



# RAF Butterworth/Penang Association



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

## NEWSLETTER

## CHRISTMAS 2006

### Aims of the Association

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

### CHAIRMAN'S CORNER



As 2006, and our 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Year, passes into military history Christmas and the New Year rapidly approach and its time once again to wish all members and readers of our website pages the best of health and good fortune in 2007.

Our Association always seems to be up to something – the latest innovation is the opening of a Forum on the internet for moans and groans, tittle-tattle, memories and any other valid reason for getting into dialogue via the ether. Our thanks to Laurie Bean in Malaysia for setting it up for us.

This year has seen the culmination of the combined efforts of all the Far East Air Force Associations to get the FEAF Memorial completed – what a great day we had to mark the dedication. I know a number of people who have been to the Arboretum to see the FEAF Memorial and I understand that they were all “most impressed.” My concern now is to see how it stands up to the Winter Weather!

REUNION AND AGM – just a reminder to fill in your application to attend the Reunion and AGM at Leeds/Bradford Ramada Hotel on 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> March 2007. You have been a bit slow in coming forward!

MEDEKA – 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary – A number of members who served in Malaysia in 1957 have taken up the offer made by the NMBVA to join a contingent going out the KL and other areas to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Malaysia's Independence next August – we look forward to hearing the reports in due course.



ASSOCIATION TIES – Stop Press – An order has been placed for another batch of 50 Association Ties. They might just be available for Christmas. If you want your first one or want to replace your old one, send ME (Address amongst the “Officials”) a cheque made out to “RAF BPA” for £10-50, together with your NAME and ADDRESS, and I will endeavour to get them dispatched in time for Christmas.

We owe Dave Croft, George Gault, Richard Harcourt and Laurie Bean our thanks in keeping us abreast with technology, developing the electronic newsletters, website and forum and to Len Wood, Peter Mather and Jean Allen for their unstinting efforts in keeping the books and administration straight.

TO ALL MEMBERS ACROSS THE WORLD, Anne and I wish you all a very Happy Christmas and New Year. May a more peaceful world develop in the coming year.

Best wishes.

**Tony and Anne Parrini**



## *EASTWARD*



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Neville Stubbings

## IN GENERAL

**Frank Loweth:** it is with regret that we have been informed of the death on the 4<sup>th</sup> September of Frank Loweth. Frank was an RAF Policeman based at Penang, 1946-47 and Butterworth, 1947-48.

**Please note:** Should you need to contact Jean Allen in her capacity as Hon. Sec. please be aware that Pete Mather is still 'holding the fort' until Jean is fully recovered and able to take over the Association administration. Pete's contact address is: 25 Budham Way, Bracknell, Berks RG12 7PE and his e-mail address is: [peter.bpa@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:peter.bpa@tiscali.co.uk)

### **Electronic version of the newsletter**

Following the entry in the Summer 2006 Newsletter electronic copies of the Autumn 2006 newsletter were sent to those members who indicated they would like to try receiving their copy this way. The numbers are still small and I haven't yet received much comment to help us to evaluate what people think of receiving their copy this way.

Should any other member wish to receive their newsletter as an electronic copy please send your name and e-mail address to Pete Mather. The list Pete holds will be the definitive list which Richard Harcourt will use to distribute the copies...Please remember that if you have registered your e-mail address with Pete you need to confirm it is up to date, especially if you have opted to receive the electronic copy!

### **Albatross or Eagle?**

In the Summer 2006 issue of the newsletter I mentioned Lancaster NX611 (page 5) at East Kirkby in Lincolnshire. During my visit there I was discussing various things with an ex-Lancaster crew member when I happened to mention the 'eagle' shoulder badges worn on RAF uniforms. He corrected me by saying the shoulder badges displayed an 'albatross' and this set me thinking.

I recall when in training the Drill Corporal referring to the albatross as being the bird represented on the badge but I, being a smart and observant person, thought the bird more like an eagle...this I tried to discuss with him on a logical footing only to find myself doing exercises very similar to jogging but around the parade square....and the bird was still an 'albatross'(I won't say what type because he was very rude about it!)

However, as time went on it was always recognised as being an eagle by all and I was happy to live with that but the doubts surfaced again when I recently looked at my official key ring of the Royal Air Force at the Royal Tournament. The bird represented is more like an albatross.....



Albatross (from the keyring)

Back to square one with the quest and the results of my research on the subject have revealed the following:

'There is occasional controversy over whether the badge that RAF other ranks wear on each shoulder is an EAGLE or an ALBATROSS. Some decades ago the explanation was given on the radio from someone who

knew the facts, due to being involved at the time. The design requirement was for an EAGLE with wings spread, but it was not cost-effective for the artist to observe actual eagles soaring, so he had to resort to stuffed birds in a museum. Now taxidermists have their own stereotyped ideas, and the mountain bird will usually be stuffed as though perched on its eyrie, while the ocean bird will be mounted as though soaring over the sea. Thus the artist used an albatross for the general pose, and an eagle for the details.



The final illustration was that of an EAGLE

‘The RAF albatross is blazoned .. "an eagle volant and affronte, the head lowered and to the sinister" (AMO A.666/49).

From another source: ‘I entered the RAF at the time that AMO was published (1949), and we learned from our drill sergeant that our badge was an albatross "because that's the only bird that takes a run to get into the air" (as helicopters were then some time in the future, and the VTO Harrier even further away, this was significant), and that although we were now to refer to it as an eagle because "some bloke at the Air Ministry can't tell the difference!", it was still an albatross. Recruits had been told it was an albatross since 1918, and for the type of drill NCOs we had then (who had all been through the war), "civvies in the Air Box" were of no account’.

**Royal Air Force History:** At an Air Council meeting on 1 August 1918, a badge for adoption by the Royal Air Force was approved. The badge was adopted was similar in design to the one used today with the exception that the circlet surrounding the eagle comprised a garter and a buckle. The badge was not submitted at any time to the King or to the College of Arms for approval.

The original designer of the Royal Air Force badge is not known, but it has been suggested that he was a tailor at Gieves Ltd (Tailors) and the bird he drew was an albatross. At an Air Council meeting in December 1922, decreed the badge as worn on the head dress which did not include a garter and buckle but just the crown and eagle with circlet was to be used at all times. In January 1923, the new badge was submitted to the College of Arms for registration, the covering letter stating the design received the approval of the King simultaneously with other details of the Royal Air Force uniform.

