command to the UK.*



Stinging Hornets and Venoms- No's 33 and 45 Squadrons at Butterworth in the 1950s.

In this part of the newsletter an extract from *The Flying Camels* by Wg Cdr C G Jefford (with permission) is featured, preceded by an article, *Memories of Malaya*, by Fred Hoskins, one of the early 33 Squadron pilots. This article has been featured in the newsletter previously but perhaps it is fitting that it is included again to help give a rounded picture of those early flying days on both squadrons.

Memories of Malaya

Butterworth 1952: 'After getting my wings, and that so thin as to be an almost invisible ring on my sleeve, I moved all the way from Cranwell to Swinderby to join No. 204 Advanced Flying School with which I was transferred to Bassingbourn. Having completed the course on the Mosquito T3 and FB6, I was sent to the Far East Training Squadron (FETS) at Seletar, Singapore, where I was converted on to the Hornet, another De Havilland design. From there I was fortunate enough to be posted to No. 33 Squadron at Butterworth in the north of Malaya, on the mainland right opposite the island of Penang. Butterworth in those days was a small station commanded by a Wing Commander. Effectively, it comprised just 33 Squadron, an Armament Practice Camp (APC) and the support for those units. No. 33 was my first squadron and in due course it turned out to be my last as I had the good fortune to command No. 33 at RAF Odiham from 1971 to 1973 when it was equipped with Puma helicopters.

At the date of which I write, 1952, No. 33 Squadron was equipped with the Hornet F3 and a few Mk F4s which could carry a vertical camera for photographic reconnaissance, but the (main) role of the squadron was fighter/ground attack. The Hornet was, to put it simply, a smaller single seat derivative of the Mosquito with a wing span of 45 feet instead of 54 feet, and entry to the cockpit through a sliding canopy instead of squeezing up through a small hatch in the bottom corner of the cabin. In my eyes the Hornet was one of the best looking aircraft ever built, its sleek lines enhanced by that De Havilland trademark, the elliptical tail fin and rudder, which in the case of the Hornet was enhanced by a dorsal fairing into the fin.

The Hornet was designed for long range bomber escort in the war against Japan, but that war ended before the Hornet could be used in that role. In the Malayan Emergency (Operation Firedog), it was employed on strikes against the Communist Terrorists (CTs). For that purpose it was armed with two 500 pound bombs, four 60 pound rockets and four 20mm cannon. It was fast (420 knots) and as its two engines were 'handed' (turning the propellers in opposite directions) it had no tendency to swing on take-off.

Butterworth in 1952 had the reputation of being somewhat 'wild'. This reputation had something to do with its remoteness, far from the delights of Singapore, and something to do with drinking Tiger beer I seem to recall. Indeed the instructors on FETS had advised us that we would have to be prepared to play liar dice and drink Tiger beer when we went to Butterworth for the armament training phase of our course. Without those attributes we would lack what is now known as 'street cred'. In fact, the favoured tippie was Anchor and those who drank Tiger were thought to be a bit on the rough side, even by Butterworth standards. Anchor was so popular that there was a hush of disbelief and horror when the Padre referred one day to St Paul, when caught in a storm at sea, as "casting out three anchors". Anchor was even consumed at the table on dining-in nights without the knowledge of the top table...all that was necessary was for those preferring it to wine to ask the bar boy (a non-PC expression then common in the Far East and perfectly acceptable to all concerned, including the 'boys' themselves), to bring 'Chateau Anchor', whereupon a bottle would be produced wrapped in a napkin and poured very carefully to minimise the head.

But I digress. Butterworth's reputation was also related to the fact that until just before I arrived everyone had been living in attap huts, and also to the fact that during the Emergency all aircrew and officers carried

pistols at all times. At lunch time these weapons were deposited, i.e. left lying about, on a table in the mess entrance. So it might be said that a certain element of the Wild West was involved at Butterworth, particularly as it was known that a few of the more unconventional souls would think little of firing at, for example, a snake if such were to be seen in the mess. A few of us rode BSA Bantam 125 cc motorcycles and an air traffic controller named F Howard Stirling (we never did know what the 'F' stood for) would occasionally take a friendly shot at these with a Vary pistol as they crossed the runway going to or from the squadron. Once he hit a rear wheel. Howard also liked to produce a pair of sabres at the end of a dining-in night and fence without helmets or protective clothing. In my mind's eye I can still see a target figure scratched on the wall of the billiards room, and a few ripped shirts!

It was Howard who crammed a Sten magazine into his pistol holster to give him a 'quick on the draw' capability. When, during the AOC's annual inspection, he demonstrated this to the great man on the balcony of the ATC tower the weapon left the holster at great speed when the flap was flipped open, just as intended! Unfortunately Howard failed to catch it and as he had not fitted a lanyard the weapon flew down to the ground below the tower. Then there was the 'boat', or hydroplane, he built out of two Sunderland wing tip floats with a structure of 3 inch rocket motor tubes supporting a salvaged engine and propellor from an Auster. It was not a success!

A quirk of Howard's was to give ATC instructions in rhyme, e.g. "Aircraft waiting with engines turning, take off by permission of F. Howard Stirling." Howard was not alone in this way in air traffic and I recall Ken Duke's ready wit as regards rhyming R/T. It was Ken who deflated one of our number who had just arrived from a course at the Day Fighter Leader's School and having flown the mighty Meteor, felt he was undervalued by being posted to a Hornet squadron. His name was Crowe and another of our pilots was named Duck, so when Jim Crowe led six aircraft one day and after take-off called, in DFLS fashion, "How many chickens have I airborne?", Ken replied "Four chickens, one duck and a crow."

All in all Butterworth was an interesting and exciting place to be at. Penang was nearby for off duty pursuits with most of us belonging to the Penang Sports Club for the rugby and Penang Swimming Club for the swimming and some social life. With rugby on Wednesdays and Saturday afternoons, and perhaps two games of water polo on Sunday mornings, I can now see why I was just a little slimmer in those days. As to work, we had plenty of opportunity for dive-bombing, rocketing and firing on our own ranges near some islands to the north of Penang, and this being the height of the Emergency we also had plenty of the real thing on strikes against the CTs.

