

Eastward

Christmas 2018



The Centenary of the Royal Air Force
1918 - 2018

RAF Butterworth & Penang Association

Issue 52



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

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Malayan Airways DC-3 at Kallang Airport 1947

Chairman's Page



RAF Seletar Association Reunion 2018

As guests, Anne and I attended the RAF Seletar Association Reunion in Derby in October during which I was presented with a Certificate of Appreciation for coordinating the 'Units of the Far East Air Force' group at the Annual Cenotaph Parade, also for the work involved with the FEAF Memorial (at the Arboretum). In addition to a big 'Thank you' to their Chairman Chris Puxley and members, I have to remark how relaxed the occasion was. I discovered that their committee had no obligation in respect of organising any element of the reunion and that any problems or complaints were made to the tour operator who had organised everything. This included taking the bookings, organising the hotel bookings and making all the arrangements with the hotel, also providing coaches for the two day trips and all the other tasks that normally fall to Len Wood and other committee members. From what I gleaned, everything ran smoothly and I certainly thought that our Association would benefit from the same arrangements with the tour operator. I have therefore asked Len to invite a representative of the company to our reunion next May in order to help take the pressure off Len and the other committee members in future years.

WWI Centenary

There have been so many reports of the wondrous activities across the UK to commemorate the Centenary of the end of the First World War. In my area of the country, both the County Council and our City Council provided plentiful financial support to ensure that the commemorations were marked fully and appropriately. However, from a Royal British Legion perspective, it was mainly the over 70's who provided the knowledge and experience to provide the necessary military style to each event. This made me think about the next major centenaries in 2039 and 2045 to mark the start and end of WW2. Attitudes amongst more recent departees from the Services have changed; my perception (I might be wrong) is that the ex-services community is either glad to have left the forces and have no further desire to become involved, or they have been compartmentalised and are only interested in their meeting up with colleagues from their own Ship, Unit or Squadron. If I am correct, I wonder whether 2039 and 2045 will be marked with the same enthusiasm, dignity and ceremony we have witnessed over recent weeks?

Cenotaph Parade

I won't add to Roger Hughes-Jones' report (page 29), suffice to say thank you to him for looking after things on the day and especially for the care he showed to John Rutland who arrived in a wheelchair, and also wearing a neck collar. I know how much John appreciated all the help he was given.

Peter Guy

Although Peter Guy resigned from the Association following a stroke a few years ago, he was always interested in our activities, subscribed to the FEAF Memorial Fund and referred to times in Penang every year in our exchange of Christmas letters. Peter was the Education Officer at Butterworth and then Penang from 1968 to 1971 and advised airmen on commissioning, was OC the Combined Mess at Glugor and was always out and about with Christine at the Penang Club and the Swimming Club. A great personal friend - Peter died in October and I thank Lee LeClerq who represented the RAFBPA at his funeral.

Health Scares

Since last putting fingers to the keyboard in aid of the 'Chairman's Page' I know some of our readers have been under Doctor's Orders recently. John Rutland is an example, but equally John Muter is having a few problems as is Bill Wardle. I pick these two gentlemen as neither was fit enough to lay the Association wreath in Carlisle this year, so I left my commentary duties and laid the wreath in Carlisle on your behalf. I wish all three gentlemen a speedy recovery. However, I could also have been missing! In August I was diagnosed with a potential cancer in my throat. Thankfully, after an inconclusive biopsy and a further operation, I was given the 'all clear' in October, subject to a further scan. So those of you at next year's reunion might have to endure another rendition of '*Just One Cornetto*' But when a nurse a nurse with a 'Macmillan' lanyard round her neck tells you "not to worry", you suddenly realise just how fragile life can be.

So don't put off till tomorrow what you can do today. Live life to the full and remember that you can't take money, or chattels, with you when you go!

HAPPY CHRISTMAS from Tony and Anne

From the Editor



Welcome to Issue 52 of '*Eastward*'. As with Issues 50 and 51 it is intended that this issue continues to (hopefully) inform readers of the achievements of a few of the RAF, especially when serving in the Far East. Hopefully, that has been achieved to some extent. The next thing I want to mention, perhaps with some trepidation, is the situation regarding future issues of the newsletter. Some members have taken to calling the newsletter a magazine and when queried as to why the unexpected answer came back that was what it looked like! I have always thought of it as a newsletter with the occasional article of interest thrown in. On reflection it seemed that was a good idea born in the earlier years of the RAFBPA where a member was the catalyst at an AGM for suggesting that material intended for the newsletter be extended beyond Butterworth and into Malaya - a good idea that was acted upon, but in those days there was plenty of members' material coming in, something that is not really still the case. At this stage I do thank those who have contributed material on occasions, or regularly, for the newsletter (including others who are not RAFBPA but have been generous enough to share articles they have written for their associations), but there others who have a story to tell but shy away from submitting them.

What can be done to persuade more members to put pen to paper? Well, I have thought long and hard over this. My thinking has been wide ranging and after much agonising, especially regarding the 'extra' articles which take up a lot of time researching, the following alternatives are a possibility:

1 That the newsletter continues as it is with news and notices, plus any members' contributions and the occasional article. At the present rate of contributions and with three issues a year, I think members would receive a newsletter that would be approaching the state of *Old Mother Hubbard's* cupboard!

2 To offset the above, two newsletters a year might instead resolve the situation for the time being.

Your thoughts on this would be welcome, as would those stories you may have been meaning to send in for ages!

A few years ago regular contributor Don Brereton said to me, on several occasions, that a well informed and well produced newsletter reflects strong membership. I feel he was right and have tried to adhere to that, welcoming all contributions, but at the time we didn't take into account a reducing membership in the later years of the Association. We don't have the fresh injection of new members we used to have but we haven't yet heard from many of the existing members who must surely have a story to tell. In the meantime, I will continue to do my best for the newsletter.

On a different subject I recently came across a mention of the Teluk Intan (previously Teluk Anson) War Memorial to the fallen of both World Wars: 'The Batu Tenggek (Sitting Boulder) War Memorial is situated in the town centre. Legend has it that the rock was placed there by a British soldier and originally was the size of a matchbox. Over the years the rock grew bigger until it reached the size of a boulder. Upon closer inspection crystal-like substances can be seen throughout the rock's surface. As crystals have expanding properties this might explain the growing nature of the stone? The boulder is now part of a local war memorial built to commemorate both world wars - the plaque on the memorial carries a line from Laurence Binyon's famous poem "*For the Fallen*"...*At the going down of the sun and in the morning, We will remember them.*'

To all, have an enjoyable Christmas and best wishes for 2019.

Farewells

Kenneth (Ken) Allen: Long time RAFBPA member Ken passed away on the 29th July 2018 following illness. Ken joined the RAF as a boy entrant and remained in the service until 1975. According to Jean, his wife, he still remained in the RAF even then as he became a Verger at St Clement Danes, the Central Church of the Royal Air Force, where he served for twenty years, completing his time there as Head Verger. Ken served at Butterworth 1966-1969 as an Armament Fitter at the Dump Base Armoury. In the time I knew him he mentioned little about his time at Butterworth but took delight in one story, that of a Royal Navy aircraft that diverted to Butterworth with a bomb hang up! Being carrier based the aircraft couldn't return to the ship carrying the bomb so it fell to the Butterworth based RAF armourers to sort it out, which they did successfully. The RAF armourers also offered to service the bomb release mechanism but the Navy refused saying they would do the necessary work when the aircraft was returned to the carrier. To facilitate that, seeing the aircraft was deemed u/s, the ship despatched an officer (with sword) and ratings to ceremonially tow the aircraft to the docks where it was to be loaded onto a lighter and taken out to the carrier. Ken's description of the officer, with drawn sword, leading the towing crew with the aircrew to the docks was superb, and it is that description that reminds me of first meeting Ken. *Dave Croft*

Eric Sharp: A RAFBPA member for many years, Eric passed away peacefully on the 26th September, his final words being '*Over and Out*'. Eric was stationed at Butterworth from 1953 to 1956, initially with the Far East Training Squadron (FETS), then 45/33 Squadron when FETS was disbanded. *See page 31.*

Brian Symondson: The Association was informed of the sudden death of Brian in September. As a Flying Officer Fighter Controller, Brian served on 487 Signals Unit from November 1955 to June 1957.

Members Feedback

Brian Lloyd wrote in to say that General and Lady Templer departed (on the first stage of leaving Malaya in 1954) in a VIP Hastings and not a DC3 as mentioned on page 6 of Issue 51. The accompanying picture of 'their' aircraft was one of two taken by Brian at a distance from the scene of activity, and clearly shows a Hastings.



Tam McCrorie shared Don Brereton's article on the Lincoln bombers bomb load (page 9, Issue 51) with an ex-Seletar friend, Lachlan Stuart, who was the store man in charge of the 1000lb bomb dump at Seletar (1958-1960), who says the bombs shown were 1000 lb bombs, not 500 pounders. From the book *The Malayan Emergency & Indonesian Confrontation*, in the Air Weapons Section of chapter 9 it states that 'The most effective weapon used in the Malayan Campaign was the 1,000 lb HE nose-fused bomb, which was first employed in 1950 following the arrival of Lincoln medium bombers...The 500 lb HE nose-fused bomb was the next most commonly used weapon...Perhaps the picture shown of a 'RAAF Lincoln Bomber (right) dropping 1000 lb bombs into the Malayan Jungle' is of some help in deciding the size of bomb being loaded in the Butterworth Lincoln as shown in Issue 51?



Rosemary Fell sent in her story of a 1953 long haul from the UK to Ipoh. 'The photo of the Super Constellation (Page 10, Issue 51) reminded me of my journey out to Malaya for my Summer holiday in 1953, the Coronation year. I travelled in a Comet 1, this series being removed from service shortly afterwards due to metal fatigue. I returned home on a Constellation, and yes for both journeys we had all our meals on the ground, five stops on the way out and five on the return journey. On the way out we spent part of the night in Bahrain because Karachi airfield was flooded. It took nearly three days to get to Singapore due to the Bahrain stop-over. Then I had to fly up-country to Ipoh in a Malayan Airways Dakota*, which appeared to be held together with string!'