In May 1925, the College of Arms was asked to prepare coloured sketches of the badge, it being stipulated that whilst the details of the approved badge should stand, any modification of mere drawing, e.g. the eagle's body and the sprig of laurel, could be left to them [the College]. The College of Arms produced a colour drawing which was placed on file. The question of improving the badge was again raised in May 1941, the feeling being that a more war-like eagle might perhaps be adopted. However, nothing was changed. So far as can be ascertained, the design registered with the College of Arms in 1923 is still the official badge of the Royal Air Force, and although a version in heraldic colours (with some artistic licence) was produced in 1925 (mainly in connection with Royal Air Force drums), it seems never to have been intended that it should replace the original black and white drawing, except, perhaps where it was necessary to produce a badge in colour.

Whilst there may be papers in existence which may be at variance with this view, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, the badge now produced on Air Ministry Orders is the official badge of the Royal Air Force.

**Note:** It would appear that a considerable effort was made in 1949 to produce a definitive Royal Air Force badge and at least one authority, writing in *A New Dictionary of Heraldry* edited by Stephen Friar and published in 1987, asserts that: The official badge of the Royal Air Force has been in existence since 1949 and is blazoned, " In front of a circle inscribed with the motto *Per Ardua Ad Astra*

and ensigned by the Imperial Crown an eagle volant and affronte, (the) head lowered and to the sinister."

The RAF Eagle shoulder badge was removed from uniforms around 1973 and did not reappear until about 1998 when the RAF wished to re-establish its identity.

And finally what type of bird does the red badge of the tropical uniform represent?



Don Donovan

Perhaps some design artist confused by the albatross v eagle argument over the years had submitted his own design based on the 'Great Gonzo' from the Muppets TV Show?

## **LETTERS, ETC TO THE EDITOR**

### **Association Forum.**

Recently member Laurie Bean contacted me with respect to the concept of an Association Forum and setting one up for use of members and others interested in the Association. The following is the result of Laurie's efforts to date:

*"Whilst browsing various association web sites recently, I noticed that a common feature among them was that each had a forum attached. Such a system allows members, and any other visitors to the forum, to post messages on various subjects related to the association, display images which are also relevant and put up notices on future association events. The use to which this sort of board can be put are many and I thought that our Association might well benefit from something of this kind. Such a site could also be a potential source of new members for the Association.*

*Accordingly, I have, on a trial basis, set up a forum for the Association that can be viewed at the following link:*

<http://www.activeboard.com/forum.spark?forumID=96877>

*In its present form it is fairly basic. As new posts are made, it can be expanded to cover whatever subjects are raised. Most of the forum is a public one and as such, is open to whoever wishes to post on it. However, before doing so, anyone wishing to post must first register. Towards the bottom of the main page is the 'Members Only' area. This section is a private area and will only open to RAF Butterworth & Penang Association members. No-one else will have access to this area.*

*The forum is now up and running. I hope that those Association members who have Internet access will make use of it. I look forward to meeting you all there."*

*Laurie.*

Note...I have successfully trialled the forum. In my case the link to the above address had to be typed into 'My Favourites' on the computer but after that it has been plain sailing although it is intended to continue trialling the forum for some time yet. However should any member experience difficulties with access etc., please e-mail Dave Croft who will forward the problem to Laurie who, hopefully, will be able to help.

My thanks go to those who have submitted their stories to be printed in the newsletter. The newsletter does depend upon your inputs because when they are in print the newsletter ceases to be an information sheet and becomes a series of stories, adventures etc, hopefully of interest to all.

Thanks also go to Mike Ward for sending me a copy of The National Malaya & Borneo Veterans Association Journal 2006. It covers the Emergency and Borneo Confrontation from official and personal levels and also much more and is a fascinating read, full of important and interesting detail.

Also a thank you to Tony Flynn for donating to the archives two books. The first 'Who Won The Malayan Emergency' by Herbert Andrew is about the author's experiences as a police lieutenant with the Malayan Police Force followed by a commission in Templer's new army in the early 1950's. The second book is quite controversial, 'My Side of History' by Chin Peng. That the Malayan Communists continued to be a thorn in the security forces side after the 'Emergency' officially ended in 1960 is another story confirmed by the author. Forced to find refuge across the border in Thailand, Chin Peng's 'army' made occasional incursions into Malaysia in the late 1960's and posed a threat at the cross-country new road opened in 1982 linking Butterworth to Kota Bharu.

In 'My Side of History' Chin Peng tells of being ready to move some units south of the (Thai) border in 1968. Guerrillas for the 1968 excursions were sent to visit the old areas of operations in northern Perak with the possibility of re-establishing some of the deep jungle bases. These attempts were foiled by government security forces!

Which leads me into the part played at Butterworth in 1968. I was going to work, crossing the runway to 33 Squadron (Bloodhound missiles) and was confronted by 'a lot' of helicopters and armed soldiers described as being SAS. Through the grapevine we heard that Chin Peng's guerrillas had ambushed a Malay Police force near the border and the police had suffered serious casualties. After that nothing!

Recently I contacted friends who were with me during this period and no one seems to recall the incident, one member of the Association who shall remain nameless (Don Donovan) even mentioned that I might be 'losing it'! However Laurie Bean also remembers an incident from 1968 and, hopefully, will be able to find details of it. Following that Tony Parrini e-mailed me about an incident concerning a RAF corporal visiting re-fuelling outposts where he was fired upon. Further to this the 1990 issue of Insight Guide to Malaysia states, in respect of the Butterworth - Kota Bharu Highway, "After Gerik, (*Grik*) you will pass an army checkpoint. The army has a very large presence in this area, for it was here that the communist guerrillas had their last hideout in Malaysia. Since this is a desolate place, there are still fears that this would be the area that they would return to, should they inspire an uprising in the future. The highway on this section, between Gerik and Tenah Merah in Kelantan state is closed between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. for the same reason'.



**Other news:** John Dicks, the archivist for the RAF Changi Association has sent a CD of troopship photographs for the RAF BPA archives. My thanks to John.

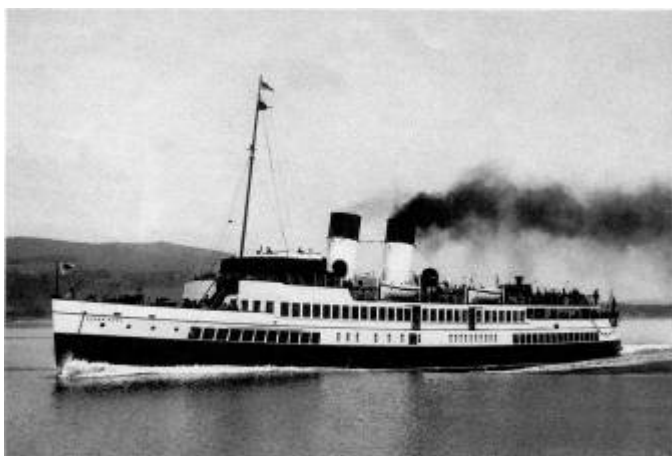
Member Sam Heaphy, via Len Wood, comments that the period 1960-63 is a bit thin on the ground in respect of correspondence and articles in the newsletter. The Association list for this period indicates we have a fairly substantial number of members, so perhaps we can persuade some to come up with a story?

