



RAF Butterworth/Penang Association



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

NEWSLETTER

Summer/Autumn 2005

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



Eastward

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In General

A Butterworth Query – our question answered.

Members will remember the question about the identity of the building in the background of the picture of a 33 Sqn. Hornet (last issue, p4). Les Downey has provided the answer. The building was used as a transit reception centre when flights from the UK were started in 1946. It was damaged when the ex-Japanese bomb dump, near the trees on the left, blew up.

Thanks, Les.

17 Squadron RAF – 1945

Tony Moor is interested in any information members may have about Flying Officer F.D. Irvine who flew with 17 Sqn in 1945. He was killed on 3 June 1945 and is remembered on the Ashford (Kent) War Memorial and the Singapore Memorial. Tony believes he was based near Butterworth. Any information on F.O. Irvine, his squadron or the airfield can be passed to Tony at: A. J. Moor, 190 Hythe Road, Ashford, Kent, TN24 8PP or e-mail: Amoorbiggles@aol.com

‘Class of 1956/57’



Mini-reunion at RAF Museum, Cosford, 17 April 2005.

Back row from left to right – Don Brereton, Roy Hill-Baldwin, Roy Street, Barry Jones, Mrs Pat Finlay, Brian ‘Bunk’ Banks, Miller Finlay, Mrs Sue Jones; front – Nigel Hardy, son of Roy Hardy.

On Sunday, 17 April 2005 an enjoyable mini-reunion of some Butterworth members from 1956/57 took place at the RAF Museum Cosford. After a look round the museum the group headed for the Bell Inn at the nearby village of Tong and over a meal and drinks reminisced with photographs and a chat.

‘Eastward’

It was with sadness we heard from Don Brereton of the death of Group Captain Lawrence ‘George’ Bastard, A.F.C., D.F.C. (US) on 15 January 2005. As a Wing Commander he was CO of 9 Squadron which did a three month tour at Butterworth in 1956. A small man, five feet six in height, he inspired fierce loyalty amongst the members of his Squadron, who referred to themselves as ‘Bastards Boys’. He had 24 operational flights in bombers in WW2. After the war he flew over 200 flights into Berlin during the cold war. Following that Group Captain Bastard flew Canberras as CO of 9 and 617 Squadrons, and then a three year exchange with the USAF flying B52s. After a tour as CO of RAF Cottesmere he ended his RAF career as Deputy Commandant of the Air Warfare College at RAF Mamby in 1972.

My Journey to Butterworth 3125371 LAC Lear, J.B. (John Lear)

Of the 15 months that I spent in Singapore and Malaya I only managed 6 months in Butterworth. These were prior to my repatriation and were the happiest months of my service in F.E.A.F.

My journey to Butterworth really started at RAF Compton Bassett in the late spring of 1950. I had completed my mandatory 8 weeks 'square bashing' at Henlow, and was posted to Compton Bassett to complete a 24 week wireless operators' course. This was no problem as I had already mastered the intricacies of the morse code whilst in the ATC and was able to do 8 words per minute. During the next months I raised my speed to 20 wpm and gained an insight to radio and electricity necessary for the job.

The time flew by, the summer of 1950 was glorious, the Wiltshire countryside is beautiful. We were young and fit and in the RAF, who could ask for more? At the end of the course we were asked if we had a preference with regard to a posting. I said Germany and got Singapore! Must have been my accent. My parents were not too happy about my posting, things were a bit 'sticky' in that part of the world in 1950. I said Singapore was OK and not to worry (as if I knew)! Then came 4 weeks on the MV Devonshire and I was at Changi. I was there a couple of weeks and the Bertha Hertogh riots* broke out and a few people died. So much for my words of comfort to my folks!

Just after Xmas and working presumably on the 'last in first out' rule I was posted to Kuala Lumpur as a replacement W/op to fill a gap, so to speak. I was given a Lee Enfield 0.303 rifle (No Bullets) and put on the train. The trip as I recall was pleasant. The views from the window showed mostly jungle and rubber trees – bit different to London, I thought. I noticed that the walls of the train carriage were plastered with a material like cement and I asked an NCO also traveling on the train what it was for. He said it was protection from 'bandits' who sometimes fired upon the train. I sank down a bit lower in my seat!

I enjoyed KL. It was surrounded on perhaps 3 sides by light jungle and had a fairly large airstrip and football field. We were surrounded by soldiers and Ghurkas and felt very secure. Kuala Lumpur itself was only 10 minutes by cab/taxi and we went in most weekends to drink endless cups of chocolate and coffee, having not discovered the magic of Tiger Beer.

Our feeling of security was shattered by the assassination of Governor General Sir Henry Gurney at Fraser's Hill, not a million miles from KL!