* See page 3

From Sam Mold. A previous request for dates of Sam's Far East postings received the following story in his reply: 'After an absence of 18 years (1952 Tengah - 1969 Tengah), my first posting on returning to RAF Tengah was WO i/c Logistics, which involved transferring to the SAF (Singapore Armed Forces) Air Division all the Hunter jets of 20 Sqdn (below), together with their spare parts held in the Supply Sqdn. After that, my final task was to take over the role of Barrack Warden in readiness for the RAF Far East withdrawal in 1971. The first job was to hand over to the SAF the site (segregated from the main base) buildings and equipment on what had formerly been the RAF Regt (Malaya) complex - where I had served



20 years earlier as the supply Cpl i/c No 95 (Rifle) Sqdn stores. The buildings and contents were signed over to a certain 1st Lieut Thanapathy of the Singapore Armed Forces (Air Division), whom I first met as a Pilot Officer when we served together from 1964-66 in the Royal Malaysian Air Force at their Equipment Depot in Kuala Lumpur, on the site of what was formerly RAF Station KL. The (Tengah) site was segregated from the main Tengah camp and had been the home of the Regt when I

worked there as a Cpl in 1952. Now it was nothing more than property which I had to transfer to the SAF. This was followed by someone on a much higher pay scale than me to hand over the main Tengah base to the SAF. Coincidentally, when serving as both UEO & MTO at RAF Hospital Ely, I found it far quicker to obtain ambulance spare parts by phoning around MT Sections at different RAF bases rather than ordering through official channels. At one station (I believe it was in Yorkshire) I spoke to the Officer i/c MT, who happened to be none other than F/Lt Thanapathy, the same guy who had already served in both the RMAF and SAF. To have served in three independent air forces in the space of a few years is probably worthy of an entry in the Guinness Book of Records! I knew Thanapathy as a true gentleman and an affable officer with no airs and graces. He always dreamed of emigrating to the UK and wanted to know the best way he could achieve this aim. I could only suggest that he sought advice from the British High Commissioner's office in KL. After transferring from the RMAF to the Air Division of the SAF, it appears his fortune changed for the better when dealing with the BHC's office in Singapore; after all he was a Singaporean born of Indian parents. I guess his persistence finally paid off, though it was still a shock when I found out he had joined the RAF as he only ever mentioned his wish was to emigrate to the UK and never spoke about wanting to join the RAF.'

Bombs away! Further to the discussion on the size of bomb carried by the RAAF Lincolns (Issue 51 and page 6, this issue), **Don Brereton** follows up with: 'Reference to my photograph of the armourer loading a bomb into the innards of a RAAF Lincoln - acting on advice from my friend, ex-Butterworth armourer Syd Rogers, the bomb is a 1000 pounder! The size should have told me as 500 pounders were carried by the Venoms and I can't see the one shown (in the picture) fitting under a Venom.' Don also adds to the General Templer piece from Issue 51, page 6 - 'To atone for my misinformation (about the bomb) I can say about

the photograph of the General's visit to KL that the car he was travelling in was a 1953 Studebaker convertible.'

'Thaipusam' images. Member Ann Large offered 26 x35mm slides, taken during the time around the 1968-69 festival, for the Association archives. On behalf of the Association these were gratefully accepted and after further correspondence Ann had digital copies made for the archives. Our thanks to Ann for donating the images.

W/O Preston. Among the 'Big Book' of VIP visitors to RAF Butterworth (1955-57), now with the RAF



Museum, was a picture of a Warrant Officer (*left*) that 'might' have been the legendary SWO Preston. In the hope it might be, copies were sent to members **Rowly Christopher** (*right*) and **Mike Ward** (*below*) as both worked in the same building that W/O Preston ruled over. Unfortunately it was not to be and the quest to find a picture of him at Butterworth, or anywhere else, continues. Mike in his reply also mentioned his bush jacket (*right*) to add to Don Brereton's story in Issue 51, page 12 saying 'I wore the jacket whenever possible in SHQ because it had pockets.' Mike also attached to his reply a copy of the 1957 Annual Athletics Meeting officials list, where the Medical Officer in attendance was RAFBPA member Flt Lt G. N. Penlington, and one of the two judges on the Tug-of-War was 'W.O.



W. Preston'.

Sam Mold. Following the information provided previously by Sam (*page 7*), another package followed containing a list of his RAF Movements (1947-1975), a selection of photographs taken during his earlier service in Malaya, also a selection of negatives and a



photograph of the guard of honour at RAF Tengah for the French High Commissioner of French Indochina in 1952 (*left*). The details on the back of the photograph, as given by Sam, is as follows: 'At the RAF Tengah air base, F/Lt Whiteside (2nd i/c No. 95 Sqdn. RAF Regt, Malaya) is the guard of honour



escorting officer to Jean Letourneau, French High Commissioner of French Indochina

(Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam). He had flown to Singapore for security meetings with Sir Malcolm MacDonald, the British Commissioner General for South East Asia, whose previous post from 1946-1948 was as Governor General of Malaya. With the French facing a serious threat of a Communist takeover of their Indochina colonies, Jean Letourneau needed all the help he could get. The extremely smart guard of honour parade was provided by soldiers from the Gordon Highlanders Regiment. An immaculate turn out for a French Colonial ruler. The three gentlemen following behind F/Lt Whiteside are, from left to right: the Base Commander RAF Tengah (Gp/Capt Champion de Crespigny), an unnamed Army officer (possibly Sir Malcolm's military aide-de-camp) and Sir Malcolm MacDonald.'

The RAFBPA annual UK Reunion and AGM for 2019 will take place on Monday and Tuesday 13th and 14th May at The George Hotel, Lichfield

The RAF in India 1942 -45

Part 1: 1944 - a year in the life of Leading Aircraftman G. W. Pattison (from his diary)



The story of the escape of LAC Geoffrey Walter Pattison from RAF Kota Bharu in December 1941 has been described by **Dr Mike Pattison** in the Christmas 2017 (Issue 49) copy of *'Eastward'*. In the months that followed LAC Pattison eventually found himself in Ceylon and then India and Burma. This account, taken from his diary, is of his time with 258 Squadron (*Part 1a*) and 261 Squadron (*Part 1b*), and starts from January 1944. Mike writes: 'Most stories of the Second World War inevitably focus on the drama of military operations, or the mystery of codebreaking, or the dogged perseverance of the Home Front. Little has been told about the relatively humdrum lives of those behind the scenes, such as the RAF ground crews who worked to support flying operations in the theatres of war around the globe. This article, in some small measure, attempts to redress that omission. It is based entirely on a record kept by my father in a week-per-page

pocket diary that was given to him at the beginning of 1944. He assiduously jotted something every day, and although the entries are sometimes repetitive, and very brief they do manage to capture the zeitgeist of the camps on which he served and the routine of his life in the RAF. It is not true to say that my father's war was without moments of high drama! In December 1941 he had escaped from the advancing Japanese in northern Malaya by travelling (by road convoy) from Kota Bharu to Kuala Krai where a commandeered train then took him, and other airmen, to Singapore. From Singapore he made his way to Ceylon and eventually to India and Burma. His diary opens in January 1944 at Chittagong (now in Bangladesh) where he was posted as an armourer to 258 Squadron. A mechanic by training, he had studied at Wrexham Technical College and then joined the RAF in January 1940 at the age of 19. His service record shows he had trained at Cardington and been posted to the Far East in May 1941...he had never travelled abroad until then.'

'Those early weeks in 1944 were not happy days. For whatever reason (his diary does not elucidate) morale in 258 Squadron was not good. In part it might have been due to a lack of downtime for on 25/1/44 he records "Ken, Joe Milton and myself do a bit of grumbling about time-off, not much success" and on 26/1/44 "More grumbling this time with a little more success - we'll get a day off yet!" In part it may have been because of the heightened nervousness about an anticipated Japanese invasion from Burma. Writing from Hay Strip, south east of Chittagong, where the squadron was based for a short while, he notes "Lecture by F/Lt Freeman C.O. There seems to be bags of panic about this expected invasion" (9/2/44). The following day there were further developments "Lecture by the ALO. We are assured as to the situation but there is still bags of panic", and on 11/2/44 "Lecture by the M.O. on first aid, expecting casualties!"

One by one his friends received postings elsewhere, which compounded his mood. Then on 16/2/44 he received news of his posting to 261 Squadron, "Heard I'm posted, receive clearance chit and I'm not sorry either. Posted 261 Squadron." He was to remain with 261 for the rest of the year, although his first challenge was locating the squadron. On 18.2.44 he records " Said goodbye to the lads. In my way at 6.30 pm from Hays. I arrive at *Chitt* transit camp late" Next day "Can't locate 261. Go to Group. Find out at Chiringa. Spend the day at Chittagong". On the next day, 20/2/44, he travelled to Chiringa where he notes "Found 261 here OK. Find billet and get organised with kit etc,"

First impressions of 261 Squadron were good."Do the usual New Arrivals round and met the w/o and section. They create a good impression. Find out (I'm) in 'B' FLT." Not long after he arrives the squadron found itself in action against the Japanese "Kites on a strafe, therefore we work late. It's worth it to hit Japs (23/2/44)" On 24/2/44 "Spend horrible night on flare path in paddy field. Worst night I've ever spent." But the action soon ended in what seems to have been a strategic withdrawal by the squadron into India. This

involved a three day journey by train, and by boat along the Feni River, to a camp just outside Calcutta. Here his daily life settled into more of a routine of cleaning and maintaining guns on aircraft and, in the evening, often going to the cinema. The cinema was a major source of evening entertainment for the ground crews, whether the local cinema such as the 'Lighthouse' in Calcutta or the camp cinemas such as the one at Bangalore. In total my father saw 111 films in 1944, most of them Hollywood or Pinewood blockbusters, though a few sound more like propaganda films, such as *Destination Tokyo*. Other sources of entertainment included occasional concerts, dances and table tennis tournaments - my father was particularly taken by a Chinese band at an ENSA show (3/6/44). But by far the second most common form of evening entertainment was reading and writing correspondence which, with few interruptions, happened throughout the year. His least favourite activity, which mercifully happened very infrequently, was overnight guard duty which he found boring and repeatedly described as unpleasant.

During his time in Calcutta his earlier wish was granted and days off became a regular occurrence. On these he visited restaurants in town, went swimming at the baths, and on one occasion. "Went down to Cal (Calcutta) to shop. Had photo taken," Early in March a small pox outbreak confined all to camp at Alipore (just outside Calcutta) for a week, prompting my father's plaintive note; ""Still confined to camp. I wish they'd lift ban (16/3/44". On the 18/3/44 he wrote "This quarantine is a dead loss. Day off today. Can't go out."