Finally this newsletter relates to troopships in general and we start with a letter and photographs from Les Downey. I sincerely hope you enjoy this issue.

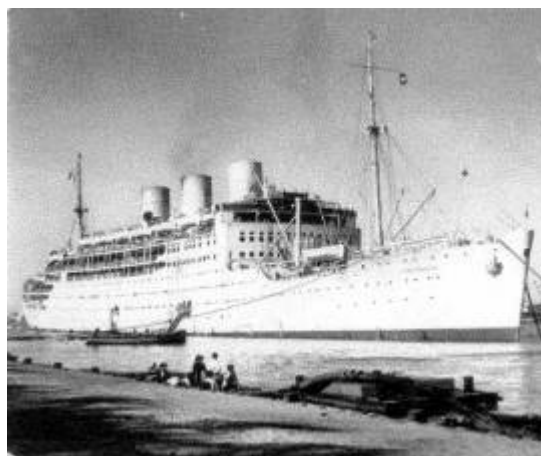
Les writes, "The enclosed photos may be of interest to those of us who travelled by sea to the Far East. In May 1945 the Queen Mary was used to tranship troops from Gourock to the last convoy to sail from the

U.K. At this time not all U Boats had reported in and it was thought that one or two might still do some damage to shipping. Along with ten other Oxygen Plant Operators bound for India I boarded the Queen Mary and was taken out to the Highland Chieftain, HMT F6. Before the war it had been a chilled meat carrier from South America, all the notices were in English and Spanish. At Gibraltar 'Gremlin' our electrician had to be taken ashore after developing appendicitis, he caught up with us later in India. A pay sheet shows that we arrived in Bombay on the 13<sup>th</sup> of June 1945 and were taken to Worli transit camp, where our 'Carry on up the Khyber' Solar Topees were burnt on the cookhouse fires and we were issued with Bush Hats, much to our approval. After a two days train journey via Calcutta the eleven of us arrived at Kharagpur, which was a stores unit. When the Japanese war ended all the stores were put on a train and sent to Calcutta, the camp personnel following by road, which took about 14 hours to cover 96 miles. After 5/6 weeks sea transport had been arranged for the stores and vehicles in one ship and a Bibby Line troopship (Derbyshire?) was fully loaded with men from all branches of the services. On arrival at Madras it was announced that another 500 troops were going to be crammed aboard, this caused a walk off of a large number of disgruntled 'passengers' and delayed the movement of the vessel for quite a time before sailing for Singapore and Seletar. Here we were accommodated in tents pitched on the grass patch on Mornington Crescent and had to use the facilities of the pre-war married quarters. As you know a strike took place followed by a dispersal of personnel to all quarters of S.E.A.C. When I last heard from 'Gremlin' he was in Kure, Japan. I went to Butterworth for 8 months and then was posted back to 314 M.U. the bomb dump until 13<sup>th</sup> May 1947 when I went to the transit camp at Tengah to await transport back home on the P&O liner Stathnaver. Finally being discharged at Kirkham where I had learned my trade in 1943/1944. I served 4 years and 4 days Does anyone else remember the Madras incident?"

*Les Downey*



Queen Mary' built 1933 and now a floating restaurant on the Thames



S. S. 'Strathnaver re-fueling at Port Said 1947



Troopship HMT F6 'Highland Chieftain' built 1928 for the Nelson Line. Sold 1959 to the whaling industry and ran aground in the Montevideo estuary in 1960. Broken up in the 1960's.

*All photographs Les Downey*

## Members' Stories

### HMT Empire Fowey – Southampton – Singapore 1955

*By Mike Ward*



After bashing the square at RAF West Kirby I was posted to the accounts office (drafttees' pay) at No5 Personnel Despatch Unit, FAF Innsworth in Jan '54. Some members will know this was the unit where the airmen were given their kit bag and despatched overseas.

So, I was at the right place when my name came up on Draft 1885G for the Far East. (Did not know what station). Set sail on HMT Empire Fowey from Southampton on 27 May 1955 together with 78 other airmen, a few RAF officers and a couple of RAF families, the bulk of the troops being the Anglia Regiment bound for the 'ulu' of Malaya. As I was the only RAF clerk on board I spent time in the Army office under the bridge. I escaped cleaning decks etc. but did take part in .303 rifle practice shooting at balloons dropped over the stern.

We proceeded uneventfully until we entered the Straits of Gibraltar. Then we went into the fog which was most unusual in that area. We could not see Gib and when the fog cleared we were well into the Med. The sea was as smooth as a sheet of plain glass. Our next port of call was Port Said at the head of the Suez Canal where we were plagued with the 'bum-boats' (locals selling 'nick-nacks' from their rowing boats). Very interesting going through the canal and through the Bitter Lakes.



*Des Clifford*

When I returned to Liverpool on HMT Oxfordshire two and a half years later the canal had not long been reopened and wrecks of ships could be seen in the Bitter Lakes.

So down the Red Sea to Aden. Aden is sand and volcanic rock, an awful place. Did not realise then that I would be posted to Steamer Point eight years later. There could be no greater contrast on earth than the RAF stations at Butterworth and Steamer. On leaving Aden for Columbo we endured two days and nights of monsoon conditions.

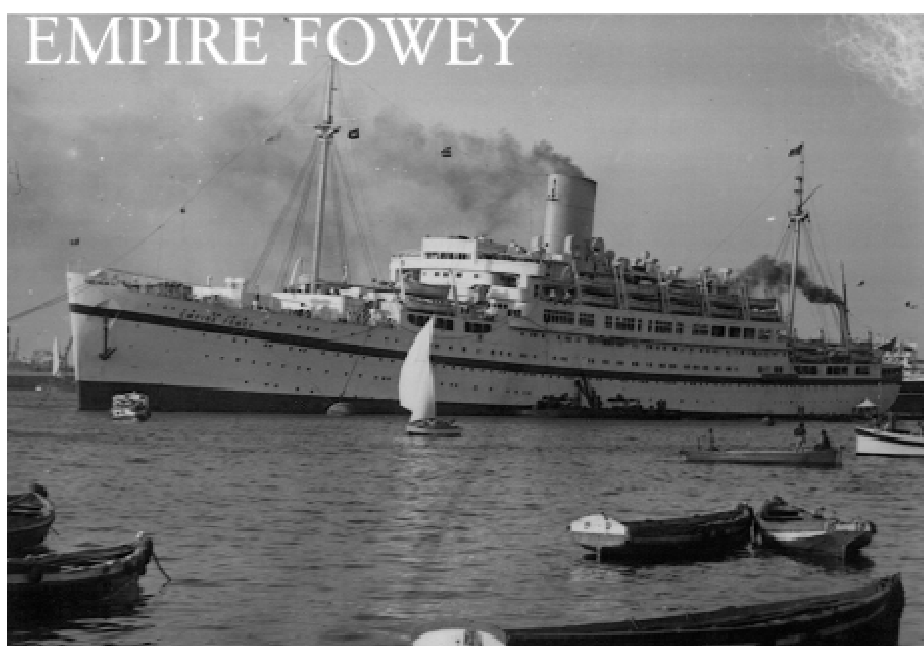
HMT Empire Fowey did not have good stabilizers and everything and everybody was rockin' and rollin'. Trays of food would fly off the tables in the mess and forward viewing from my office was nil with rain and sea pounding the ship.