Fraser's Hill ... the track seen from left to right is where Sir Henry Gurney, C. in C. Land Forces, was ambushed.

Photograph courtesy of N. Andrewartha.

Anyway, before I got too used to the place it was time to move again. There was a small detachment of RAF running a communications section at 'Maldist', which was an army camp just outside KL, proper name Malaya District. It consisted of one corporal and three airmen and they were one short! I was well on my way to Butterworth now, only 6 weeks here and off to the Big "B". About the only memory I have from Maldist was one morning early our door was opened a bit noisily and an army PTO said something like, "Come on you shower, don't you know it's time for P.T." Our corporal looked up from his bed and said something like, "We are the RAF, we don't do P.T.", and invited him to go on his way. The squaddie actually shut the door before going. Shortly afterwards I was off to Butterworth.

Butterworth was really closer to the action, with its long airstrip and seemingly endless aircraft of many varieties and we in signals were very busy. I was working Singapore, FEAF HQ and Seletar, KL and Car Nicobar. It was very interesting. When not working I spent much of my time on the beach. There was a feeling of safety after KL. Penang was just across the water and a succession of 'trishaws' awaited us outside the camp gates to take us to the ferry.

One surprise I had was having purchased a pair of shoes one evening in Penang and returning through the port Malaya side, I was informed that the shoes attracted customs duty. I hadn't got enough cash having spent it all in Penang and had to leave them there and retrieve them next pay day!

Life went on at Butterworth, punctuated by odd events like the 'Thing'. After storms in the area and rough seas we awoke one morning to find a tree trunk on our beach measuring about 30' by 3' thick. It had obviously been in the water for a long time and was covered with shellfish and other marine life. This was OK for a couple of days, but after the sun shone on it and dried it, it began to smell! We formed a plan of action and decided to push it back to where it came from, i.e. the sea. About half a dozen of us spend a long time scraping the sand away on the seaward side of 'Thing' until we had enough water to manage to push it into deeper water (looking back I find it amazing). Once we had it moveable we pushed it deep and two of us, myself included, swam out with it and guided it away from the beach until it was about 25 yards out and then we swam back. I show here a picture of a young me sitting on the 'Thing'.



My time was moving on. I was getting demob happy and now it was Xmas day 1951. Something was to happen today that I would remember for the rest of my life. Xmas dinner was over, we had as per custom

been served by the officers. I personally was on duty at about 5.30 to do evening shift. Rumours were circulating about an accident on the camp. I was eventually given some messages for transmission to HQ FEAF Singapore and I learned what had happened. A young airman, 21 years old, had fallen from an air force vehicle being driven around the camp during the afternoon festivities. The vehicle hit a rock marking an area of ground near a barracks and the airman suffered serious injuries and died later that day. I tried to imagine what his parents went through, so far away. Every Xmas I think of him. I attended the funeral on Penang a couple of days later. Since that time I have obtained a photograph of his gravestone, the epitaph reads,

“My task is done, this is my England”.

Six weeks later I arrived home on the Empress of Australia, on 6th February, 1952. The day the King died!

A few years later I joined the RNZAF and spent 6½ years in New Zealand. But that’s another story.



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Mr J Lear

Our Reference
D/AHB(RAF)9/1
Date
5 December 2000

Dear Mr Lear

Thank you for your letter dated 20 November 2000, which was received by the Ministerial Correspondence Unit and passed to this office for reply.

In your letter you are seeking information concerning the sad loss of 4031791 Leading Aircraftman Harry Wormald, who sadly lost his life while serving as a Storeman/Mechanic at RAF Butterworth, Malaya on the 25 December 1951.

Our records show that on the day LAC H Wormald lost his life, he and a number of his colleagues were visiting various buildings on RAF Butterworth exchanging Christmas greetings with other personnel on the station. On leaving the Officers Mess, three members of the party requested a lift back to their billets in an Ambulance that was about to drive off, and the Medical Officer of the Station, who was driving, gave permission for them to board the vehicle. The driver not knowing that LAC Wormald, had remained in the mess to light his cigarette, and believing he had boarded the vehicle, started to drive off.

As the Ambulance proceeded around the bend, LAC Wormald ran across the grass to intercept it, and started to climb aboard. Unfortunately, just at that time one of the wheels of the Ambulance struck a stone, causing the driver to lose control of the steering, and the side of the vehicle struck a palm tree at the edge of the road. LAC Wormald sustained serious injuries as he was caught between the Ambulance and the palm tree, and was conveyed to the General Hospital at Penang, where he died two and a half hours after the accident.