On the base life adopted the regular pattern of maintenance, gun testing (including air firing), pay parades, kit inspection, aircraft inspections and, occasionally, lectures. On 6/4/44 my father commented "Went down to 67 Squadron [*also at Alipore*] to get gen on *Spit*. Quite easy." There were also occasional prangs and at this stage (of the war) these accounted for the greatest loss of aircraft. My father's diary recalls eight such accidents throughout the year, mostly with the pilots surviving although in September (11/9/44) two were badly injured. There were infrequent bombing raids from Alipore (19/4/44) and on one occasion two pilots entertained themselves with a scenic excursion; "Fletcher and McDonald (CO 261 Squadron) fly around the peak of Everest (22/4/44)" - a round trip of some 800 miles from Alipore.

Towards the end of April the squadron was on the move again. 25/4/44 "Hear we are going to Bangalore. Busy day fitting cannons, etc. Pack up at 4 pm." 26/4/44 "I check kites over in preparation for trip to Bangalore." The journey by train, for the ground crew, took six days starting **29/4/44** "Up at 4 am. Breakfast and board train by 6.30 am. Leave at 8 am. Pass through Kharapur at 6 pm. Travelled about 80 miles by dark." **30.4/44** "Woke up at 7 am. Find we have travelled about 260 miles. Pass through Cuttak and stop at Khurda Rd for breakfast. 380 miles by dark." **1/5/44** "Woke at 7 am. Find we are now 780 miles from Madras (*now Chennai*). Have two meals through the day, both ropey. 390 miles from *Mad*. By dark." **2/5/44** "Woke up 7 am. We are now 210 miles from Madras. Travel till dark. Very slow going. Pick fruit from orchard. We are now 110 miles away. Should be there tomorrow." **3/5/44** "Woke up at 7 am just having been through Madras. Travel all day as usual. We have travelled 90 miles by darkness from Madras." Finally, on **4.5.44** "Arrived at Bangalore...Busy all day unloading equipment, etc."

The carriage of an Indian troop train was about 20 feet in length with a doorway (but no door) at each corner, a wooden bench ran alongside each side with another two back to back, in the centre line. At the front of the carriage was a transverse bench for food preparation, at the other end a hole in the floor - privacy wasn't a luxury to be enjoyed by the other ranks! Rations for each carriage consisted of bully beef, hard tack biscuits (Shakapura biscuits!), tea, sugar and condensed milk. A metal bucket was also provided to carry a welcoming brew of *char* back to the 'passengers' at meal times - at meal times the train would stop, a handful of tea was slung into the bucket and a 'volunteer' would walk along the track with it to the engine. Placed on the ground, in the right position, the engine driver would open a valve and steam/boiling water would be added to the tea in the bucket.

On reaching Bangalore it was immediately back to the monotony of camp life, but in May my father enjoyed a spot of leave with an excursion to Wellington, a British hill station north of Mettupalayan. On 13/5/44 he wrote, "Day off. Packed kit ready for Hill Party. Wrote much. Two kites collide in mid-air. Both pilots OK." The break lasted a fortnight. Getting there involved yet more train rides, this time via Jolarpet and



261 Squadron on the move.

Coimbatore, taking just two days. The region around Wellington is of woods and mountainous, with scenic waterfalls and rich vegetation. Much of my father's time there was spent exploring the countryside either on foot or by bicycle, although he also watched cricket matches, played billiards and card games and in the evenings (inevitably) watched films at the camp cinema (including *Mrs Miniver*). While there he often walked to the nearby town of Coonoor where he would dine at the Allies Cafe, including lunch on his last day in the

province. In early June, back at Bangalore, there some dramatic moments. On 2/6/44 "Worked in morning. Wrote mail in afternoon and evening. We hear Greenwood is missing in 'S'. Bad show." On 4/6/44 "Hear Greenwood okay." Also on 4/6/44, the squadron was joined by 30 Squadron, and new Thunderbolt aircraft arrived. On 5/6/44 there was mixed news "146 kites arrive. I see one bite the dust and burst into flames. P killed. Hear Rome has fallen." By mid-June the Allied efforts were gathering pace. My father reported news that the Second Front was going okay (6/6/44 and on 27/6/44 "Hear that Cherbourg has fallen. On 4/7/44 he records "Hear news of the fall of Minsk. The Americans are doing very well."

Even in Bangalore the war effort was intensifying, in June he records; "Work all morning. Bags of cannon work these days." "Work as usual in the morning. Bags of flying. See D.S.O.s awarded. 1939-43 Star. Very quiet evening, reading, writing etc." "Work on Thunderbolts. General check out. Clean up cannons on Hurricanes. See *Wuthering Heights* at night." On 21/6/44 my father writes; "Clean guns on Thunderbolts. Working all day from now on. Bangalore at night. Dinner at Chinese. See Jim Smith (from) 258 (Squadron). He also writes that the Thunderbolts were "Quite an easy kite on the whole." At this juncture, the mail from the UK was interrupted "Receive plenty of inland mail. Blighty mail coming through very badly these days. More frequently now bad weather interrupted flying. Typical of his entries in this period was one on 29/6/44; "No flying due to bad weather. Quiet day", and in July "Bags of practice bombing with Harvards. Weather too bad for Thunderbolts." Apart from the rain, the wind was a factor as well "Still very windy and quite cold." (25/7/44). Towards the end of July it was not only the elements that interfered with the flying operations "Kites grounded due to yesterday's crash (28/7/44) in which pilot killed. Cleaned guns, etc." Two days later; "Day off as kites still grounded due to inspection of old petrol system. Very quiet day reading." In the down-time my father reports of cleaning the Hurricanes "ready for going away", then a week after the tragedy, flying resumed. the 'faulty' petrol system presumably having been fixed. But there were other hazards to contend with; "Eventful day! I got stung by a scorpion. George gets hurt when a bomb blows up." (9/8/44), and on the following day he writes; "Plenty of cannon firing. Hear George isn't too bad, but he'll be in dock a week or two. 146 Squadron lose two kites. Both pilots killed." On 14/8/44 "30 Squadron lose two T.bolts. Both pilots killed."

The 'old petrol system' mentioned above of the razor-back Thunderbolt in use at this time may have been related to the 'mysterious' engine failures that occurred when the aircraft were operating in the European Theatre. These mysterious engine problems were eventually found to be due to the added weight of bombs and drop-tanks to

the airframe leading to a build up of excessive high speed when diving at a steep angle of attack. Recovery from the dives led to high g-forces causing a surge or vapour lock in the fuel line in which the fuel pump was unable to overcome at the time. The technique of introducing the Japanese to what the Thunderbolt could achieve was for the aircraft to drop their bombs at low level forcing them into their foxholes, then climb to 8000 feet before diving vertically firing their .5 inch machine guns from 6000 feet into the foxholes. This devastating method was used operationally in Burma late 1944 and early 1945. At high speed and high g-forces the fuel pump had to be up to the job...if that was the cause of the 'faulty petrol system'?

By mid-August my father was reunited with old colleagues as 258 Squadron joined 261 at Bangalore. But the reunion was fleeting. On 15th August 261 again upped-sticks and moved 210 miles to Arakkonam by lorry, where my father complained the "Grub here is horrible" (18/8/44). From there, on 30th August, they were moved yet again, this time further east to an airfield near Chittagong. The move signalled the changing fortunes of the war and the coming assault on Japanese forces in Burma and beyond. The journey (by train) which lasted a week, included my father's birthday on 1/9/44: "My birthday! Up at 7.15 am. 509 miles. Travel through Waltair & Visakhapatnam. 350 miles to Cal (Calcutta) by bedtime." They arrived on 5th September, but on 7th September he grumbles: "No kit arrived yet. Still raining cats and dogs." His kit finally arrived on 10th September.

On 11th September my father gained new responsibility: "Am now i.c 'B' flt section. Two kites prang on runway. Both pilots badly injured. Still bags of gun cleaning." Attacks on the Japanese began to intensify from this point in the year, interrupted by bouts of bad weather. 16/9/44. "Kites on ops bombing and strafing. Bomb up and re-arm ready for tomorrow. On the 19/9/44." "Weather still bad for ops. Bombing and strafing in afternoon. Re-arm and bomb up. Five new armourers." 21/9/44 "Clean kites and bomb up, etc. Plenty of running round with this new responsibility. Write mail at night. c/o prangs. On 25th September, no doubt in recognition for his new responsibility my father notes "Promoted to Cpl. Kites go on ops. Very successful."

New armourers arrive to reinforce the section - they were much needed! He notes on 1/10/44 "Extensive ops all day. A good show on the whole. Bags of very hard grafting." On the 4/10/44 "Squadron scramble for enemy aircraft. No luck. Spits beat us to it. More new chaps arrive from Blighty. Write mail again at night." When the weather was bad there was always training to be had "Very heavy rain all day. No ops. Another new Sgt and Cpl arrive. More gun lectures (6/10/44). On the 9th October his diary reads "We do little flying today. Weather improved. Petrol tank explodes on 146 (Squadron) 'Erk' blown up". The work of the ground crews was hazardous! By mid-October 261 Squadron was supporting advanced parties against the Japanese front line. On 16th October; "10 a/c take-off for ops from ALG (Advanced Landing Ground). We carry on intensive ops with remaining 8 a/c. Show new armourers around. Quiet night." 25th October "Up at 4 am. Kites take-off on ops at 6 am. Long range strafing and bombing. Work until late evening. Spend evening in canteen. Early bed." The next day (26/10/44); "Long range ops in morning. 10 armourers posted to 79 Squadron. Write mail in billet at night. Go to bed early as usual." The apprehension which my father reported at the start of the year had begun to be replaced by optimism as the tide of war turned in favour of the Allies; he notes on 3rd November "Ops all day. Quite successful and busy day with bags of work. Beer at night. Just a little celebrating." On the next day "Another hectic day of ops. Bags of firing etc. Finish later in the evening. More beer at night." There were occasional skirmishes where Japanese planes were clearly in evidence over the airfield "Busy day on Army co-op and long range strafing. Japs out in morning. Three or four chased by Spits (5/11/44)." But the successes were not one sided, on the 9th November, he notes "45 Squadron lose a kite, one shot up badly."

As the year drew to a close thoughts turned to Christmas - "Very quiet morning. Kites return in afternoon. Work late on kites. Send off Christmas letter-cards at night." This was on the 11th November, also the food remained an issue in that on the 14th it was written that there was a "Big moan about food. Hope it

improves." On 21st November there was yet another move further eastward towards the Japanese lines. "Pack up all equipment, etc. Check over kites. Get personal kit sorted out. 146 go to Wangjing." The issue here was the lack of water: "Bags of ammo belting. Kites on long range ops. One Jap kite (kill) confirmed, one probable and one chased. Work late at night. No water."(25/11/44). It was not until early December that the situation improved: "Pay day. Bombing and strafing ops again. Very successful. Water situation has now improved. Cook supper at night." (1/12/44).