Went ashore at Columbo and then all was calm to Singapore. Also on board ship was Wing Commander Gibson who was to take up post as FEAF Command Accountant. He told me that I was going up country to Butterworth and lucky not to be in the FEAF Base Accounts office at Changi which was a hive of accounts clerks.



Wing Commander Gibson was a great guy and we had pleasant conversations when he carried out inspections of accounts at Butterworth. So we disembarked at Singapore where three of us airmen were to embark on the train journey to Butterworth. I enjoyed the sea voyage as I did also the return journey (also calling at Limassol, Cyprus) on HMT Oxfordshire in 1957. Only 39 on the Oxfordshire and I again had the office job. But obviously everything was much more relaxed – going home! What price these two sea voyages today? Bon voyage.

### **The Troopship ‘Empire Fowey’**



The twin-screw, steam turbine vessel ‘Empire Fowey’ was the last of the big ‘Empire’ troopships to remain in service.

Built by Blohm & Voss, Hamburg, in 1935 for the North German Lloyd Line’s Far East service, she was launched as the ‘Potsdam’ and maintained a fast, regular service between continental ports and the Far East, with a call at Southampton until being taken over by the German Navy in 1939. At the end of the war she was captured at Flensburg as a war prize, acquired by the Ministry of War Transport and adapted for trooping under the management of the P & O Steam Navigation Company.

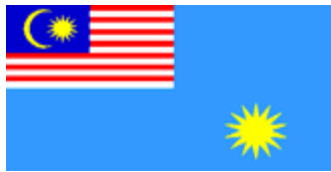
Persistent engine trouble resulted in her being completely re-engineered and boilered in 1947; the opportunity was also taken to up-grade the accommodation to post war standards with provision for some 1,300 troops and 300 civilian passengers.

All this work took three years and it was not until 1950 that ‘Empire Fowey’ returned to trooping duties, taking a full complement of troops to the Middle East from Southampton. It was shortly after this that the ship was ‘adopted’ by the Corps of Royal Engineers and a commemorative plaque was presented to the ship by the Corps and displayed in the saloon. The ship also adopted the practice of flying the Corps flag when entering or leaving port.

Sold in 1960 she continued in service as a passenger and pilgrim ship, the ‘Safina-E-Hujjaj’, until scrapped in 1976.

*Information supplied by Mike Ward.*





**RMAF Base Butterworth 2006**



Both photographs: Ray Rees-Oliviere

## Continued: Don Breton's visit to the Far East on board HMT Devonshire



Suddenly I felt my shoulder being shaken. "It's five thirty", a voice whispered quietly, "Will you wake your mates". "OK", I said, realizing that I must have dropped off to sleep after all. I woke the other four and we made our way to the ablutions to wash, shave and do the other things one does in the ablutions. The interior of the ship was heated day and night so there was no discomfort in rising early. We pulled on our working blues and headed towards the canteen.

The chief cook was a Liverpool land like myself, so we got on right away. "Spud bashers reporting for duty", I said. "Right, lads, follow me", he replied.

We followed him to a small locker with a single porthole. There was just enough room for us, several sacks of potatoes, a sluice which let out on the outside of the ship and a large circular contraption in the centre of the floor which was the potato peeler. We tipped twenty-eight pounds of potatoes at a time into the machine. When it had peeled the potatoes (it actually rubbed the peel off with its abrasive sides) our job was to cut the eyes out. We got through about ten fifty-six pound bags a day.

Before we started work we were issued with denim trousers for, after a while, we were covered with white. This was the starch from the potatoes. This would have ruined our working blues.

While the potatoes were being rotated inside the peeler they were sprayed with water, so the room did tend to get rather damp. After a shift we were wet, dirty and covered with white. But once we got the hang of the job it didn't take long to process the spuds and we usually had finished at about nine o'clock. Breakfast started at seven and, because we worked close to the canteen, the cooks gave us the nod and we were usually first in the queue.

I made friends with an Indian crew member, the same age as me, who worked in the canteen. When breakfast was over shortly after eight he would sneak into the locker with trays of bacon and eggs that were left over. There were usually about forty eggs and about eighty rashers of bacon on the trays. At eighteen we were always hungry and we made short shrift of the food but we could never quite finish all of it. What was left we dropped down the sluice. We always waited until Louis (my new friend's name was Louis D. Gomez) had left the room, we didn't want to discourage him from bringing all that lovely bacon and eggs for us.

The really good thing about the spud bashing job was that at nine o'clock we had our breakfast and finished work for the day. All the other lads on the ship were doing P.T., attending lectures, stripping Bren guns or many other such wastes of time. We, the spud bashers, went up on deck and found a quiet corner to settle down in the sunshine to smoke, talk and relax. This also allowed our denims to dry out.

We were now through the Bay of Biscay which was, thank goodness, behaving itself. I had got used to the movement of the ship by now and I never felt seasick throughout the whole of the trip.