On 27 December 1951 LAC H Wormald was buried at the Penang Western Road Cemetery, Malaya in Grave No 2142.

- **The Bertha Hertogh Riots of 11 December 1950.....** Maria Bertha Hertogh was born in Java 1937 to Dutch Catholic parents. At 5 years of age her parents became a POW's of the Japanese occupying forces and Maria was taken by a family friend, Aminah Bte Mohammad to safety in Bandung
Maria was brought up as an unofficial adopted Muslim child and in 1947 brought to Malaya to avoid the conflict of the Indonesian War of Independence. She could only speak Malay at this time! In 1949 the Hertoghs received news of their daughter and sought to reclaim her through the Singapore Court on 22 April 1950. Throughout the rest of 1950 there was a custody battle for Maria who now as a Muslim was married to a 22 year old Malay teacher. On 13 November 1950 the court ruled she should be returned to her Dutch parents, the Muslim marriage be made invalid and she be placed in a Christian convent prior to return to the Netherlands.

On 11 December 1950 the Appeal Court sat to hear the case. Custody for Aminah was refused. Outside the court the crowd, upon hearing the verdict, were convinced the colonial legal system was biased against Muslims and started to riot.

Europeans and Eurasians were attacked by the Malay and Indian Muslim rioters over a 3 day period leaving 18 people dead (including an RAF Serviceman and his wife) and 173 injured.

It was officially stated that the riot was caused by the colonial authorities being insensitive to racial and religious feelings of Singaporeans by putting a Muslim girl in a Christian convent!

Changi Incident (continued) More from Don Brereton

When I got to my bedspace the first thing I did was get out of my sweaty uniform. But when I got to my socks the left one came off but the right one felt like it was glued into the wound. I couldn't ease it out whatever I did. So with one sock on and a towel wrapped round my waist I headed to the ablutions to soak my foot in water as hot as I could stand. But even with the hot water it took a long time to get the sock out and when it did come out my heel started bleeding again. But my feet were glad to get back into flip flops again. Once I had got my kit sorted out it was just time to go to lunch. I had plenty of stories to tell the lads in the mess.

After lunch I caught up with my mail and had a nap. When I awoke as it was a bit quiet I thought I would go and collect the section's mail. I hadn't a care in the world. Later on I would go to the station armoury and arrange to go back to Bidan on Monday. That would mean I could have a Friday and Saturday night in the N.A.A.F.I. bar.

I walked up to SHQ and around the right hand side to the Post Office at the end. I had completely forgotten about Station Warrant Officer Preston. As I passed his open doorway I heard his voice shouting out, "That Man". My heart sank. He started off about the length of my hair. I told him that I had just come out of hospital in Singapore and hadn't had time. This made him even madder. "Nobody told me", he said, "Your bedspace should have been cleared and your belongings should have been put into stores". "Typical army", I said, "I thought they had told you". He seemed to calm down after that. "Anyway, I'm off back to Bidan on Monday", I told him. I thought that would finish it off. "Oh, no you aren't", he said. "You have been given your leave allowance so you will have to take nine days leave and that means you can't eat in the mess". As I looked at him I thought how crazy it was, but it was the system and in a strange way I understood his thinking. Then he started to look at the papers on his desk and I realized that I had been dismissed. I said, "Thank you, sir", and turned to go. As I went through the door he added, "Don't forget the haircut". I nearly forgot to collect the mail but I turned back and picked up one letter and it wasn't even for me. I walked back to the billet in a state of shock. I couldn't believe I was getting another nine days leave.

Once the excitement had died down I started thinking practical. If I couldn't go into the mess I would have to live out of the N.A.A.F.I. and what I could persuade the lads to bring me back from the mess. I dare not go into the mess as the SWO man was always hiding in the bushes outside the exit. So how much money did I have after my trip to Singapore?

When I got back to the billet I got my roll out of its hiding place and counted it. If I was a little careful it would just last out until Monday, July 8th, which was when I assumed I would be returning to Bidan. Next I visited the station armoury and told them of the new development.

Once I got used to my new lifestyle I started to enjoy it. Meals when I wanted them. Trips to the swimming pool and cinema and no work. As a break from banjos in the N.A.A.F.I. I would

sometimes buy a tin of salmon with bread and butter. All canned goods had to be signed for in an exercise book kept for the purpose. Nobody ever signed their real name and the book was full of Elvis Presley, Tony Curtis, John Wayne and Mickey Mouse. As the week wore on the heel still hadn't healed up and I got to thinking of Bidan and the sand flies which attached themselves to open cuts. So on Thursday I decided to go sick and see the M.O. about it. Even though he could see the wound hadn't healed I couldn't explain to him how basic Bidan was. So as far as he was concerned I was fit to go back to the island. I can remember quite clearly saying to him as I left the room, "If anything happens to me you will be responsible". I've no idea what that actually meant but it made me feel better.