Here there was extensive bombing and strafing. My father worked late most nights, but morale in the camp was boosted by the apparent success of the operations, for which they were thanked: On 6th December "Readiness again. Another escort. N.C.O.s parade. Talk by G.C.. Thanks for work done, etc. Write mail at night. Hear news. Good." Repeatedly my father records (e.g. 9/12/44): " Bombing and Strafing. No snags." There were plenty of incidents as well: Quite an eventful day. Kites on escort. 146 and 79 badly shot up. Evand killed. 79 CO prangs on runway and guns do a minor strafe off strip. No one hurt." (11/12/44). On the 12th: "Air raid warning and scramble in morning. Bags of panic, but no action. Kites on escort again. Another late finish. A fortnight later, on the 27th December there was a "Big panic on...bombing etc. All squadrons on bombing to relieve (the) Army."

Christmas 1944 came and went: "Kites bombing again. Change over to tanks at night. Quite a big sesh (session) in tent at night If I remember right." (24.12.44), and on the 25th: "Day off today and am I glad.



What a hangover! Spend a quiet day. Do some washing, etc, Kites on patrol." The menu suggests he also enjoyed a hearty Christmas meal, The year ended much more positively than it had begun - the final diary entry from New Year's Eve reads: "Kites back ops. Very successful close Army support. Bomb ops again. Big New Year celebrations. Hogmanay." It is evident from these records that 1944 was a turning point in the Second World War on so many fronts. My father's diary illustrates a shift from fear of invasion in India and a sense that the Japanese forces still had the upper hand at the beginning of the year to a growing confidence among the Allied forces as the year draws on. It describes the routine of life for the ground crew in India; the frequent moves, often involving long train journeys, the enforced downtime due to foul weather, the long evenings spent writing mail or chatting in the canteen, or listening to the news on the radio, the numerous visits to the cinema and the intense bursts of frenetic activity to get the aircraft to a state of preparedness

for operations, sometimes working for long hours. It also reveals the grumbles; poor food, lack of water, overnight guard duty, lack of time off and the celebrations as the news of the Allied victories elsewhere unfolded alongside their own successes. Above all then, his diary briefly shines a unique spotlight on the experiences of a member of the RAF ground crew in India at this crucial juncture in the war, and also charts the many highs and lows of daily life in 261 Squadron in 1944.



Part 1a: 258 Squadron - the early time in the Far East.



Gibraltar: Convoy WS14D, including 266 (Fighter) Wing (242, **258** and 605 Squadrons) and 232 Squadron (267 (Fighter) Wing, departed the Clyde early December 1941 bound for the Middle East via the long route around Africa, through the Persian Gulf (name used in historical context) and Suez Canal with Iraq as the final destination. Among the RAF Element of HQ staff and ground crew were inexperienced Hurricane pilots, replacements for the 'old hands' of the three squadrons who previously had travelled separately on HMT Athene, a naval aircraft carrier who in turn, with 39 crated Hurricanes on board, was bound for Gibraltar. The plan was for the experienced pilots to embark the aircraft carriers HMS Ark Royal and HMS Argus to convey the pilots within flying range of Malta and refuel

for flying onto Egypt. It is also assumed the aircraft carriers already had the required number of Hurricanes on board already as the Athene still carried the full complement of 39 aircraft.

Two trips were to be made, on the first 242¹ and 605 Squadrons were to be taken within range of Malta and on the second **258** Squadron. Following the successful launching of 37 Hurricanes to Malta from both ships, Ark Royal was torpedoed on the 13 November on her return to Gibraltar. She finally sank on the 14th! The Argus, being an elderly training ship, was to remain at Gibraltar awaiting the arrival of a replacement 'modern' aircraft carrier, in turn leaving **258** Squadron on the 'The Rock'. During this period the pilots of **258** Squadron officially formed Fighter Defence Gibraltar until the start of the Japanese action in the Far East in December 1941, when they were ordered to re-embark the Athene and proceed to Takoradi (along with the 39 crated Hurricanes) on the Gold Coast. The 'old hands' of **258**, and a handful of 'left over' pilots from 242 and one from 605 Squadrons disembarked at Takoradi.

The African Adventure: After unloading 'the old hands', the Athene was later to sail to Singapore with its cargo of 39 aircraft. The off-loaded pilots had to travel to Port Sudan via Khartoum where they were to board the recently commissioned aircraft carrier HMS Indomitable in early January 1942. In order to oversee the movement of the pilots, the CO's of 232 and **258** Squadrons travelled from Takoradi to Khartoum by Pan Am DC-3. Other pilots followed, travelling to Khartoum and Port Sudan by various aircraft, namely DC-2s, Blenheims, Bostons, and Dragon Rapides with a few flying newly assembled Hurricanes to fly this part of the Takoradi route. Rail travel was considered², but:

"The CO had refused to let us travel by train since there were only two types of carriage - First Class, which sergeants were not permitted to use, and cattle wagons, which the CO wouldn't allow us (Sergeants) to travel in."

In early January 1942, HMS Indomitable sailed to Ceylon to collect 48 Hurricane fighters for 232 and **258** Squadrons (*some accounts say the Hurricanes were flown in from Takoradi - it is an area of uncertainty!*) storing them below deck, and separated from their wings! On January 11th HMS Indomitable's Albacore and Fulmar squadrons were off-loaded at Aden to give deck room for the RAF fly-off at sea. Following Aden the vessel arrived at Port Sudan on January 14th to take on board the pilots and also around 100 RAF (Middle East) groundcrew³ tasked to reassemble the Hurricanes en-route to Christmas Island. Unfortunately most had never worked on Hurricanes in their service careers, the main aircraft types being Blenheims and Lysanders! The assembling of the Hurricanes in the main fell to the ship's Sea Hurricane unit - one of the Sea Hurricane pilots noted:

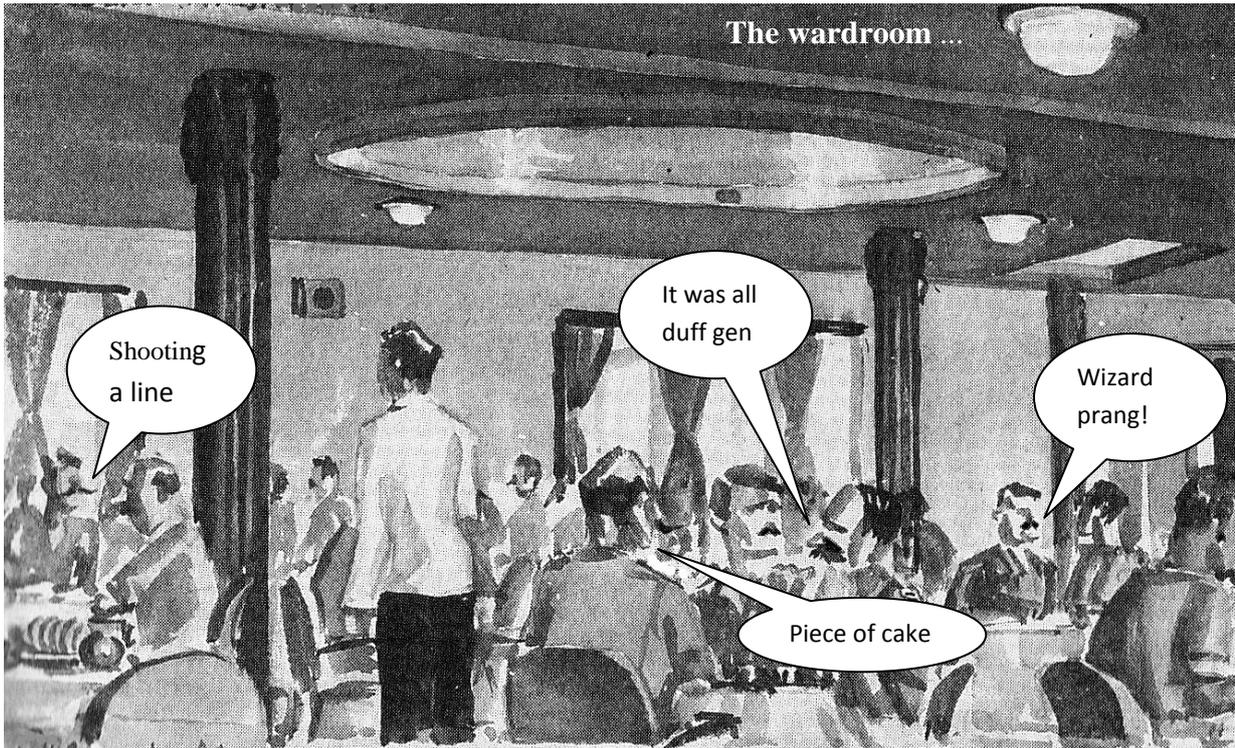
"The hundred RAF men turned out to have worked on Blenheims and Lysanders and did not know one end of a Hurricane from another; the mainplanes had all got mixed up and had to be sorted out; and the squadron

ratings and officers were in the hangar, almost without a break, for 72 hours, staggering round, twelve or fifteen to a wing, juggling them till the right ones were found, and juggling with them again until the bolt holes on wing root and mainplane could be made to correspond and the bolts fitted."

The same RN Sea Hurricane pilot also commented that the ship's personnel took a dim view of the RAF intrusion on the Navy's way of life onboard the carrier:

"The wardroom was full of RAF moustaches and RAF slang, and the ship had been reduced to a freighter, which disgruntled us."

A RNZAF officer from **258 Squadron** noted that: "The officers on the Indomitable lived in luxury with their own cabins and batmen. Other ranks had only a small part of the ship to themselves and at night were packed in like sardines...The English class system. We had a luxurious dining room and wardroom though."



In the meantime the Athene with its cargo of 39 crated Hurricanes moved to Durban before setting sail mid-January in convoy for Singapore but in the end arrived at Batavia early February 1942 - twelve of the aircraft were passed over to the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army Air Force (ML-KNIL).