Although a number of brick buildings had been erected by the time I arrived at Butterworth, the squadron offices were still housed in tents and the crewroom was an attap shelter with no sides - much more romantic than the brick edifice that took its place, and a sight more cooler. It was in one of those tents that I had my arrival interview with the Squadron Commander CCF Cooper. After the usual exchanges he said "Tell me, have you ever had an accident?" "Oh no sir!" I replied, conveniently forgetting about putting a Prentice into a cabbage on a previous occasion! He responded with "Good, keep it up", or words to that effect, Thinking back, he might as well have also said "Then make sure you don't start now".

Our aircraft were parked in line along the disused north-south runway, which was not very wide, and it was necessary to taxi into the line from the front and then execute a tight 180 degree turn to end up facing forward. This entailed using a lot of brake on the inside wheel and a lot of power on the outside engine.

Not long after my interview I returned from a flight to find that I was being marshalled into a rather narrow gap in the line. I started my 180 degree left turn and could see that it was going to be tight but had the reassurance of an airman at the starboard wingtip giving me the thumbs up. By this means I managed to slide my starboard wingtip over the port wingtip of the next aircraft. Looking back, I wonder if the National Serviceman thought he would get his revenge for being called up, was bored and thought it would be funny

to see a very new pilot getting into trouble....or whether he put his thumb up in mistake for down? Nevertheless it was my fault, but I did not receive any punishment for this 'offence', in fact I do not believe the situation became known beyond the flight commander because good old 'Chiefie' Sinfield (ex-Halton) just removed the wingtip fairings, knocked out the dents, and screwed them back on again.

How not to fly a Mosquito: With its 'handed' engines the Hornet was unlike the Mosquito. To take off in a Mosquito it was necessary to repeatedly lead with the port throttle and bring up the starboard. If you opened both together you would find yourself going at right angles across the grass instead of along the runway. In addition to the Hornets the squadron also had two T3 Mosquitos, used for dual checks and for instrument flying training. They were not very serviceable and so one did not get the chance to fly them very often, and when the day came it all seemed a bit difficult after the sweet little Hornet.

Shortly after joining 33, I was detailed for some solo instrument flying (IF) in a Mosquito which entailed flying out to sea north of Penang to find a cloud to fly in. However that was not the real problem! The only useable runway at that time ran east-west. There was a taxi track running to the east end of the runway and it was here that the trouble started. I had thought to myself that it would save a lot of time if I were to do my checks before take-off while taxiing instead of at the halt just before moving onto the runway. I got to the bit where you check the flaps are up and reached for the flap lever....you've guessed right!

The undercarriage, flaps and bomb doors were controlled by three levers grouped together in the centre of the bottom of the Mosquito's instrument panel. To avoid confusion (and thereby offset what I suggest was a serious design fault) each lever had a different shaped knob and the undercarriage lever also had a safety catch which had to be depressed in order to unlock the lever and lift it. This was intended to prevent the lever being moved by mistake - vain hope! Taxiing along, I reached out my right hand and grasped the undercarriage lever instead of the flap lever, released the safety catch and raised the lever. Immediately, there was an amazingly loud noise in my earphones coming from the undercarriage warning horn. This device came on when the aircraft was below a certain speed if the undercarriage had not been lowered and locked down and was intended to prevent pilots from inadvertently landing with the wheels up. Obviously, taxiing speed was well below the operative speed!

Fortunately the shock of the noise caused me to jam the lever down again, but when I looked at the undercarriage indicator lights I saw one was red, and it would not return to green. I ought to have done the sensible thing, namely stopped the engines, informed the tower and waited for someone to come out and put in the undercarriage locking pins. Remember the Mosquito had a tail wheel so the backwards tilt of the fuselage and undercarriage legs created a geometric lock and there was really no likelihood of the undercarriage collapsing if I shut down. But this did not occur to me. My thought processes were dominated by the noise in my ears and my first reaction was to think that everyone at Butterworth could hear it and realise what an idiot I was!

Therefore I continued to taxi cautiously, using the brakes as little as possible and pushing down on the undercarriage lever every few seconds. I simply cannot now remember whether I ran up the engines and checked the magnetos before turning onto the runway, but I suppose I must have. The red light was for the port wheel and the turn was to starboard so at least the brakes were not acting against the unlocked leg. On the other hand it might be argued that the extra power on the port engine for the turn would have same effect. In the event the port leg held as I lined up for take-off and began to open the throttles.

As I have explained, the Mosquito had a marked tendency to swing and to prevent this it was necessary to lead with the port throttle and then bring up the starboard. This in itself could be a little challenging for a relatively new pilot who did not have much continuity on the Mosquito. I was also intent on changing hands from throttles to stick so as to free my right hand to push on the undercarriage lever as often as possible.

Also, the wretched horn was still blasting away at me! Suffice to say that there was a decidedly dodgy feeling about the take-off run. Fortunately the port leg still held until I attained flying speed - just! At that moment I felt the leg go and the wing drop. I put on the opposite aileron to lift the wing at the same time as I eased back the stick to get off the ground.

After climbing away and settling down I found a cloud and did some IF as if nothing had happened - well almost. Then I returned to base and was glad to find that the undercarriage came down satisfactorily and locked with both warning lights green. It had not occurred to me that the undercarriage system might have been damaged by the lurching take-off, but luckily there was no harm done.

The landing was not good and after signing the Form 700 my flight commander told me so. I acknowledged this with due humility and forebore to say what I was thinking 'You should have seen the take-off!'.



**March 1953, No. 33
Squadron pilots.**

Front row

1st left - Pilot Officer

F. Hoskins

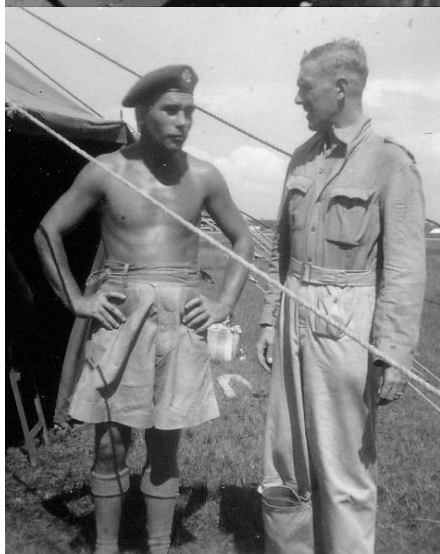
4th left - Squadron

Leader Cooper.