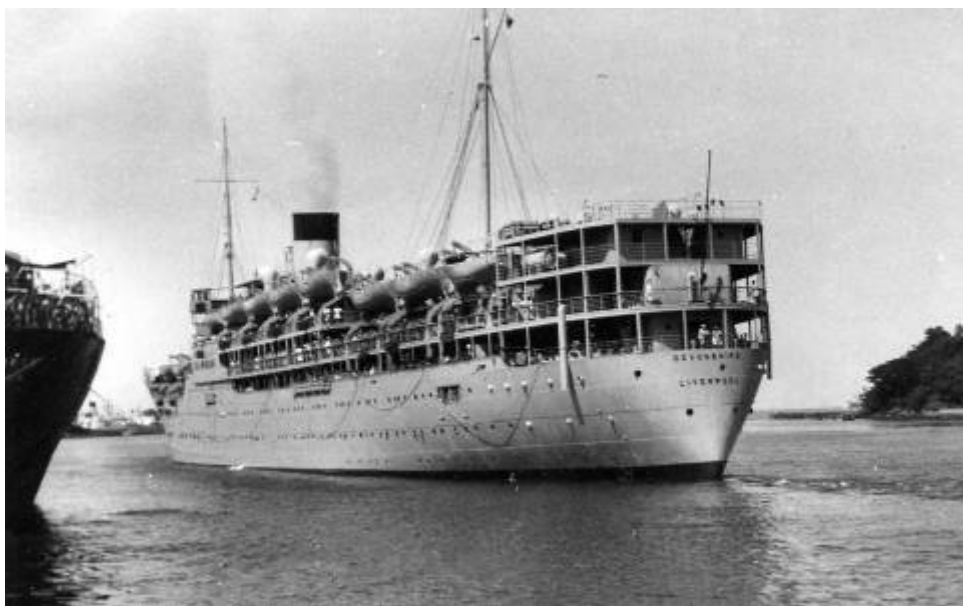
A sad occasion was the losing of my mug. It had been issued to me at Cardington. I was something of an impersonator of the film actor Robert Newton in the part of Long John Silver in the film *Treasure Island*. Quite often I would throw the old "Come 'ere, Jim lad", in that well known voice. Consequently I ended up with 'Long John' painted on my mug. However, I banged it on a bollard on the floating landing stage in Liverpool. There appeared to be a hairline crack by the handle, but when I put tea in it it leaked like a sieve. I buried it at sea, with full military honours, off the coast of Portugal where it probably rests to this day. I've wondered if it was washed up on a beach in Portugal would some local beachcomber think it belonged to the original Long John. Oh well, just a thought.

When we were woken up on the morning of the third day we couldn't help noticing the ship had stopped moving. So before we headed for the spud locker we slipped up on deck to see what had happened. There were only one or two people about. We were anchored off Gibraltar. What a sight. We had all seen photographs and film of Gibraltar but seeing it 'in the flesh' was a different matter. It looked every bit the fortress it was. As we looked at the Rock we could see a launch

heading out from Gibraltar towards us, curving through the clear blue water leaving a white wake behind it. We only stayed on deck a few minutes as we had to get below and attend to our potatoes.

We really got stuck into the spuds that morning and by eight thirty we were up on deck again. However, we didn't have very long to enjoy the view for at about half past ten the ship started to move out into the Mediterranean sea. We stayed at the rails watching until Gibraltar slipped out of sight over the horizon. We then went back to our normal practice of finding a quiet place to relax and smoke our cheapies. The novelty of rushing to buy cheap goods from the shop had waned somewhat, so now you could get served at the shop without the inconvenience of queuing.

The only day of note was May 12. 'Bunk' and I had our 19<sup>th</sup> birthdays. Not a lot happened but we did get a birthday record played on the ship's radio service; Tennessee Ernie Ford singing 'You don't have to be a baby to cry'. I think Trevor Wood requested it. It was his birthday the next day.



*C. S. Trotman*

The more we moved into the Med the warmer it became. This was very nice as we could sunbathe and get a tan. We carried on through the Med for several more days. They seemed to run into each other. Then one morning we woke up and the ship had stopped again. We quickly dressed and made our way up to the deck. We were in Alexandria, Egypt. We were abroad! This was different from Gib. The sights and smells were fascinating. The decks were crowded even though it was early morning.



As we looked over the side we could see that the ship was surrounded by small boats. These, we found out, were called bumboats. They sold an assortment of leather goods and tourist souvenirs. They shouted up at you and you shouted down to them and between you sorted out the price to be paid for an article. You sent down the money in a small bag on the end of a rope that had been tied to the ship's rail. The trader then sent the item up. They had obviously learned their lesson.

One of the traders called up in the direction of the lad standing next to me at the ship's rail, "Do you want to buy this leather bag, John?" The chap turned to me with a puzzled look on his

face and, in a broad Lancashire accent, asked me, "How does 'e know my name's John?" He didn't realize that the locals called

*R. S. Lloyd* all British servicemen John and vice versa.

There was lively trade going on as Britain at that time was still suffering from the effects of World War II and goods were still not plentiful in the shops. So it was great to see so many things available. There were Egyptian policemen walking the docks dressed in black greatcoats over their uniforms, which seemed strange to us as we were dressed in shorts and P.T. shoes as the weather was so hot. A magic show had been arranged and a local magician called a 'Gulli Gulli' man came aboard and gave a really polished performance.

We stayed in Alexandria for most of the day waiting for other ships to join us as ships went through the canal in convoys. The thing that reminds me most about Alex was a building which stood out from the others. On a large maroon hoarding was the well-known name 'Woolworths'.

We saw Alex as a foretaste of things to come. Halfway through the afternoon we upped anchor and headed towards the canal. We didn't know at the time that we were the last British troopship through the canal as it was not long afterwards that the British and French forces invaded Egypt causing the Suez crisis.

The Egyptians we talked to showed no animosity towards us. However, there did appear to be a lot of military activity along the banks of the canal which we could see as we made our way south, but most of the civilians we saw waved. One chap in full sight of everyone on the ship pulled up his toga-type garment and proceeded to use the canal bank as a toilet. Naturally, he received a big cheer from everyone on the ship. He replied by giving everyone the V sign. I was led to believe this was a common sight along the canal.

For the first time on the trip we saw the married women who lived on the upper decks of the ship as they crowded the ship's rails looking at the sights. They were going out to join their husbands who were already out in the Far East. Some of the Romeos amongst us had already found the way around the 'Out of Bounds' barriers that were supposed to protect the ladies' virtues. However, the hot weather had got to some of the ladies and it would appear that they couldn't wait three weeks to receive the attentions of their husbands. Luckily, no-one got caught doing it. If they had it was instant sending home for the errant wife. Then she would have a job explaining why to her husband.

The following day we were in the Red Sea heading for our next port of call, Aden. This was going to be different from the other ports of call as we were going to be allowed ashore; actually on foreign soil for the first time in our lives. Our friend, the chief cook said he would fix it for us to be in the first boat ashore. Like the other two ports we had arrived during the night, so the following morning we were up on deck early again. The decks were all hustle and bustle as the ship's crew were loading cargo onto lighters that lay alongside. Some troops, fully kitted up, were boarding launches to go ashore, they were being stationed at Aden. There was also an oiler which was filling the ship's tanks with fuel. There were no bumboats we were sad to discover. Aden was very different from Gib and Alex. It looked a drab place surrounded by dark mountains.

We got through the spuds quicker than ever, we were getting to be real experts by now. After we had finished we went down below and changed into our shorts, shirts, long socks and peaked caps. We thought we looked very smart. Then we went upstairs to see the chief cook. He was as good as his word and got us away in the first boat. This was a big advantage as some people had to wait an hour to get ashore.