The Squadron sails toward Christmas Island: HMS Indomitable reached Addu Atoll on the 21st January and later refuelled at the Cocos Islands, before proceeding some fifty miles south of Christmas Island where the two squadrons were to fly off the carrier and make for Batavia's civil airfield on Java. On the 28th January, fitted with long range fuel tanks and an escort of two Blenheims from Java, sixteen hurricanes, eight from each squadron took off for Batavia. The remaining thirty two aircraft were to follow the next day (29th). Of the first batch fifteen aircraft (one went u/s) then flew to P2 airfield (Palembang) sited in Sumatra, where the guns were removed and thick anti-corrosion grease removed, and the aircraft refuelled before taking off for RAF Seletar, guided by two Blenheims. They landed at Seletar just before a large number of Japanese bombers attacked the airfield. After the Japanese departed, the first task was to remove the external long range fuel tanks and outer two pairs of guns in order to lighten the aircraft - also ethylene glycol, the coolant for the engine wasn't available at the time! The ground crews drafted in (from Buffalo squadrons 243 RAF and 488 RNZAF) also found difficulties with the Hurricane being a 'new' aircraft to them, their tools were not Hurricane 'friendly' and removal of the external fuel tanks proved to be 'awkward' - also removal of the guns, all under the threat of a return visit by the Japanese bombers.

Of their short stay at P2 an American pilot from **258** Squadron commented:

"This aerodrome was simply a couple of enormous runways cleared in the jungle, which grew thickly right up to the edge of the field on all sides...The RAF was just getting established here...Our machines were brand new and there were numerous things to take care of before they would be in fighting condition. Among the other things, all the machine guns were heavily coated inside and out with a special grease to resist corrosion on the long sea voyage. I spent most of the day working with some armourers on my airplane, removing and disassembling its twelve guns, carefully cleaning all the parts in gasoline, greasing and oiling the parts properly for service, and then reassembling, installing, and loading them. We worked beside the airplane, sitting on empty gasoline cans, retreating under the wings to work during the frequent showers that swept across. And while we worked, by chatting with these armourers who had all been in the fighting zone in Malaya until recently, I gradually assimilated some of the picture of what lay ahead for us."

All of the *Indomitables* Hurricanes of 232 and **258** Squadrons arrived at RAF Seletar by the 30th January 1942 and flew their first operation 31st January.

Withdrawal from Singapore - 10 February 1942: Over the period 31st January-10th February, the



Hurricane squadrons on Singapore were continuously in action and suffered losses. As the bombardment of Singapore airfields intensified the decision was made to withdraw aircraft to P1 airfield at Palembang. On the 5th February, 232 and **258** Squadrons had 11 and 18 Hurricanes respectively, plus 4 from 488 Squadron, parked at Palembang, The final exodus from Singapore

(Seletar) was on the 10th February, of three 'flyable' Hurricanes, and a 'battered' Buffalo. One of the Hurricanes, BG830, a 232 Squadron aircraft was flown by Flt Lt Sharp of **258** Squadron, later to play a prominent role as a RAF Chindit in Burma after escaping from Java. At P1 Facilities for aircraft servicing were wanting; Hurricane tool kits were not available and tools were either purchased locally or made by the groundcrews. Servicing of 258 Squadron aircraft was by Buffalo groundcrews, few if any of aircraft spares were available, ammunition was in short supply, as also was ethylene glycol and oxygen, and there were no

battery starters, or even battery charging facilities! Finding P1 in bad weather could also be difficult as there was no DF and RDF facilities. Also around this time, reinforcement pilots, HQ staff and ground personnel from 258 and 605 Squadrons arrived from Java by boat, rail and lorry during which time the squadrons were in action daily but also recognising a withdrawal south to Java was inevitable. Without going into the (at times) chaotic withdrawal to Java it is sufficient to say that the remaining few Hurricanes and fifteen pilots eventually fetched up at Tjilatap airfield in Java. On the 16th of February it was decided to disband 232, 258 and 488 Squadrons and cards were drawn to select the surviving pilots who would form one flight of the retained 605 Squadron; this took place at the Hotel des Indies in Batavia. Those being evacuated travelled by train (including ground staff) to Tjilatap where on the 27th February the (very) crowded ship, the Kota Gede, sailed for Ceylon. Some six days later the Kota Gede arrived at Colombo.

The Kota Gede: This small Dutch cargo vessel took on board some 2000+ Allied servicemen, mainly RAF being evacuated from Java in February 1942. Accounts of conditions on board over the journey vary but all



describe in general what the evacuees had to endure: *"For sleeping we were in holds on the bare boards and only a blanket for bedding. The conditions in the hold were terrible and during the night rats ran across the beams overhead and water dripped down from the roof, the stench was overpowering. Food was a great problem. \usually we began the day with some dried bacon, biscuits and tea. At mid-day we had three 'dog' biscuits, a bit of jam and tea if we were lucky. In the evening more biscuits, a bit of bully beef or a couple of spoonfuls of mixed (tinned) stew and a mug of tea. There was no variety at all and very soon all we had*

was nothing but biscuits and bully beef. It hardly seems possible that hundreds of servicemen would queue for hours for such rations. The drinking water was usually red with rust from the tanks that had not been used for years, and for washing there was only salt water and as we did not have salt water soap...Sanitary arrangements were also very bad and often it was impossible to use the lavatories; no one could keep clean under these conditions.'

The new 258 Squadron: G Squadron, a 'reserve' squadron of mainly RNZAF Hurricane pilots based at Ratmalana airfield (Ceylon), was renumbered on the 1st March 1942 as 258 Squadron. Ratmalana airfield was requisitioned to form part of the air defence plan for Colombo and became RAF Ratmalana on the naming of the new 258 Squadron (Hurricanes). The squadron, together with 30 Squadron (also flying Hurricanes), went into action on the Easter Sunday Raid (5 April 1942) on Colombo by carrier based aircraft of the Imperial Japanese Navy. Both RAF squadrons suffered heavy losses in the action.

¹The 'experienced' Hurricane pilots of 242 Squadron were retained on Malta (and absorbed into 126 Squadron) for the defence of the island and the squadron now plays no further part in this story.

²The journey by rail from Takoradi to Khartoum was a non-starter according to a 1955 map.

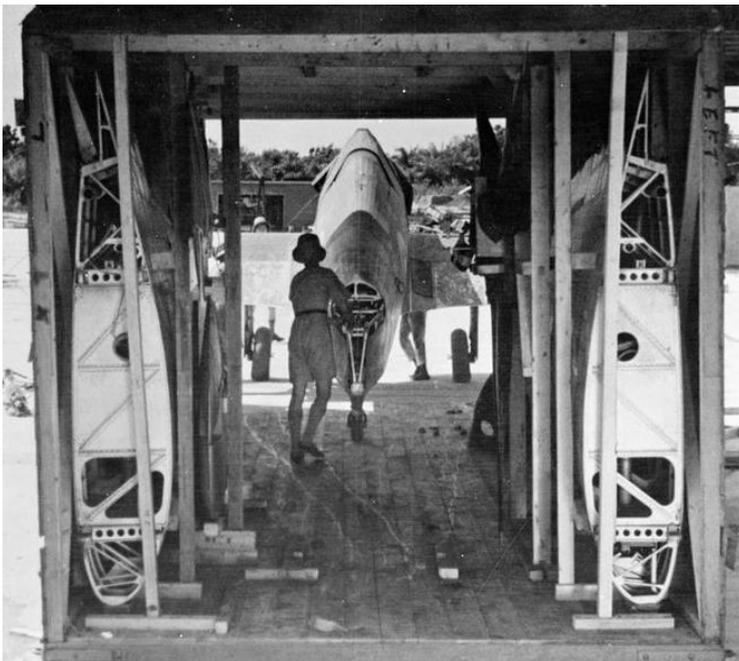
³It is possible that the 'Middle East' groundcrew taken on board HMS Indomitable at Port Sudan on January 14th might have returned to Port Sudan with the aircraft carrier when the ship returned late February to move 261 Squadron to Ceylon. On this journey 261 Squadron had its own Hurricane assemblers!

Part 1b: 261 Squadron - the early time in the Far East.



From the Middle East to Ceylon: 261 Squadron was initially formed as part of the Malta Defence Force with Sea Gladiators based at RAF Hal Fal. The later addition of four Hurricanes raised its status to that of a squadron. Disbanded in May 1941, the squadron reformed on the 12th July 1941 at Habbaniyah (Iraq) when 127 Squadron was renumbered. The squadron (Hurricanes and Gladiators) served in Iraq, Cyprus and Palestine, the latter two in the role of air defence before preparing for moving to the Far East, with 30 Squadron, at the beginning of 1942 (destination Singapore, changed mid-voyage to Ceylon) The Hurricanes of both squadrons were taken to Port Sudan, crated¹, and then taken onboard the aircraft carrier HMS Indomitable. In the meantime a 196 personnel party of Hurricane assemblers made

their way to Port Tewfik at the southern end of the Suez Canal where they boarded HMT Princess Kathleen on the 22nd February for the journey to Port Sudan. Likewise general squadron staff and stores etc. also embarked the Princess Kathleen and stayed on board for the journey to Ceylon. They arrived at their destination (Trincomalee) on the 11th March. At Port Sudan the (experienced) assembling party embarked HMS Indomitable and with the Hurricanes onboard set sail on the 26 February for Ceylon, with the Hurricanes of 30 Squadron flying off Indomitable on March 6th with 261 Squadron following on the 7th after assembly on board during the 5th and 6th.



Left: Were the squadron Hurricanes crated before loading onto the aircraft carrier? If this was the case were the crates carried (as flatpacks?) on board the ship and off-loaded at Port Sudan for packing each aircraft individually? Following the aircraft leaving the carrier for their destinations, 30 Squadron for Ratmalana and 261 Squadron for China Bay, the aircraft assemblers/ground crews arrived on the 7th March at Trincomalee and then travelled, by road, to RAF China Bay. The rest of the squadron and stores arrived at China Bay on the 11th March as mentioned above. 261 Squadron went into action against the Imperial Japanese Navy air attack on Trincomalee Harbour on the 9th of April 1942...there were significant losses!

¹Different accounts of the preparation and loading of the squadrons Hurricanes are given from several sources The speed of assembly on board HMS Indomitable as it neared Ceylon would seem to support the crating of each aircraft, together with wings, to avoid the problems experienced with 258 Squadron on the earlier journey to the Far East.