**O. C. S/Ldr Cooper
(wearing the beret)
with the duty Army
Liaison Officer at a
briefing of No. 33
Squadron pilots.**





**Above: (L) Ken Duke.
(R) 'Jim' Crowe.**

**Centre (L): F/Sgt Sinfield
with S/Ldr Hancock.
(R) 'Donald' Duck.**

**Below: Fred Hoskins
'running' up a Hornet
with the Armourer riding
'shotgun'.**

**Images: Flt Lt Duke by
Sam Mold, remainder
courtesy of Ronald Ingle.**



No 45 Squadron at Butterworth 1955-57

(An extract from *The Flying Camels* by Wg Cdr C G Jefford, ISBN 0 9526290 0 3, 1995)



Part 1. There were two significant additions to FEAF's Order of Battle in early 1955. Although No 1 Sqn RAAF continued to commit its Lincolns to FIREDOG for another three years, the RAF had by now virtually withdrawn this type from bomber operations. From March 1955 the detachments of Lincolns under Operation BOLD was superseded by the deployment of Canberra squadrons under Operation MILEAGE, the only difference being that the Canberras generally operated from Butterworth rather than Tengah. The second increment to the strike force was the arrival of No 14 Sqn RNZAF on redeployment from Cyprus. The new Squadron's Venoms were to be based at Tengah and the Rt Hon Sidney Holland, Prime Minister of New Zealand, visited the station personally to inspect the accommodation which was to be allocated to his unit. It was at the time occupied by the Flying Camels, which meant that they were going to have to be evicted. It was clear that Commonwealth defence policy at the highest level was involved here and OC 45 Sqn, Squadron Leader Viv Jacobs, realised that there would be little point in lodging a protest - especially as he was a Kiwi himself and might want to go home to Auckland some day!.

By this time the Hornet's day were numbered. Spares were becoming increasingly scarce and there were growing doubts about some aspects of the integrity of their airframes. Plans were already in hand to replace them with Venoms however, and a start was to be made by gradually running-down the Hornet force. As the first stage in this programme it had been decided to move the Flying Camels up to Butterworth and to amalgamate them with No 33 Sqn. A shot-gun marriage had been arranged and the two units were to be 'linked' as 45/33 Sqn with Sqn Ldr Jacobs as CO. This was to be the last manifestation of another attempt to keep squadron identities in use by artificial means, much like the business of the Flying Camels having notionally fostered No 27 Sqn's number plate back in 1947. The Linked Squadron concept had been introduced by AMO A.86 in February 1949 and between then and 1957 thirty two such combinations were to be formally established. In each case the first of the two designated units in each pair was deemed to be the one which was actually in being but it was supposed to keep alive the spirit and traditions of its *alter ego*. It was another well-intentioned but unrealistic idea; any squadron attempting to grant more than token recognition to its dormant self could only do so at the expense of diluting its own identity. Predictably the 'other' squadrons in these liaisons rarely received more than scant attention. The merging of Nos 33 and 45 Squadrons differed significantly from earlier 'linkings', however, in that it was created from two active units, rather than by grafting a defunct number plate onto a serving squadron.

After five years at Tengah the squadron had put down deep roots so it took the best part of a month to get it ready to move. The CO wanted to make one last demonstration of the Flying Camels' superiority before they left and he called upon the airmen to get all the aeroplanes up for one last flypast. They responded willingly and on March 18th the squadron's dispersal was empty while all fourteen aircraft showed off in fine style by flying up to KL and back to Tengah via Changi; twelve Hornets, the Vampire and even the Mosquito!

As FETS (Far East Training Squadron) was to disband on the same day that No 45/33 was established, it was quite clear that the Hornet was now living on borrowed time. With the Hornet OCU closed, there could be no more replacement pilots so the new unit was to be quite large to start with and then be allowed to waste away. Even so it was not intended to create a mega-squadron so to reduce the manpower to a manageable but still generous level there was a spate of postings from both units, mostly involving the early repatriation of those who were approaching their tour-expiry dates while a number of No 45 Sqn's airmen remained at Tengah to join other units. One stalwart member of the squadron who did not make the trip to Butterworth was Chopper. He was still going strong but was now over ten years old which was not a bad age for a hound of his pedigree in a tropical climate. Having previously established his authority over Negombo

and Kuala Lumpur he was now the undisputed canine king of Tengah and it seemed unreasonable to make him face the challenge of a new territory at his age; Chopper stayed in Singapore.

The squadron began its redeployment on March 21st when five Hornets were flown up to Butterworth. On March 31st No 45/33 Sqn formally came into being. As with the personnel of the two squadrons, their

aircraft had been pooled and, although a number of aeroplanes had been despatched to Seletar, the new unit had twenty-two Hornets to start with, of which nine wore the Flying Camel and thirteen No 33 Sqn's bar-style insignia (a red stripe on a pale blue band edged top and bottom in dark blue). There were also two Vampire T.11s (one of which was on loan to the New Zealanders) and a trio of Mosquito T.3s of mixed parentage. By this time squadron codes were becoming distinctly passé and it was definitely the 'in thing' to have a bar-type insignia. It was decided to resurrect the dumb-bell which had been worn by No 45



Sqn's Camels in 1918. It was to be painted in white and applied flanking the fuselage roundels with a miniature representation of the Flying Camel in each of the dumb-bells discs. A prototype marking was applied to WF975, a camouflaged ex-No 33 Sqn aeroplane, which carried the individual letter N on its fin in white. The strong ex-No 33 Sqn lobby were not over-impressed with the idea of having their markings replaced and there were proposals to have the aeroplanes marked as No 33 Sqn on one side and No 45 Sqn on the other - such are the problems which can arise from daft ideas like 'linked' squadrons. Fate was to intervene before this matter came to a head and the dumb-bell was never applied to any other aircraft.