Saturday night in the N.A.A.F.I. bar – I decided to really enjoy myself as it would be more than a month before I had a drink. However, it was to be longer than that because I hadn't realized that Malayan Independence was to be granted on 31st August and we would all be confined to camp. On the way back to the billet I managed to fall into the monsoon drain but didn't hurt myself as I landed like a paratrooper.

Sunday morning I decided to go to the mess for my meals as I was nearly out of money and Bill Preston didn't work on the Sabbath. Anyway, what could he do to me? I would be on the island tomorrow. I spent an evening packing and talking to Marty and Ken Morris, our other room mate. The fourth occupant of our room, Brian 'Bunk' Banks, was like me on a temporary posting at Bidan. Monday morning, I was up early and after an early breakfast I made my way to the guardroom where I was picked up in a Vanguard vehicle of MT section. He ran me to the Shell jetty in Butterworth village where he left me at the end of the pier with a pile of stores. I could see a little dot coming towards me from Georgetown, Penang. It was RAF Glugor's HSL (high speed launch). It pulled alongside the jetty and tied up. After the normal greetings we loaded the stores and undid the securing lines and the HSL pulled away, heading north. I was going back to Bidan!



From Snakes to Sabres

by Dave Croft

During my time at Butterworth snakes were to play a major role in my life. The site was fairly well littered with cobras and these were usually 'chopped' by the grass cutters scythes. From a previous member of the squadron I learnt there was a need for cobra venom at the hospital in Georgetown so I set about to collect the snakes....alive!

The grass cutters were eventually persuaded not to kill the snakes but to let me capture them. This was the easy part as snake loops and large bins were used. However transfer to a more transportable cardboard box was more

difficult, especially when the Flight Sergeant thought I was certifiable and, initially, would not let me use the servicing bay for the job. The boxes containing the snakes were well secured and labeled in Malay to the effect that the occupants were poisonous. This did not stop the ever curious Chinese on the ferries gathering around and attempting to put their fingers in the air holes. After an angry snake had made its presence felt they would usually settle down...at a safe distance! After disrupting the Georgetown public transport system on what was fast becoming my frequent visits to the hospital, the squadron kindly put a Landrover and driver at my disposal. On reflection many years later it is easy to see how tolerant my squadron bosses were, it would have been much easier for them to have banned the whole enterprise from the start.

Needless to say every unit has a know all and 33 Squadron was no exception. One 'expert' (whose interest in the snakes was always from a vast distance) proclaimed to all and sundry that a cobra could only inject poison once and after that it was harmless until the venom sac had refilled. What a load of cobras!!! However the gauntlet had been thrown down!

A healthy adult snake was soon acquired and for safety reasons (and the proclaimed 'experts') was tipped into the tyre bay cage where I proceeded to upset it with a **LONG HANDLED** broom. Seven 'doses' of venom were released on the broom before the snake 'dried up' Naturally this made us all much more wary of these creatures especially me as I thought the 'expert' to be right at first, but you don't let on do you?

Where do the Sabres come into the story ? Butterworth was an Australian Air Force base and at the time the RAAF were replacing their ageing Sabres with the Mirage III. I was fortunate to be able to see both aircraft in use whilst hard at work running the gauntlet of Gen. Fitts. using their grease guns as short range weapons on us poor radar fitters. Your average 'Gen Fitt', by which I mean all general fitters, always appeared to be a coarse unsophisticated chap, always covered in thick grease who would rudely refer to us as 'fairies' and then proceed to fire grease guns at us. Perhaps they missed out on our intellectual conversations in the crew room as we understood words of more than one syllable! However back to the Sabres. One fine day an Aussie pilot flying his Sabre at some 20, 000 feet over the sea decided to leave his aircraft in a hurry and elect to be successfully rescued by RAF Air Sea rescue. This event made the news in the English printed national newspaper, The Straits Times, as "the pilot ejaculated successfully at 20, 000 feet. What some people will do for the newspapers!



RAAF Mirage III at Butterworth.



ROYAL AIR FORCE BUTTERWORTH

by kind permission of
Group Captain R. E. BAXTER, D.F.C.

A
DANCE
(In aid of the R. S. P. C. A.)

**AT THE SWIMMING POOL
R. A. F. BUTTERWORTH**

Friday, 5th April, 1957
from 9 p. m. to 1-30 a. m.

with
JOE ROZELLS AND HIS HAWAIIANS
BUFFET

THREE BARS

WILD WEST CABARET.

Prizes

Novelties

Carnival