It was only a ten minute ride in the launch from Devonshire to the quay at Aden. My first step onto a foreign country.



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## Life and Times at RAAF Butterworth 1967 – 1970

*By Don Donovan*

### **Part 2. 33 Squadron and all that.**



I had been posted to 33 (SAM) Squadron at RAAF Butterworth. The Squadron was situated at the south end of the old Japanese runway and was reachable only by the roadway that ran from the gate adjacent to the golf club and around the west end of the main runway. On route you had to pass the remains of the Gloucester Javelin that had been left behind by the RAF for fire practice plus the many packs of wild dogs that roamed the area with their leader, nicknamed ‘Tunku’. The ‘singlies’ travelled in by three ton truck while those ‘scalies’ from the island travelled by ‘luxury’ coach from the ferry terminal. The squadron flew the RAF ensign on their flagpole, a bone of contention with the RAAF, but a source of pride with all the troops.

33 Squadron ‘flew’ Bloodhound Mk2 Surface to Air missiles and comprised of four Missile Launch Control Posts (LCP) and eight missiles (*for each LCP and Missile Section*) on their own launcher. The theory of the job was that Western Hill passed the co-ordinates of the ‘target’ aircraft to the LCP, this in turn aligned the TIR (*Target Illuminating Radar*) to the general area where it searched for the target. When the radar had locked onto the target the details of height, speed and direction of travel were passed back to the LCP and confirmed with Western Hill. If a positive match was achieved the missiles were turned to the target and a lock achieved. At this point everything was ready to fire!



The LCP control console

Paul Tuffery



65 Squadron missile on launcher

I worked in MS3 with ‘Ginge’ Shores, with John Paull and Geoff Morris in the LCP. Wally Watson and Norman Nunn were in MS1, ‘Chunky’ Andrews and Dave Croft in MS2 and Dave Birchall and Bryn Baker were in MS4. Len Wood and the Armourer’s were in the hanger and looked after the missiles (they were NOT rockets!). That took care of the business end of the Squadron.

As we were not at war with anybody in the Far East at the time we had no real targets so we had to make do with playing the game with any aircraft that were in the range of Western Hills radars. This meant the daily Bristol ‘Frightener’ from Changi was used as a test aircraft most mornings as was the MSA Fokker Friendship from Singapore. If the passengers on these flights had been aware of 32 missiles locking on to them they might have had a few bad moments. After the morning checks were complete it was fair game to search out the Super Sabres flown by the RAAF – much more fun. They used to call us the ‘Petrified Forest’ but secretly they hoped we stayed that way.

During the many exercises held in the Far East – Red Flag (Eastabout) and Bersatu Padu, 33 Squadron came into its own.

This was the time when the Vulcans came out to Singapore or Butterworth and Victor tankers kept them in the air, and C130s, Belfasts and Britannia aircraft ferried thousands of airmen from the UK to all points east from Hong Kong to Singapore. Everybody was divided up into the Red Force or the Blue Force and we played war games to our hearts content. If the Vulcans were based in

Singapore they made a fine sight with their vapour trails all over the Malaysian sky and good targets for us. We went through our search and lock procedures and when everything was ready we all shouted 'BANG' together and pretended to shoot them down. At the same time they pretended to drop their bomb loads on Western Hill and Butterworth so it took the adjudicators to decide who had won. Unfortunately we never found out the final result so it was all a bit confusing really.

On a more serious note we did have one nasty incident which resulted in a 24 hour curfew being imposed. Naturally we did not know anything about this until there was no breakfast (the local cooks were still at home) and it was a very hungry bunch of 'singlies' who arrived at the Squadron for work. When we found out we were the only ones who were coming in as the 'scalies' were stuck on the island as the ferries were not running, it was a very unhappy bunch of boys who were allocated out for guard duty. For some strange reason I was sent with six airmen to guard the main bomb dump. We did not know our way around the area, none of us were armourers, so we were not happy. As we were also armed I was a little concerned for our safety so insisted the magazines were not fitted while we were out on patrol. I was issued with a piece of paper on which was written a challenge in Bahasa Malay – the only bit I remember was 'Berhenti' - but it was totally useless so we decided to shoot first and ask questions later if necessary. Luckily everything went well although we did nearly shoot a cow which was scratching itself on the fence during the first night. We were relieved after 48 hours when the curfew was lifted and life returned to normal.

With all the Hindu, Muslim and Christian festivals, plus the many national holidays (including ANZAC Day) and annual leave, it was a bit of an event if you had to work a five day week. We did fill in our time in meaningful employment during 1967 and 1968 but when the British Government decided in late 1968 to start pulling out the troops in the Far East to save a few quid it all changed. The Malaysian government voted not to buy the Bloodhound system so it was off to Prai docks to meet the RFA Stromness which brought the boxes for us to pack it all up. It took a lot of effort to strip all various elements down to the basic parts, pack them into boxes and ship it all home but it did wonders for our suntans. It appears our association Chairman was also involved in his capacity of O.C. Supply but I do not remember him. The pack up did offer the opportunity to get flights home to the UK and I spent 7 days in the back of a Belfast while escorting five missiles home. We were due to land at RAF Lyneham but due to inclement weather we finished up at RAF Waddington. At that time I was very glad I still had my greatcoat but the drive to RAF North Coates in the back of a landrover was very, very cold. When I arrived back at Butterworth the lads had packed up two complete Missile Sections so it was a very sad time for me to put my own radar into boxes. Everything was gone by late 1969, several people had gone home and some had been posted to 65 Squadron at RAF Seletar, Singapore so we were down to trying to fill in time.

I was lucky enough to be detached to 65 Squadron to help them hand over the whole system to the Singapore Armed Forces. I met up with 'Ginge' Shores, Bryn Baker and Geoff Morris again and we managed to get all three Missile Sections handed over by February 1970, just in time for my return to the UK. I flew from Changi to Butterworth in a VC10 (a lot better than the usual 'Frightener') where I joined the remaining members of 33 Squadron on the flight to Brize Norton. I had been involved in the disbandment of two Squadrons in 12 months, but I did get a lot of golf in and my handicap had reduced greatly, but that is another story.



*Eric the Turkey hopes it will not be a 'fowl' Christmas*

## *At the 11<sup>th</sup> hour of the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month*

By Don and Margaret Donovan



We volunteered to represent the RAFBPA at the National Memorial Arboretum for the Armistice Day Service of Remembrance on 11<sup>th</sup> November this year. We do like to attend memorial events on the 11<sup>th</sup> rather than waiting for Remembrance Sunday if at all possible. The only instruction we had was to be seated in the marquee by 10.30 hrs, so an early start was required to ensure a quick trip around the Nottingham ring road before the Saturday shoppers got going.