A background to the 261 Squadron is given by an AC F1 Mech (E) who served with 261 Squadron in the Middle East and then Ceylon:

"I served with No, 261 Squadron which was reformed from a nucleus of Gladiators and Hurricanes. I was allocated one of the Hurricanes - seeming very complex after the Audax....Our next job at Habbaniya was to follow army units into Syria against the Vichy French. All this time refuelling was done by hand from 4

gallon cans of fuel strained through chamois leather and carried in Crossley six-wheelers, not too comfortable an operation! Back at Habbaniya we equipped as a full Hurricane squadron. A short stay and then down to Shaibah by (Vickers) Valencia to cover the occupation of Iran before before returning to Habbaniya, this time by rail to Baghdad and thence by road.

Just time to recover from sandfly fever and (then) on my way with a flight of 4 Hurricanes - this time in defence of Haifa. Still travelled by Valencia and still the same 'in-flight entertainment', watching the RPM gauges (situated out on the engine nacelle) fluctuating as we wallowed around Transjordan....no CDUs (constant speed units) fitted yet. In-flight catering consisted of such gastronomic delights as the unexpired portions of the day's rations - a bully beef sandwich, cheese sandwich and probably a tomato or hard boiled egg. Drinks were of tepid water from our water bottles, but since full water *chargals* (chaguls) were attached to the struts we were assured of a cool drink at a refuelling stop.

Christmas Eve 1941 saw us on the move again with our 4 Hurricanes, this time to Nicosia in defence of Cyprus. On this we travelled by DC2 (31 Squadron). The tail plane was covered by the signatures of numerous film stars, but no safety belts or seats! We sat on our bed rolls and hung onto the sides! I think the plane had originally belonged to Florida Airway, hence the decorations? We remained on Cyprus until February 1942 when we recalled to Palestine, this time by DH86 where we eventually we met up with our squadron, minus our aircraft. Eventually all a/c tradesmen were separated for further travel, others told they would follow later. We proceeded to Port Tewfick there boarding the *Princess Kathleen* for quite a pleasant trip to Port Sudan where we found we were to embark on the aircraft carrier *HMS Indomitable* along with 30 Squadron. Our destination at the time was unknown to us and it was during the voyage that we were given to understand that we would be landing in Ceylon. 261 had sixteen Hurricanes and 30 Squadron would have the same. These were in a partially dismantled state, assembly to be carried out on board and the aircraft flown off when we were within range of Ceylon. We eventually arrived at China Bay, it would now be early March. This was a period of chaos in the Far East and on arrival it was found there was insufficient ammunition to arm all our aircraft. However the powers that be must have anticipated trouble as an ammunition ship that had put into Colombo had been told to clear off, eventually arriving at Trincomalee. We boarded it and after removing tons of bombs of various sizes and a large amount of pyrotechnics, we (then) removed our requirements giving us just time to get sorted out before the Jap attack on April 2nd 1942."

The 31 Squadron DC-2 referred to above is believed to be former Pan American Airways NC14271 (*below*). It found its way to 31 Squadron in 1941 as HK821 and spent a year in Iraq before being moved to India. It was struck off charge at Lahore in 1943.



Note: 2019 RAFBPA UK Reunion and AGM - Monday 13th May and Tuesday 14 May 2019.

RAF Chindits: On the first Chindit Expedition into Burma (Operation Longcloth 1943), it was intended that the RAF play a major role in supporting the men on the ground through supply drops from aircraft (based in India), and these drops being called up and co-ordinated by RAF personnel¹ who were attached to the Army columns, each column numbering several hundred men. The 1943 expedition was the forerunner to the successful 1944 'Operation Thursday' where aircraft, both RAF and USAAF were involved in a full air support programme for the Chindits, again with RAF signals sections (each made up of one officer and one sergeant) on the ground being in wireless contact with the supply drop aircraft (Dakotas), unlike in Operation Longcloth where communication with the supply aircraft (mainly Hudsons) was by Aldis lamp, or smoke fires in the day and bright fires at night.



The 'hardening up' of the first Chindit Expedition RAF signals volunteers prior to leaving for Burma starts with the story of Sergeant Arthur Willshaw and is taken from the book *March or Die - The Story of Wingate's Chindits*.

I had been a wireless operator in Singapore from 1939 until it fell and I had worked every wireless and signals station from Singapore to the UK during this time. I wanted to fly and above all I wanted to get home to take an eagerly awaited chance at "Aircrew". After an interview with my Commanding Officer a signal was received from Headquarters at New Delhi instructing me to report for an interview with the AOC-in-C. It was on Colombo railway station that I met up with my first two compatriots, a Flight Lieutenant Longmore and a Sergeant Davies, who knew no more than I did - except a rumour. Their rumour very nicely agreed with mine, little did we know! During the journey from Ceylon, across India to Delhi, we got to know each other. Arthur Longmore was an ex-rubber planter from Malaya, the first man he said, ever to loop a glider. Cliff Davies was an Australian, quiet, studious, wanting anything except a nice secure desk job. And so to Headquarters, New Delhi. Marble staircases, a very ornate office and a personal interview with Air Vice-Marshal D'Albiac.'

The next 12 months. 'In those twelve months I had enough adventures to last me a dozen lifetimes. We were ordered to report to a Long-Range Penetration Group, training in the central provinces at Jhansi in India. Our RAF element had now been joined by Flight Sergeant Allan Fidler and we arrived at Jhansi in best uniform, in the middle of the monsoon. Getting off our train we were told that the brigade we were to join was in camp at Malthone some ten miles away in the jungle. On asking for transport we were (none too politely) told there was none available and that orders were "all personnel joining the brigade were to walk it". Leaving our suitcases behind, walk we did, the first few miles along a reasonable road and then a plunge into a jungle track which we followed to our destination. Most of the track was signposted with the odd Army noticeboard and for the last few miles it was completely under water. wet, miserable, bedraggled, we reached the Brigade Headquarters - just a few tents in a jungle clearing. All around people seemed to be living in trees and the surrounding water was deep enough in places to swim in. Tired, weary and fed up with life in general, I found myself having to make a bed in the forks of a large tree and then, dreaming of wild animals, especially snakes, I dropped off to sleep.

And so began three months of hard and bitter experience, How I hated it - used to the comforts of barrack life, it became a fight for existence. We were paraded before daybreak, plunged into icy cold rivers, taught how to build bridges, how to cross lakes and fast flowing rivers, how to shoot, how to handle explosives, how to be amateur Tarzans swinging on ropes from tree to tree, how to travel in the jungle and, above all, how to live off the jungle. The explosives tent was always open - take what you want and learn how to use it. Woe betide the careless! March, march, march, ten, fifteen, twenty miles from camp along the only track in existence. We were then turned off the track into the jungle and told to find our way back to Headquarters. We lived off the jungle, no food except biscuits² - if we wanted food we foraged for it. We ate snakes, frogs, lizards, fish, roots, leaves, in fact we tried everything at least once! Pigeons were a great favourite, but there wasn't much left of a pigeon that's been shot with a .303 from short range. Six pigeons just about made a meal. Stuffed with broken biscuit and served with young bamboo shoots - I can still taste them. But of course, as we foraged, game became scarcer. Peacocks, which were plentiful to start with (they taste much like sweet

turkey) soon left the area, and most of the bigger game too. This meant foraging further and further afield into the jungle in order to live. We learned by experience which leaves, when dried, made a tobacco substitute, and which leaves to use for other vital necessities. One of my most painful recollections was the time when I was somewhat in a hurry I picked the largest leaf to hand only to find, too late, that it was covered with small hairs that, when crushed, caused a nasty itchy rash. I never made that mistake again. And so after three months of this type of living we had toughened up considerably- flabby flesh had disappeared, chests filled out, muscles developed, etc.'

After the 'survival course' Arthur Willshaw was attached to the Headquarters column together with F/Sgt Fidler and S/Ldr Longmore (now promoted); his job was to keep wireless contact with all the columns and also RAF HQ New Delhi.

¹Communication with base at RAF Agartala (east Bengal) was by RAF 1082/83 wireless sets (standard in Blenheims) carried by mules. Air supply for Operation Longcloth was provided by 31 and 194 Squadron aircraft on detachment to Agartala. Inter-column communications whilst in Burma was by FS.6 field sets.

²The standard ration biscuit in India was the *Shakapura* biscuit; it fulfilled the same role as the British ration hard tack biscuit.



A number of personnel from one of Wingate's five dispersal groups, 7th April 1943: S/Ldr Longmore, Captain Motilal Katju (Indian Army Official Observer), Flt Lt Cecil Tooth, Lt Lewis Rose, Lt Ken Spurlock (Signals Officer), F/Sgt Alan Fidler, Major John Jefferies.

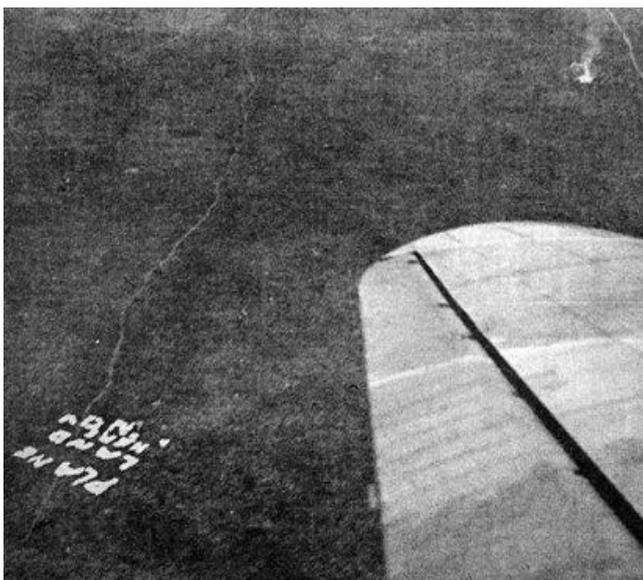
F/Sgt Alan Fidler joined the Malayan Police after the war, becoming a Senior Intelligence Officer during the Emergency, S/Ldr Longmore believed survived Rangoon Jail as a PoW of the Japanese, Major John Jefferies was Wingate's doppelgänger during the February 1943 entry into Burma.