The personnel complement of the combined squadron was as mixed as its fleet of aeroplanes, nine of the pilots being ex-No 33 sqn. In total the squadron consisted of twenty-two officers, one master pilot, thirteen SNCOs, twenty four corporals and ninety-eight airmen. Both of No 45 Sqn's original Flight Commanders were 'tourex' so their places were taken by Flt Lt R L Maslan as OC A Flight and Flt Lt J J Connors as OC B Flight. A period of accommodation and adjustment began as the two halves of the unit began to get to know each other, to bury hatchets and try to work out a new corporate identity. As part of this process the reconstituted A Flight embarked on an APC to shake itself down.

The reconstituted unit flew its first strikes on All Fools' Day when a dozen of its Hornets participated in Operation BEEHIVE, most of them landing at Kuala Lumpur before returning to base. The following morning No 45/33 Sqn suffered its first losses. The authorised strength of the squadron was only twenty Hornets so two of those on charge had to be disposed of. Fg Off J E Bowler was on his way back to England and the first leg of his journey was to be undertaken by ferrying one of the surplus aeroplanes, PX350, down to Seletar. Fg Off R J Russell, a relatively new arrival, was to accompany him in the other redundant aircraft, PX362. Most of the pilots, and several wives, were at the airfield to see Johnny Bowler leave. The pair took off and then turned back to make what appeared to be a farewell run across the airfield. In fact Bowler had an undercarriage problem and had called the Tower to let them know that he was planning to make a flypast so that the Local Controller could inspect his aeroplane. His companion, neatly tucked in on his leader's right, appeared not to have been aware of the complication, or to have understood its

implications. As they reached the Tower, Bowler banked to starboard to expose the underside of his aircraft and his No 2 flew straight into him. Both aircraft crashed on the airfield; both pilots were killed. The shock of this awful accident was aggravated by the fact that it had been witnessed by a large proportion of the squadron, including Mrs Russell. The tragedy did at least serve to unite the new squadron, albeit in shared grief.

The next day, April 3rd, Plt Off Sheppard was taking off in WL564, one of a handful of Vampire FB 9s belonging to the APC when it lost its brake pressure and he ran off the runway, but no major damage was done. A couple of weeks later three of A Flight's Hornets were grounded with serious main spar defects and the aircraft were condemned. The rest of the Hornets were permitted to continue flying but the original twenty-two aircraft was already down to seventeen. Hampered by the loss of three aeroplanes A Flight was unable to complete the bombing element of its APC, but it had done what it could by May 3rd and B Flight then began their APC two days later.

Having considered the wing problem, AHQ Malaya ordered the temporary grounding of all of its Hornets on May 7th and this edict was promptly endorsed by HQ FEAF and extended to those at Kai Tak. Coincidentally, De Havillands had been having misgivings too and had just informed the Air Ministry that in their opinion it was inadvisable to continue to fly the aircraft. With both the manufacturer and the operating authority expressing concern, London confirmed the grounding order which became permanent on May 17th. The Hornets were to fly just one more trip. On the 16th, fifteen Hornets were ferried gingerly down to Seletar where they were to be broken up. Two days later Hornet PX293 and Mosquito RR297 followed them in the hands of the CO and Sgt Jack Doudy. Since this trip was made one day after the type had been officially grounded it is quite possible that Viv Jacobs' trip was the last flight ever made by a Hornet. Whether or not, his and Doudy's ferries were certainly the last flights ever made by piston-engined aeroplanes of No 45 Sqn.

The period during which No 45 Sqn had flown Hornets had been a memorable one. The aeroplane is a prime contender for the title of the fastest, and possibly the best, piston-engined fighter ever produced, and its pilots certainly enjoyed flying it. Slow delivery of aeroplanes had made the conversion programme a rather protracted affair in 1952 but once it was up to strength the squadron became highly successful. During the Hornet era the squadron's role had been expanded and it had become a DF (GA) unit in the fullest sense, providing its pilots with a broad spectrum of flying experience and, since it was on active service, ample opportunity to make lots of very satisfying flashes and bangs. In its primary role of strike the squadron's Hornets had flown a total of 1,657 sorties, dropping 1,226 x 500 lbs of bombs and firing 5,073 x 60 lb rockets and 479,746 x 20mm cannon shells. It had also flown a considerable, but undetermined, number of additional operational missions on such tasks as convoy escorts and patrols. It was particularly unfortunate that this notably successful chapter in the story of the Flying Camels should have come to such an untidy and precipitate end, leaving the squadron with a confused identity, grounded and non-operational.

The squadron had been proud to fly the Hornet and had established a fine record with it, but there was no avoiding the fact that it was actually a WW2 design. By the mid-1950s a self-respecting fighter outfit like the Flying Camels really ought to have been operating jets - as its erstwhile colleagues on No 60 Squadron had frequently pointed out while the squadron had been at Tengah. By this time Nos 28 and 60 Sqn had both been flying Vampires in FEAF for four years and the latter was already in the process of re-equipping with the second generation Venom. With the recent arrival of No 14 Sqn RNZAF the proliferation of Venoms only served to heighten the contrast between these more modern aircraft and the Flying Camels' stylish, but dated mounts. Nevertheless, no one was expecting that the squadron would have to make the transition to jets in quite the undignified manner that circumstances dictated.

To be continued.



Versions of the 45 Squadron 'flying camel' that appeared on some of the aircraft

HORNET STING by Colin Parker



45 Squadron de Havilland Hornets WB898 (OB-A) and WB876 (OB-O) on patrol over Malaya c1952-53

Social & Sports - No. 33 Squadron 1965-67

Don Donovan was sent some images of 33 Sqn members that were at Butterworth before his (Don's) time there. Member **John Thorne** was on the squadron in the mid-60s and copies were sent to him as he appeared on one of them. Two (1965 and 1967) of the three images are shown below.