We arrived at the NMA just after 10.00 hrs and it was obvious this was to be a big event as we had to park our car on the road outside the grounds, and walk back some distance. The weather was sunny but with a stiff breeze which had a chilling effect if exposed to it for too long. The marquee was situated on the lawn between the Entrance building and the Chapel and it was packed. The array of medals and regimental cap-badges was impressive. I was wearing my Grandfathers medals, he was a survivor of the Great War where he served with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, Royal Fusiliers in France and Belgium, plus my RAFBPA tie and RAF beret (not many of them about!). A guard of honour was mounted by the Burton-on-Trent Sea Cadets and Combined Cadet Force who were very smartly turned out. An overflow seating area had been set up adjacent to the marquee with a large screen and sound system relaying the service to those outside, not recommended due to the chilly wind. We did manage to find a space at the rear of the marquee and so were able to watch and join in first hand and in the warmth.

The service was conducted by the Rural Dean of Lichfield, The Reverend John Allan and VIPs included the Lord-Lieutenant of Staffordshire, Mr James Hawley. British Legion, RNA, RAFA and local regimental Old Comrades Association standards were also present. The service followed the traditional pattern of hymns and readings plus some local interest with a poem by Giovanni Esposito (Birmingham Poet Laureate 2006/7). The address by Reverend John Allan followed a theme of “Do you remember when we ....?”, a question that started most conversations that day.

As a piper played the lament “Flowers of the Forest” I was reminded of another 11<sup>th</sup> November at another service, this time at Beaumont Hamel in the Somme in 1996, in the trenches once filled by the volunteers of the Newfoundland Regiment. On 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916 at 07.00 hrs over 600 members of the regiment went over the top to capture a German trench only 400 yards away. At 07.30 hrs only 60 survivors returned, the German trench still intact, although several hours later the Scottish Division took the objective after further heavy losses. In 1996 there was an honour guard and band from the current Newfoundland Regiment plus a survivor of the attack were present to pay tribute to the fallen. During the service a lone piper from the Scottish Division played a lament in the surrounding woods. As it was raining for most of the ceremony the tears of the spectators were conveniently covered.

The playing of the Last Post always sends a tingle down my spine, it is a haunting piece of music and reminded me of another service, this time in Banwell Parish Church, Somerset. RAF Locking used to parade in Banwell on Remembrance Sunday and members of the Apprentice Band played “Last Post”, the two trumpeters standing on a balcony next to the organ at the rear of the church. In 1960 I was one of the trumpeters who played but it turned out to be a solo for me as my partner completely froze when the whole congregation turned to face us. I am glad he did not tell me before I started, but I had to finish! We both managed Reveille I am glad to say.

After this years Remembrance Service we went to the Far East Air Force memorial that was dedicated in May this year. It is a very impressive memorial that brought many positive comments from passers by. One gentleman did stop to look and asked me “Which one was yours?” to which I replied “Number 3, RAF Butterworth”. His next remark was “I was number 4, RAF Kuala Lumpur. I was on



the helicopters there in 1950 – I was only National Service” (note: RAF units denoted on the FEAF Memorial are all numbered, hence inscription 3 is Butterworth and 4 is KL). I tried to persuade him to come to the next AGM but he politely declined and left.

At 11.30 hrs. a Tiger Moth overflew the Arboretum and did a ‘Poppy Drop’. As the wind was now strong he had a lot of trouble keeping the aircraft straight and slow but he got some poppies away on the first pass and a lot more on his second lower pass but sad to say most of the petals finished up nearer to Burton-on-Trent than Alrewas.



This reminded me of another 11<sup>th</sup> November at another service, this time at Ypres, Belgium. In 2004 we attended the parade held at the Menin Gate, where the Last Post is sounded at 20.00 hrs every day of the year. The service there is held in Flemish and English and follows exactly the same format as the Cenotaph in Whitehall. During the two minutes silence poppy leaves are dropped through the ceiling of the Menin Gate and fall on the thousands of spectators (much like at the Albert Hall). I collected two of these poppies, a reminder of my Grandfather who was wounded at Ypres in 1917.

It was a relief to get into the café area and get a nice warm cup of tea and biscuit and to look at the plans for the new National Memorial to the service men and women who have been killed during service since 1945. The mound has been constructed already and the whole thing will be very impressive when it is finished in 2007.

We agreed it had been an experience to attend the Service of Remembrance at the National Memorial Arboretum, one we would repeat. Anybody can attend, not just invited guests, and the number of memorials has risen since we were all there in May 2006 making it even more interesting.

All we have to do now is decide where we are going on May 8<sup>th</sup> 2007 to celebrate VE day. This is when we think about our fathers and their war that ended in 1945. It could be France again as the Association de Combattant Anciens made us very welcome when we went in 2005 and you get more than a cup of tea afterwards!



**H**E whom this scroll commemorates was numbered among those who, at the call of King and Country, left all that was dear to them, endured hardness, faced danger, and finally passed out of the sight of men by the path of duty and self-sacrifice, giving up their own lives that others might live in freedom. Let those who come after see to it that his name be not forgotten.



*Royal Air Force Station,  
Butterworth, Malaya.*



*The Commanding Officer, Officers,  
Warrant Officers and Senior N. C. O.'s*

*wish you all*

*A Merry Christmas*

*and*

*A Happy New Year.*

1955

J. Newell of G. E. Young  
(FLT LT. NEWBOLD) (FLT LT. YOUNG)  
**AUTOGRAPHS.**

A. Welch  
(FLT SGT GARDNER)

(SGT LDR CHESNEY)

W. Wingard  
(FLT. LT. WINGARD)

Subent.  
(FLTSGT. ZMITOWICZ)

Dr. MacKewen - Jones  
(M/PT. LLOYD)

G. Ashworth  
(F/O ASHWORTH)

Patall  
(PT SGT PERIBERTON)

F/O Dawson  
(F/O DAWSON)

F/O Thompson  
(F/O THOMPSON)

Mag Donald - Johnson  
SGT JOHNSON

Handwritten signature  
(SRDN. LDR HANCOCKS)

Jim Crow  
(FLT LT. CROW)

J. T. Crow  
(F/O CROW)

de FW  
I.M.C  
RAF  
Bullenth

## Pansies Like You!

No. 2 Airfield Construction Squadron, RAAF, were busy building the new runway when I arrived at Butterworth in June 1956. They were a law unto themselves and I found them intriguing.

Firstly, their average age was in the thirties rather than the twenties like us and they were a bunch of tough looking guys. Their uniforms, while a far better quality than ours, had been adjusted as follows. The sleeves were cut off from the shirts. The shorts were cut very short. Black ankle socks worn with a far more comfortable pair of boots than ours. Oh, yes, and their cap badges were painted black which saved polishing.