Rescue by Dakota: Following the 1943 expedition into Burma by the 'Chindits' in February, Wingate ordered a withdrawal of the columns to India in late March. This is the story of a party from 8 Column and the subsequent airlift of eighteen wounded or ill soldiers to India: 'On the 3rd April the column crossed the Shweli River on their return journey and continued north towards Bhamo and the rendezvous point for a supply drop. On their way the column ran out of rations and nearly all were in a poor state when eventually they came onto a large area of open ground in the vicinity of the village of Sonpu. The following is taken from the 8 Column War Diary, with amendments:

25 April - Major Scott took (a) foraging party into Mezaligon village (deserted on the issued map). Foraging party succeeded in getting 3x chickens and sufficient rice to give each man enough for two meals. After issuing the rice the column moved along the SONPU (village) track crossing the Patin HKA, a good running stream, intending to make as near as possible to the line of flight to be used by planes for the S.D. About 1 mile west of the Patin HKA (small river) found a large open space running north, so dispersed off the track on to maidan (open space) and thence along the jungle on the eastern edge. At 1200 hrs lit fires and cooked rice and made tea. At 1300 hrs prepared S.D. ground and put out defences.

A message "COULD PLANE LAND HERE" had been marked on our maps as it was thought possibly a plane could land in this particular area/ Plane arrived at 1445 hrs - earlier than expected - and dropped 5 days rations, tommy guns, waterproof capes, bully, cheese and chocolate. Plane lowered undercarriage and tried to land but failed. It then made off to the west in a great hurry. Shortly afterwards a thunderstorm burst - hail stones the size of marbles fell and all the troops started collecting them to eat! Only half our demands had been dropped. It was thought that the remaining supplies would be dropped later in the day but no planes arrived. Decided to go into bivouac for the night and wait to see if a plane would come the next day. Four fighters had accompanied the D.C., but had left in a great hurry with the D.C., presumably to avoid the storm. Next day - reveille 0430 hrs. Major Scott and party moved to S.D. area. At 0600 hrs plane heard and further S.D. carried out. Another five day's rations dropped including more bully, cheese, mail, papers, oil, atebri (Atabrine), medical stores, charged battery and waterproof capes. No clothing dropped. Message dated 25 April from O.C. RAF Transport Squadron asking for particulars to be sent by W/T* regarding possibilities of landing ground. At 1600 hrs two fighter planes arrived over the area and dropped two messages; one was a repetition of the questionnaire previously dropped and the other gave a route out of Burma, also included was information as to patrols operating in enemy occupied territory.'

There are different versions to the story of this stage of the rescue, one being that the 25th April message



laid out on the ground (using maps) requesting an aircraft lands was not as described in the War Diary but was, as suggested by the Support Group Commander on the ground, to read PLANE LAND HERE NOW. The column leader, Colonel Cooke, afflicted with jungle sores and dysentery, apparently replied that "We cannot issue orders to the RAF and the message should read REQUEST PLANE LAND HERE". However, due to the closeness of the expected time of arrival of the supply aircraft it was decided the shorter message be laid out in the clearing, as shown in the photograph (left) taken from the Dakota attempting the landing - piloted by Flying Officer David Lord who later died at Arnhem on the 19th September 1944, and whose action on the

day resulted in a posthumous VC.

* At this stage the column survivors were without W/T communication and visual requests from the ground to the aircraft were by means of strips of parachutes taken from the supply drops.

The aircraft attempted a landing but found the chosen area in the clearing was too rough, so didn't complete the task and returned to RAF Agartala where the supply squadron detachment (31 Squadron¹) was based. **26th April** - 0600 hours. An aircraft from 31 Squadron delivered five day ration packs by parachute to the beleaguered troops on the ground. Unfortunately the drop didn't include new clothing which at the time were sorely needed; shirts and trousers had been cut down for other uses and were also lice infested despite regular de-lousing by hand!

27th April - A message was dropped (possibly by 155² Squadron Mohawk fighter) for the troops to "Mark out a 1200 yard landing ground to hold a twelve-ton transport".

28th April - Mid-morning a 31 Squadron 'rescue' Dakota (FD781), escorted overhead by eight RAF Mohawk fighters landed alongside the white line of parachute markers set out in the clearing (*below left*). In the twelve or so minutes that the aircraft was on the ground, 18 wounded or seriously sick, or both, Chindits were taken on board (*below right*) and the aircraft took off into the comparative safety of the fighter escort aircraft...a Japanese fighter airfield was only 14 miles away!



The crew of Dakota FD781

Sgt Charles May (Flt Rigger), F/O Michael Vlasto (Pilot), Sgt Frank Murray (2nd Pilot), Sgt Jack Reeves RCAF (W/Op)

From the 8 Column War Diary:

28th April - Eight fighters circled overhead while the D.C. was on the ground. As soon as the party had emplaned the D.C. taxied to the end of the straight and took off. Two fighters escorted it to IMPHAL where the party was taken to 19 C.C.S. The Commander Fourth Corps after receiving reports from Lt. Col Cooke and the pilot of the D.C. F/O Vlasto of R.A.F. Transport Squadron decided that it was unlikely that it would be possible to evacuate all Major Scott's party by air, that he had been relieved of all sick and wounded, that owing to the shortage of transport planes no undue risks could be undertaken and that Major Scott's party was adequately rationed for the march out, no further evacuation by plane should be made.

29th April - Fighter planes were sent to drop a message to this effect to Major Scott - this was followed by a D.C. which dropped clothing, cardigans, medical comforts and a number of up to date maps on the coln. Further instructions regarding the route out of Burma were also dropped.

It is interesting to know that the crew of FD871 had (through forward thinking at the base) been supplied with 'marching' boots in case they needed to join the remaining ground party on their march out of Burma. Also, in addition to the Dakota crew of four, the aircraft carried a war correspondent and photographer from *Illustrated Magazine*.

Of those left behind: Before setting off on their long trek to India the remaining Chindits (100+) cheered those onboard with a silent cheer - there was always a fear a Japanese patrol might be close by. India was



some 150 miles away and was a long and dangerous trek. Following an ambush by the Japanese soon after the Dakota rescue, the party split up into groups of around 40. For one group there was another skirmish with the Japanese after crossing over the railway, possibly in the vicinity of Mawlu, on their journey towards the River Chindwin. They eventually crossed the Chindwin and continued their journey along a track through the Naga Hills towards Somra when they came upon a frontier post maintained by the Assam Rifles. The party was escorted to their headquarters where they were looked after for 24 hours before continuing towards Somra and then onwards to Kohima. They stayed at the Somra District Officers residence the following night and believed they were under attack when shots rang out. It was only the DO shooting rats with his revolver...to the 'jittery' Chindits, he was thought to be 'round the bend' being stuck in such a remote district.

¹Following the Japanese surrender in 1945, 31 Squadron moved to Java (Kemajorang) to fly released Internees and POWs to Singapore.

²155 Squadron reformed at RAF Kuala Lumpur in the 1950s.

A Rigger's Tale - FEAF Draft 132c. This article was kindly provided by **Brian 'Eddie' Edwards** following his article *A Rigger's Tale - it's just up the hill* that appeared in the Summer 2018 issue (51) of *'Eastward'*. Many who flew the FE trail in the 50s and even 60s will recognise much in the article, having most likely experienced similar on their Far East journey.

"On completing my training at the Aerial Erectors School at RAF Chigwell in the 17th July 1956 I was posted across the road to No. 4 GRSS and was happily putting my newly acquired skills to work, under the eagle eye of Cpl Gallagher, at various bases in the south east of England. At the same time I was notified that I was on the PWR (Preliminary Warning Roster) for posting to the 2nd Tactical Air Force in Germany. On Wednesday the 7th November I had to report to the Orderly Room and told I was posted overseas and was given 14 days embarkation leave which would commence in the 14th November. I was to go through the camp clearance procedures prior to starting my leave. I was also ordered to take all my kit with me on leave, given a railway warrant from Enfield to Gloucester and told to report to No 5 PDU (Personnel Dispersal Unit) at RAF Innsworth on the 28th November unless otherwise instructed by post.

On arrival at Gloucester station I reported to the RTO and was directed to an RAF coach in the station car park. After waiting for several other trains to arrive, the coach now almost full, took all of us to RAF Innsworth where we were allocated to various huts.

Next morning we were paraded outside the huts and marched to a huge hangar and were called to a table one by one and informed of our destination. It seemed that I was not going to Germany after all but was posted to the Far East Air Force on Draft 1322c. At this time in 1956, RAF Innsworth was like an upturned hornets' nest and was jampacked with RAF personnel waiting to go overseas. The congestion was caused by a little bit of a dispute that was going on over who owned the Suez Canal? The troopships which took all the British personnel to the Middle East and Far East normally passed through the Mediterranean and the Canal and thus had to be diverted round the Cape of Good Hope. This created a huge gap in the usually regular flow of troopships available to transport men to and from Aden, Kenya, Hong Kong and Korea. Regular troops returning to the UK were not a problem as they could wait where they were, but National Servicemen due for demob had to be brought back to the UK quickly. The RAF did not have enough suitable aircraft to carry out large scale air trooping flights so the situation was eased by chartering civilian aircraft.

Shortly after my arrival at Innsworth I was kitted out with my tropical kit and KD uniforms, plus an extra kit bag to carry it all in; we retained all our normal blue uniforms in our usual kitbag. We were also given all our jabs, yellow fever, smallpox etc, Then there followed nearly three weeks of practicing Egyptian PT until



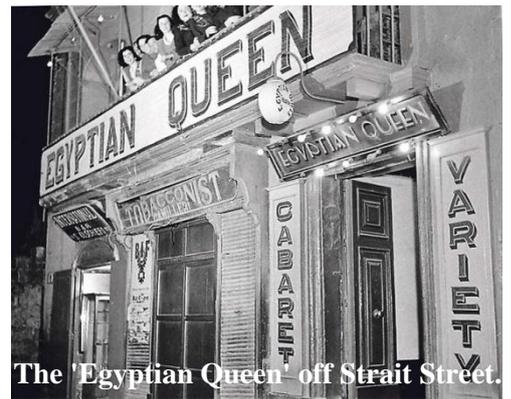
I was finally allocated to Draft 1322c and told we would all be flying to Singapore on the 21st December. We were also informed we would be travelling as civilians on board an Airworks Ltd Hermes aircraft, and as we would be avoiding the area of dispute we would be landing in several foreign countries. We were all photographed and issued with British passports which described us as

Government officials. Those of us who did not have any civilian clothes with us were given vouchers and sent into Gloucester to a clothing shop to be kitted out with a civilian jacket and pair of trousers. Our service shirts, tie, underwear etc. would have to do. We were told that there would be several overnight stops and that one of our kitbags would be returned to us each night to enable us to get at our clean underwear and towels etc.

The 21st December duly arrived and we were all transported from Innsworth to Stanstead in Essex, in two RAF coaches. What a rare sight we must have been. I do wish I had a photograph of us all; there were about 60 of us, mostly young men with short haircuts, with our RAF small packs containing our personal items, travelling in an aircraft that contained 120 kitbags in the hold - civilians!