John replied with the following: The years came flooding back seeing these photographs once again. I only wish that the exploits of the Butterworth and Squadron Football Teams could be highlighted. In 1965 I, as a member of the RAF Butterworth Football Team, travelled down to Singapore to partake in the FEAF Championships, which we won. It was the first time that the FEAF Cup had left the Island of Singapore since the inception of the Championships. Many of our team played for the Penang State Team as I did on a couple of occasions. One player in particular, John Leather, was spotted by a German coach who stated that if John had been younger he would have asked him to go and play in Germany.

We had a good team and many observers said we were the best Station Team that they had ever seen. I still have my FEAF Winners Trophy which I endeavour to keep polished and cherish. I would gladly bring it for display at the next reunion.



John is on the front row,
second from right.

John Thorne back row,
first left.



And...the No. 33 Squadron League Cup Winners 1966-67.

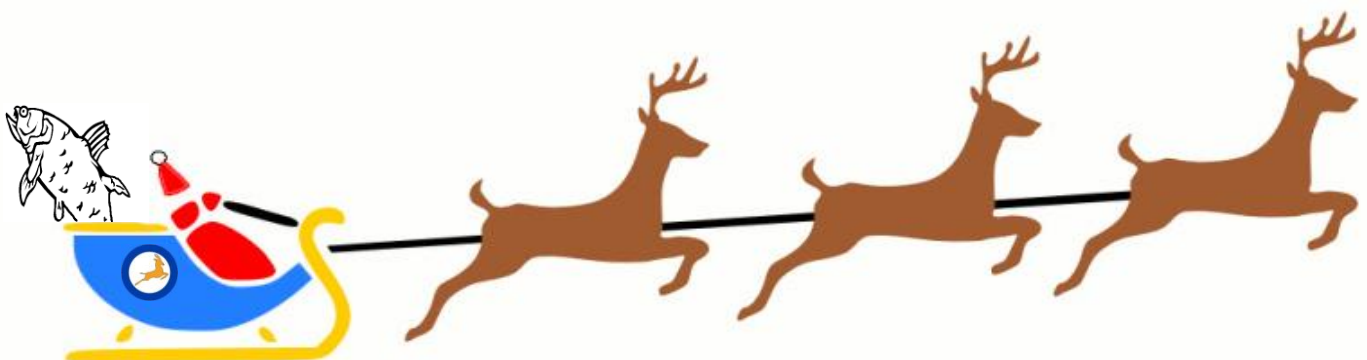


Back row: **John Thorne** (Member RAFBPA), Pete Danson, Hank Costain (CO), **Len Wood** (Treasurer RAFBPA), Alex McCulloch, Noddy Nunn (Sub), Willy Watson (Manager), John 'Trigger' Rogers.

Front row: Mel Wood, Bill Needham, Rab Donaldson, Colin Bagley, Mick Harber and Chris Botham.

A Christmas Story - 'The Flight of the Coelacanth.'

In past issues of 'Eastward' visits of troopships to South African ports, carrying FEAF personnel to their destinations, have been occasionally mentioned (and especially Perla Siedle Gibson, the Lady in White) As South Africa has been included, although only briefly, in these newsletters it was an excuse to include the following article, triggered from reading a book on the discovery of the Coelacanth in Indian Ocean waters In December 1952, a second Coelacanth (the first was trawled in 1938 in South African waters) was caught in the East African waters of the Comoros Islands. To bring this 'extinct' fish back to South Africa (in the race for national prestige) the South African Air Force played a vital role. This is the story of how a South African Air Force Dakota and crew were involved along with the foremost South African ichtyologist of the time, Professor JLB Smith, in order to win the fish for South Africa.



THE FLIGHT IN DECEMBER 1952 TO FETCH THE SECOND COELACANTH

by Major General Duncan Ralston SAAF (retired)

On a remote island.....

On the 22 December 1952, the renowned ichthyologist, Professor JLB Smith received a telegram from Captain Eric Hunt, who operated a schooner in the Indian Ocean, saying that he had obtained a coelacanth for the professor, and was at anchor at Dzaoudzi on the small island of Pamanzi, one of the islands of the Comoros group sited in the Mozambique Channel. Captain Smith and the professor were acquaintances who had often discussed the possibility of finding coelacanths in East African waters and now Smith had 'to find a way of getting to Dzaoudzi as quickly as possible, especially before any other scientists or interested parties found out and pre-empted him'. After endless frustrations Smith came to the conclusion that the only way open to him was to contact the Prime Minister, Dr D F Malan. Having been warned by Dr Vernon Shearer MP that Smith would be phoning him, Dr Malan looked up the coelacanth in Smith's book, *The Sea Fishes of Southern Africa*, previously given by him to the Prime Minister who was also responsible for the recently established research council that provided Smith with his funding. The professor eventually got through by telephone to Dr Malan, who was on holiday at the time, on the evening of the 26 December. After listening to Smith's story, and being aware of the importance of procuring the second coelacanth, Dr Malan agreed to phone the Minister of Defence the next morning and to instruct him to allocate a suitable aircraft to fly Professor Smith to fetch the coelacanth,

Planning the flight.

It was mid morning of the 27 December by the time the Minister of Defence instructions had been passed to the South African Air Force. This started a flurry of activity to find out where on earth Dzaoudzi was and if it had a suitable landing field; to get diplomatic clearance for the flight from the Portuguese and French authorities; to find suitable maps and charts which involved getting the Government printer to open his offices; to get financial authority and clearances to refuel the aircraft; to draw the money required for the flight; to assemble and brief the aircrew and determine the best route to follow; to service the aircraft and to plan the flight. The latter involved getting meteorological information, finding out the radio frequencies to be used and air traffic control details, calculating flight times and headings and heights to be flown, swinging the aircraft's compass etc., etc. All these activities were very time consuming and involved many people at many levels and countless telephone calls and telegrams.