You wouldn't know who the officers were as everybody was on first name terms. All their mechanical equipment was World War II American. Jeeps, earth scrapers, movers, rollers, Diamond 'T's transporters and their trucks were Internationals. All the vehicles were painted navy blue.

They didn't come onto the RAF site very often so contact was around the airfield or at the swimming pool bar.

I only went onto the RAAF site twice. Once was to visit the dentist, who cursed me because I had to have an injection for a tooth filling. The second time was my last night at Butterworth, but that is a story on its own.

I did make two friends from 2ACS who I would meet from time to time at the swimming pool bar. LAC Joe Kilby, a big man with arms as thick as my legs, but a gentle giant. Corporal Ross Rutter, a handsome man with blonde wavy hair. It was at one of these sessions that Joe told me about the Australian airmen who would be coming to man the Station after they had built the new airstrip. "They aren't like us", he said, "They are pansies like you". (He meant that in the nicest way).

It's funny how his words came to pass. Six months later when the new Australians arrived and on their first day they went to the Airmen's Mess for breakfast. They refused to eat the food as it was such crap. Funny, I had always enjoyed it!

### *Don Brereton*

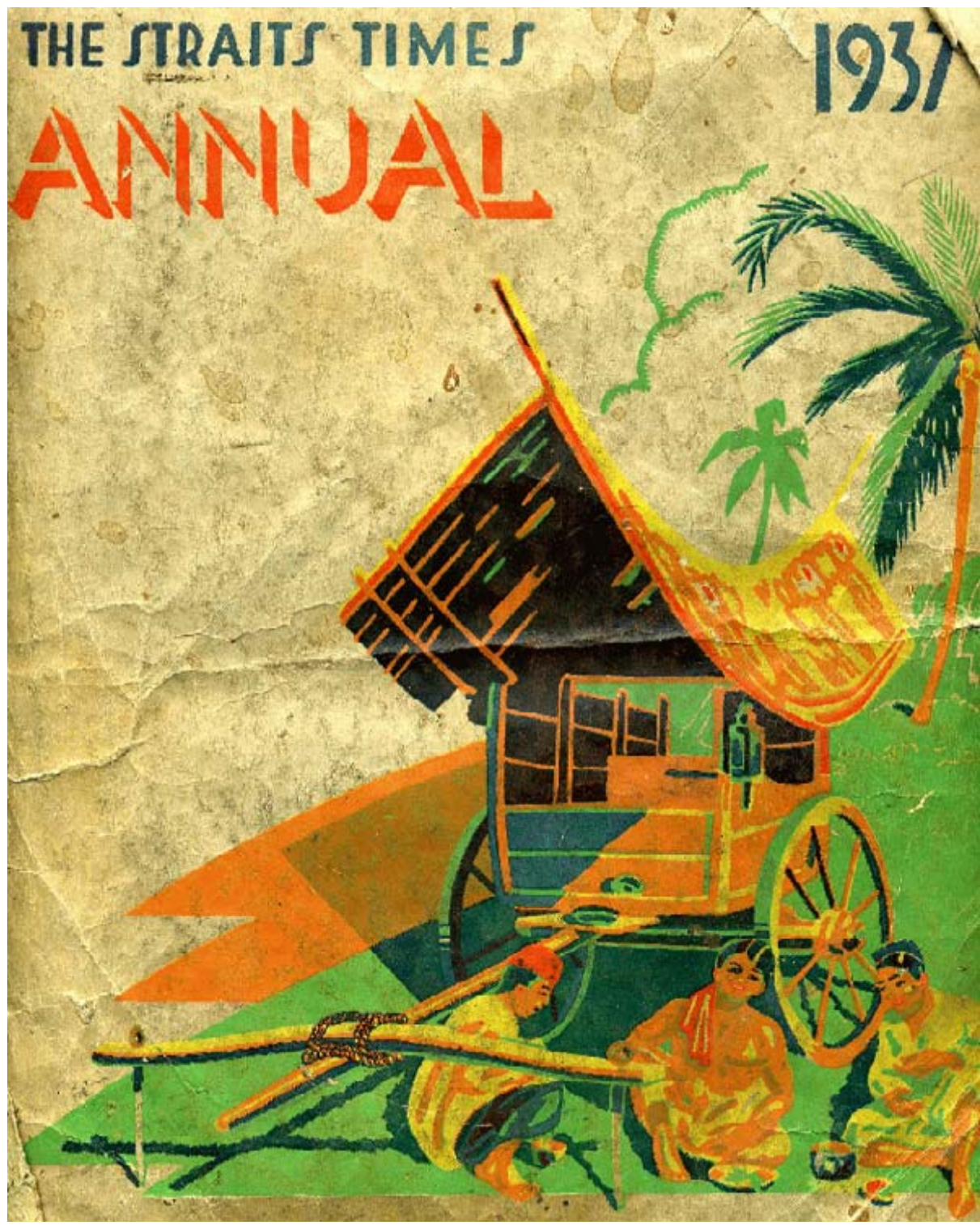
Following the above from Don, a letter to Pete Mather from member Roy Lindsell Butterworth (1954-57) says 'It was great reading the newsletter, especially interesting was the photo of the runway layout as done by the Aussies. When I was in Butterworth, just before I left the Aussie airfield construction unit was beginning to move in. I actually sold my little boat to one of them!' Roy goes on to say there is one person from Butterworth he would like to contact again: J/T Bob Eckersly. *If anyone can help with this please contact Pete or myself and we will forward any information to Roy. Ed.*

Roy also continues 'a certain SAC Colin Fielder and I were, I believe, the very first people to ride a motorbike from B/worth to Singapore in one day. We rode Colins Triumph Tiger 100, started from B/worth at 0100 hrs and got to Singapore before 1700 hrs when the curfew began – 500 miles in sixteen hours, to spend a week at Sandes' Soldiers' Home on leave'

## **STOP PRESS**

New Member: Larry Dodds, known as Geordie, 33 Sqn (Ground Radar) RAF Butterworth and RAF Tawau (Borneo) 1966-67.

Pingat Jasa Malaysia award: through Tony Parrini comes information that this medal has been received by member Arthur Mace....who is highly delighted with it.



It is amazing what we have gathered in the archives.  
This picture is nearly 70 years old!!!

**If you like this sort of memory, try and find a copy of "STRAITS AFFAIRS"  
Glimpses of the Straits Settlements in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century as seen through the  
eyes of the Illustrated London News.  
(ISBN 962 3238 005 X)**



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“That’s it for another year”

**Have an enjoyable Christmas and all the best for 2007**