The only information available on the airfield at Dzaoudzi was that it had been built by the South African forces during the invasion of Madagascar in WW2. There was no guarantee that the airfield was in fact serviceable and if not, the aircraft would have to fly to Madagascar from where a boat would be arranged to get to Dzaoudzi to fetch the fish. That decision would be delayed until more information was available. In the middle of all this hustle and bustle and vitally involved were the aircrew comprising the Commandant, Lt Col J P D Blaauw (mission commander), Capt P Letley (aircraft captain), Lt D M Ralston (navigator), Lt W J Bergh (u/t navigator), Corporal J W K van Niekrk (wireless operator) and Corporal F Brink (flight engineer).

The adventure starts

Take off from Air Force Station Swartkop was at 0330 on the morning of 28 December, landing at Durban after two hours and ten minutes where we were met by a smallish, slightly built and very intense person in the form of Professor Smith. He immediately inquired about how much water and food we had on board, and in spite of assurances that we had adequate supplies, he insisted we take extra water. This we were obliged to do as we were under strict instructions to assist him in whatever way he requested.

Take off was delayed by some forty minutes to fetch a suitable container from the nearby flying boat base at AFS Congella and to fill it with water. We duly got airborne again at 0705 and headed for Lourenço

Marques (now Maputo), the capital of Mozambique. Prof Smith was seated in the passenger cabin together with a small suitcase and a trunk which we later found to contain food, water and various pieces of equipment that he considered was necessary for our survival under the most adverse conditions. Since it was a freighter aircraft the seats comprised two rows of canvas seats along the sides of the cabin - certainly not the most comfortable of seating and also very noisy due to the lack of sound insulation. However Prof Smith settled himself down to read and make notes and I must say that, to his credit, we never had a single word of complaint from him.

It should be borne in mind that Prof Smith and we, the aircrew, came from two vastly different worlds. Apart from serving with the South African forces during WW1 in East Africa, where he became seriously ill, Prof Smith was an academic and had been one for many years. We, with the exception of Willem Bergh, were experienced aircrew who had flown on operations in WW2 in various theatres and had flown up and down all over Africa and were well aware of the risks and dangers involved and, in addition, were used to coping with them. Prof Smith had spent most of his time on *terra firma* and had no conception of flying. He was used to camping out rough in the field and hunting for fish from little boats and, I think, had a very good idea of the dangers involved. Prof. Smith was obsessed with acquiring the fish (the coelacanth) come what may and I am sure would have asked us to fly to hell and back if he thought it necessary. We on the other hand were wondering what on earth we were doing flying to a remote little island in the Mozambique Channel on a wild goose chase after a fish that may, or may not be, a relic from the past and in addition was probably very smelly by now. We were not even sure that the airfield at Dzaoudzi was serviceable, and if it was not we would have to return to Lumbo and rethink the whole situation through. We simply were not used to such uncertainty and haphazard planning but we had been given a task to do and there was no question that we were expected to do everything possible to achieve a successful mission.

The flight to Dzoaudzi

We landed at Lourenço just after 1000 hours and were met by the South African Vice-Consul and several Portuguese officials who helped us through the necessary formalities to obtain the clearances that were required. We also refuelled for the long haul to Lumbo near the island of Mozambique, where we landed at about half past three in the afternoon. On the way Prof Smith opened his trunk and produced some biscuits, dried figs and cheese which he shared with us. I learned later that there were also several hundred cigarettes for trading with the locals if necessary! He also asked if he could light his small primus stove to make us some coffee? The request was turned down because of the risk of fire on board - one of the worst nightmares for aircrew. He was rather miffed at being turned down and clearly thought he knew better. He also shook us up a bit by saying the fish might not be a proper coelacanth after all; he was merely 'going on Hunt's briefest words'. Some fifteen minutes later I went back to check on how he was getting on and was horrified to find him in the process of pumping up the primus stove prior to lighting it! He did not take kindly to being told in no uncertain terms to *please* stop what he was doing immediately.

I do not think our attempts at seeing the amusing side of fetching a smelly old fish went down to well with the professor. He was clearly worried that there may be some opposition to him removing the fish, but was convinced in his own mind that it was his by virtue of all the time and effort he had put into searching for another specimen and publicising it...after all, in his opinion, the French (The Comoros Islands were an overseas territory of France at the time) were aware of the coelacanth but had done nothing about it.

We were met at Lumbo by the Airport Supervisor, other officials and the hotel manager. Attempts to find out about the state of the airfield at Dzaoudzi came to nothing in spite of consulting with the radio station and the crew of an East African Airways aircraft. We went to the local hotel for refreshments after which a launch provided by the Port Captain took us for a short visit to view the island of Mozambique five miles across the bay. We were impressed by the famous fortress of St Sebastian built by the Portuguese many centuries ago. Then it was back to the hotel for a surprisingly good meal - we thoroughly enjoyed the prawns

and fresh fish on offer. However Peter Letley was later to be so put off by the smell of the coelacanth in the aircraft that he could never eat fish again. We spent an uncomfortably hot night in the hotel and were up again at 0330 next morning, getting airborne at 0430 for the flight to Dzaoudzi. Professor Smith, ever resourceful and opportunistic, had raided the pantry at the hotel and boarded the aircraft carrying a box of fruit. The weather en route to Dzaoudzi was relatively fine with scattered medium sized fair weather cumulus. With a moderate wind and a few white horses it was easy to calculate the wind speed and direction by flying three headings sixty degrees, one twenty degrees and sixty degrees apart and measuring the drift on each leg. Since I had flown many hours over the sea on maritime reconnaissance during the war I was able to teach Willem Bergh how to estimate wind speed and direction by using the wind lanes (faint lines visible on the surface of the sea) and the state of the sea as indicated by the white horses. In the absence of a radio beacon at Dzaoudzi we had to rely entirely on dead reckoning and our own calculations. However, our task was made easier by the fact that Pamanzi Island was directly behind the much larger Mayotte Island and the clouds over the mountain peaks gave us a clear indication that we were dead on track.

Arriving at Pamanzi with some heavy cloud about, we soon identified the position of Dzaoudzi airfield and were confronted with the problem of ascertaining whether the airstrip was safe to land on. Two low level slow speed passes over the strip with wheels and flaps down confirmed that we could safely land in spite of high hill at the end of the landing run. Soon after we had parked there was a brief, heavy shower of rain...something we were to put to good use later to speed up our departure from the island.

We meet the coelacanth

We were met at the airfield by Eric Hunt and a few French officials. The Professor ignored everyone but



Hunt and insisted on being taken directly to view the fish which was still on the boat. After assuring him that it really was a coelacanth, Hunt, however, said that for his sake it was essential to first meet the Governor at his residence. By this time the Professor was obviously seething with impatience and had no time for all the food and beverages laid out on a table at the residence. After greeting and thanking the Governor for his hospitality, Prof Smith insisted on seeing the fish, saying that we would return later to enjoy the refreshments. Down at the harbour Hunt pointed to a box near the mast of his vessel. After a moment of gazing at the fish, Smith knelt down and with tears streaming down his face, started caressing the fish. The fish was taken out of the box for further inspection and for photographs to be taken. While the fish was being

replaced in the box prior to be taken to the airfield, we returned to the Governor's residence where we enjoyed the spread of food and beverages. Unfortunately, being on duty, we could only have a taste of the vintage bottle of famous brandy especially opened for the occasion. We would have enjoyed a longer stay but Jan Blaauw, who had a smattering of French, overheard one of the Governor's aides telling him that there was still no answer from France. At this, Jan Blaauw, suspecting that the French government may insist on keeping the coelacanth and after a brief talk with Prof Smith, insisted that we would have to leave quickly to avoid a cyclone in the Channel. He pointed out that the showers we were experiencing were probably a forerunner of an approaching cyclone. Prof Smith then made a short speech, expressing his gratitude to the Governor for his assistance and hospitality, and for justifying his claim on the fish.

At the airstrip the fish was quickly checked and loaded into the aircraft. After some three hours on the island we got airborne en route for Lumbo. A normal short take-off technique was used, followed by a low level turn to seaward to avoid the hill at the end of the runway. After a time, during the flight, the smell of the fish began to permeate throughout the aircraft and would remain with us for the rest of the flight.

On the way to Lumbo Prof Smith came up to the cockpit and it was then that Peter Letley handed him a slip of paper stating that he *'Managed to intercept a message saying that a squadron of French fighter planes had left Diego Suarez with orders to intercept us and compel us to return to Madagascar'*. Poor Prof Smith nearly had a heart attack and after asking some questions stated that he refused to go back and was prepared to take a chance that the French would not shoot us down. It was only when Peter Letley and Jan Blaauw burst out laughing that he realised that they were pulling his leg. He was not very impressed and returned to the passenger cabin where he got into his sleeping bag and laid down next to his precious box. The weather deteriorated as we neared Lumbo so in order to avoid any confusion about the location of Lumbo we turned twenty degrees to port before our ETA. Thus when we reached the coast we knew for certain that Lumbo was to the north of us and we duly landed there just after noon.

Return to South Africa - Triumphant!

After refuelling at Lumbo we were in the air again before 1300, arriving at Lourenzo Marques at around 1820 in the evening. Prof Smith spent most of the flight wrapped up in his sleeping bag next to his beloved fish. After a twenty minute stop to refuel we were in the air again, arriving at Durban at about a quarter past nine having had to circle the airfield while the trailing aerial was dealt with which initially refused to retract. Once the aircraft had been parked we opened the door to let Prof Smith out where a large crowd and a battery of flash bulbs greeted him. We had to wait while he gave interviews to the news media and made a speech. Understandably all we wanted was a drink, some food, a shower and a bed. I think the Professor was even more exhausted but in spite of this he refused to let the coelacanth out of his sight, or let anyone else see it. The coelacanth was duly taken to the Natal Command Officer's Mess where it spent the night next to his bed - by this time I think he had become immune to the smell.

Prof Smith had somehow managed to contact the Chief of the Air Force late that evening and had obtained permission to fly to Cape Town to show the fish to the Prime Minister, Dr Malan, and also to stop at Grahamstown on the way to pick up his wife and son. At that time ladies were not allowed on SA Air Force aircraft so he achieved the impossible, but by then we were getting used to him getting his own way. However we were not very impressed when we told late in the evening that we would be going to Cape Town via Grahamstown in the morning. We had hoped to drop the Professor off at Grahamstown and return to Pretoria, and now we were faced with another day away from home in the middle of the Christmas break. Another short sleep and we were up again at 0300 for take-off to Grahamstown at 0450/ As Grahamstown airport had no radio beacon and due to low cloud we had to go out to sea and carry out a low level approach, landing at the airfield at 0705. We were given some welcome coffee and food before taking off again with Mrs Smith and young William, a rather large eleven or twelve year old, on board (*right*).

Once airborne, William delighted in running up and down the length of the passenger cabin disturbing the trim of the aircraft until Jan Blaauw sent a message back to tell him to stop, otherwise he would be thrown out of the aircraft!. Fifty years



later, on a flight to re-enact our arrival in Grahamstown with the fish, I reminded a much larger and older William that he would suffer a similar fate if he did not remain seated during the flight. This he took in a good spirit.

The Prime Minister meets *Malani anjouanea*

The flight to Cape Town was uneventful where we landed at around 1030 hours. On the way there, when Prof Smith again came up to the cockpit Peter Letley showed him a message stating that Dr Malan no longer wished to see the fish and wishing him a safe return to Grahamstown. Poor Prof Smith looked absolutely devastated until he saw the grins on the faces of the crew and realised that his leg was being pulled again. He states in his book that he could cheerfully have committed murder, and I believe him. In retrospect I think we were rather unkind to him as he did not share our sense of (air force) humour.

After landing at Air Force Station Ysterplaat the coelacanth was unloaded and, together with Prof Smith, was taken under guard to the Malans holiday home at the Strand. We, the aircrew, had the rest of the day free. We learned late that the coelacanth had been named *Malani anjouanea* in honour of Dr Malan, who

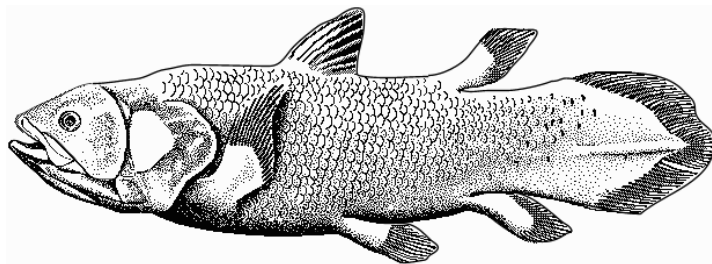


had authorised the flight, and to commemorate the island of Ajouan where it had been found. We took off for Grahamstown at 0830 on the 31st December with Prof Smith, his family and the coelacanth on board, landing there at 1145. There was a lot of low cloud on the return flight which again meant a low level approach to the airfield from the sea. We were met at the airfield by the Mayor and quite a large crowd. In a short ceremony Prof Smith presented each of the four officers with a copy of his *Sea Fishes of Southern Africa*, each copy inscribed with one of our names and the following " *With my compliments, in memory of the coelacanth flight to Pamanzu, Comores, 29th to 31st December, 1952.*" The two non commissioned officers were

each given a memento and a fifty pound note each, if I remember correctly. We also each received a scale from the coelacanth.

We managed to get away at 1215 for the two and three quarter hour flight to our home base at AFS Swartkop. That night there was the New Year's Ball at the Officer's Mess which we, the officers in spite of being somewhat jaded, were obliged to attend.....In 1953, France refused Professor Smith permission to return to the Comoros!

Happy New Year 1953!



THE CENOTAPH REMEMBRANCE PARADE - REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY 2016

UNITS OF THE FAR EAST AIR FORCE



Images on this page from Roger Hughes-Jones

Cenotaph Ceremony 2016 by Roger Hughes-Jones

This year we marched alongside our RAF Changi and RAF Seletar Associations under the banner of **Units of the Far East Air Force** for the first time. Our contingent comprised 17 marchers, eight from the Seletar Association, five from the Changi Association and four from the RAFBPA (John Rutland, Mike Ward, Mervyn Lindsley and Roger Hughes-Jones). Our friends from the Malayan Volunteers Group did not have allocated places this year so Rosemary Fell of that organisation requested that we present their wreath on their behalf, which of course we were delighted to do. We were blessed with fine weather, sunny and relatively warm which was ideal for marching, and the long wait before marching. After forming up in Whitehall we were just a few metres away from Sophie Raworth interviewing Iraq VC holder Johnson Beharry who enjoyed a lot of attention as he passed by us pushing the wheelchair of Korea VC holder Bill Speakman.



Our contingent was third in line to march past the Cenotaph and hand over our wreaths to be laid at the base. The official salute was taken at the end of the march by HRH Prince Charles, accompanied by the National President of the Royal British Legion, from the saluting dais opposite the Guards Memorial at Horse Guards Parade.

Once again the Cenotaph Ceremony passed without a hitch and was much enjoyed and appreciated by all who took part.

AN IMPORTANT NOTICE FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

CENOTAPH PARADE 2017 - The security arrangements for the 2017 Cenotaph Parade in London on Remembrance Sunday will no doubt be much the same as this year. If you wish to participate, it is better to put you on the list to be submitted to the organisers in good time rather than at the last minute, and should you be unable to take your place, no problem! So, if you think you would like to participate as members of the **Units of the Far East Air Force** contingent I will need the following information by 1st September please:

FULL NAME AS PER THE PHOTO ID CARRIED WITH YOU ON THE DAY

DATE OF BIRTH DD/MM/YYYY

PLACE OF BIRTH

FIRST LINE OF ADDRESS

TOWN

POSTCODE

MILITARY NUMBER IF APPLICABLE

In return you will receive a non-transferable ticket to enter Horse Guards Parade. Please e-mail me, or write to me, as per my address shown under Chairman, elsewhere in this newsletter.

Tony Parrini

I'M THE LAST ONE LEFT IN THE AIR FORCE

I'm the last one left in the Air Force;
I've an office in MOD
And a copy of Queens Regulations
Which apply only to me
I can post myself to Leuchars
And detach me from there to Kinloss
Or send me on courses to Cranwell
Then cancel the lot-I'm the boss

I'm the last one left in the Air Force
But the great Parliamentary brains
Omitted, when cancelling people
To sell off the Station and Planes
The result is my inventory bulges
With KD and camp-stools and Quarters
Plus a signed book of verses by Trenchard
Which I keep for impressing reporters

I'm the last one left in the Air Force
I suppose you imagine it's great
To be master of all you survey
But I tell you-it's difficult mate
I inspected three Units last Thursday
As C-in-C (Acting) Strike
Then I swept the runway at Leeming
And repaired Boulmer's best station bike

I'm the last one left in the Air Force
And it's not doing a lot for my health
Station Sports Days are frankly exhausting
Where the Victor Ludorum's myself
On Guest Nights the Mess is so lonely
There are times that I wish I were able
To pass the Port to the one on my left
Without watching it fall off the table

I'm the last one left in the Air Force
And it's quiet-but all that apart
There are plenty worse off, for example
The only Sea Lord for a start
She was called out last Wednesday evening
(Joint ops with the Army, my oath)
But their rowing boat sank in the Cannel
Which obliged me to rescue them both

I'm the last one left in the Air Force
And my kids say I'm never around
When I'm not flying Hercs or a Typhoon
I'm the lone QRA on the ground
Or I'm doing sea-survival at Plymouth
Shooting flares at the crowds on the Hoe
Or I'm Orderly Corporal at Linton
It's an interesting life-but all go

I'm the last one left in the Air Force
I'm ADC to the Queen
I'm Duty Clerk at Brize Norton
I'm the RAF Rugby team
Tomorrow I'm the Queen's Colour Squadron
Then air-testing several planes
And the day after that I'm in London
Preaching at St Clement Danes

I'm the last one left in the Air Force
And I'm due to go before long
But there's been no hint of replacement
And I won't even let me sign on
I hope to enjoy my retirement
As I've put up a fairly good show
And I won't cut myself off entirely

But you know you can always go, to reunions and meet those from long ago.