We took off, my first ever flight in an aircraft, and finally landed at RAF Luqa in Malta for an overnight stop. The airfield was full of aircraft of all sorts coming and going, including a number of Canberras which were operating a shuttle service bringing bombs from Honington to Malta.

The one officer and several SNCOs were whisked off to their messes on the camp and the rest of us were taken to the airmens mess and given a meal. We were informed that as the camp was full of personnel involved in the ongoing (Suez) argument there was no room for us on the camp and we would be staying in a hotel. We were loaded into two coaches and driven from Luqa into Valletta where the coaches pulled up outside a large and grand looking hotel. Things were looking up we all thought as we were led up the steps into the palatial reception foyer. We continued along a corridor and into the hotel ballroom. The magnificent ballroom was full of camp beds with barely a space between them; many were already occupied by a variety of British servicemen. The toilet facilities consisted of the *Ladies* (relabelled *Men Only*) and *Gents* toilets which normally served the ballroom. Both were about twelve seaters with the same number of wash basins. A number of showers were available in the hotel staff quarters. Ever been had! After a visit to The Gut (Strait Street), led by someone who had been to Malta before, and several bottles of Farsons Blue Label, we all got our heads down. Visiting the toilet in the night was a bit of a challenge and so was finding your own camp bed on the return journey. Needless to say most of us did not get a lot of sleep.



The 'Egyptian Queen' off Strait Street.

We were woken next morning at about 6-30 and clambered back into the coaches and were taken back to Luqa and the airmens mess for our breakfast. Then back to Air Movements and on to the aircraft for the next stage of our journey. We were flown from Malta across the Sahara desert to Kano in Nigeria; the flight was uneventful apart from being very bumpy due to turbulence and a number of people being air sick. At Kano airport the officer and SNCOs were taken to a hotel in the city along with the aircrew. The rest of us were loaded into 3-ton lorries and taken to the Nigerian Police barracks a short distance from the airport. Here we were all fed in their canteen; the meal was corned beef, local sweet corn (maize) and tinned potatoes with tinned peaches to follow. It was delicious, we ate every scrap. Yes, you guessed it, camp beds in their drill hall and an introduction to 'squatties', the hole in the floor toilets. Proper showers and washing facilities were also available. Some of the police spoke English and soon bottles of beer were produced so a great evening was had by all. Baked beans, bread and mugs of tea for breakfast and then back to the airport.

The next stage of our journey was from Kano in Nigeria to Entebbe in Uganda via Bangui in French Equatorial Africa (now the Central African Republic). The journey to Bangui was uneventful and we landed there around midday. We were taken off the aircraft which was being refuelled while we were given lunch in the airport restaurant. It seems the word had got around that an aircraft full of British troops-sorry, government officials, were arriving and many of the French colonials came to see these strange milk white people. We were all greeted and our hands shaken, heads patted and we were given free drinks etc. It was only when we were back on the aircraft that we were enlightened by the aircrew that the Frenchmen thought we were part of the attempt to get the Canal back. I felt quite guilty about that, at least for about 20 minutes! The landing at Entebbe airfield was uneventful. We were taken to the airport buildings and the officer, aircrew and SNCOs were taken to a hotel in the town. By now we were getting the hang if all this and sure

enough there were two 3-ton lorries waiting and we all clambered into them and they set off. After a few minutes they stopped and we got out - not a building in sight! Then we spotted the tents down by the side of the lake. This time we were guests of the Kings African Rifles for the night. They were led by British officers and one of them showed us which tents we could use (you guessed right again - camp beds!), leaving us under the charge of a Sgt who made us very welcome. We were fed in a large airy mess tent, corned beef, local sweetcorn (maize) and bread followed by tinned fruit. They then opened their canteen which consisted of two folding tables in a tent - the stock consisted of crates of Tusker beer and packets of Players Clipper cigarettes, matches and candles. Several of us went for a walk by the shore of the lake,



which was Lake Victoria, and I saw hippos in their natural setting for the first time in my life. The sound of drums drew us back to the camp; the KAR had laid on some military and native music, also tribal dancing to go along with the beer, It was a great evening, watching the sun go down with Lake Victoria in the background. The latrine was a large, long trench with two planks to sit on; the showers were operated by several 50 gallon drums of water raised up on a rather rickety platform.

Several enamel washing bowls completed the bathroom facilities, all of which were surrounded by hessian sacks tacked to poles. Breakfast next morning was strips of meat (source unknown), fried eggs and tea. Then it was back to the airfield for the next leg of our journey, Entebbe to Karachi via Aden.

We landed in Aden in the evening and were taken off the aircraft and fed while it was refuelled. To us it seemed unbelievably hot and muggy even at

that time of night and I doubt any of us had been so hot on a Christmas Eve before. We were glad to get back on the aircraft and take off for Karachi.

On landing at Karachi at about 2 am on Christmas day we were loaded into civilian coaches (modified lorries) and driven to Minwalla's Grand Hotel. The hotel was used by British Overseas Airways for their crews flying to and from the Far East which changed aircraft at Karachi. They stayed here for a break and then took over the next aircraft passing through. The accommodation was quite good, I was in a small room with two single beds and shared the room with another airman. The hotel had a pool but we were not going to be there long enough to use it. Shortly after arriving we were summoned to the dining room for a meal. What a surprise that was! It was, I think, about 4 am by then and laid out in front of us all was a huge decorated table with Christmas dinner right down to the stuffing with Christmas pudding to follow. The only thing which most of us missed out on was a Christmas drink - Pakistan, being a Muslim country, meant there was no alcoholic drinks allowed in the country. The only exception were hotels that catered for foreign travellers and the Grand did, but the fly in the ointment was the price - a small bottle of beer cost over a pound each, and with most of us only being paid about 5 pounds a week (National Servicemen 18 shillings a week) a bottle was well out of our reach. Such is life! Following dinner everyone went straight to bed.

Later that day we took off on the next leg of our journey from Karachi to Calcutta via Delhi. I don't remember much about that flight as I slept most of the time. I recall being woken at Delhi and then were offloaded while the aircraft was refuelled and were fed in the airport restaurant. The next stop was Calcutta where we stayed overnight in the Great Eastern Hotel. After we had eaten several of us went for a walk outside the hotel and were brought face to face with dreadful poverty, wall to wall beggars looking like they had just come from a German concentration camp. We had thought we were hard up living in the UK shortly after the end of rationing in the 50s, but we had seen nothing like Calcutta. We went back to the hotel realising just how lucky we really were.

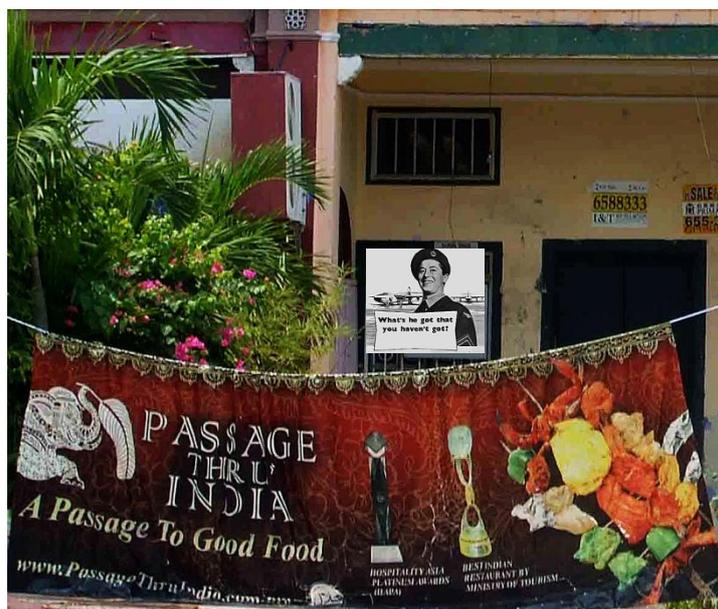
Next morning after breakfast we took off on the last leg of our journey, Calcutta to Changi via Bangkok. Once again we were offloaded in Bangkok while the aircraft was refuelled and we were given a meal in the airport restaurant, my first taste of Chinese food.

We finally landed at RAF Changi where we were taken by coach to the airmens mess and given a meal. We all thought our troubles were over now we had finally arrived in Singapore. Then it was on to the transit block to be allocated a bed for the night. There was a problem! The transit block was absolutely stuffed with people waiting to go back to the UK and delayed by the lack of troopships. We were allocated beds all over Changi, where ever an empty bed could be found, and told to report to the orderly room next day when we would be given our postings. Next day most of us turned up at the orderly room with hangovers having tested the Tiger beer in the NAAFI or Malcolm Club. The lucky ones who were posted to units on Singapore Island then disappeared to their new homes. Those going upcountry to Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, Butterworth (Prai) etc. were immediately sent to the armoury, given a .303 rifle and a quick check on the range to make sure they knew which end the bullet came out, plus 50 rounds of ammunition. The Malayan Emergency was at its height so they added to the other men going upcountry who acted as part of the escort on the overnight train to Kuala Lumpur and Prai. That left a few of us waifs and strays who were returned to transit accommodation to await transportation to other parts of the Far East.

I pestered the movements office several times a day for a few days. In the end they got fed up of me appearing at their office and to keep me out of their hair they gave me a job to do - I was given a note pad, pencil, several pieces of chalk and a bicycle. Each morning at 0730, at 13.30 and at 1800 hrs I reported to their office and was given a list of people who were to fly, or sail, the next day, and I had to chalk the details on the blackboards at the various accommodation blocks and also put a note on their bed. Needless to say after a few days everyone waiting to go home could recognise me and my list. I would be mobbed going into the Malcolm Club or the airmens mess by people wanting to know if they were on the list. Finally, about 10 days later my own name was on the list and I flew off to Negombo on board a Valetta of 52 or 110 Sqdn, calling at Car Nicobar island to refuel. I finally made it to Ceylon, the Pearl of the Indian Ocean and after all the usual arrival procedures at the Signals Centre and in Negombo I was posted to RAF Ekala, the transmitters site on the 23rd January, 56 days after arriving at No 5 PDU, RAF Innsworth to start my journey.

The RAF recruiting posters in 1955 said 'Join the Royal Air Force and see the world.' I had certainly made a good start. Happy days!

'Eddie' Edwards



Remembrance Parade and Ceremony 2018 Roger Hughes-Jones

The Cenotaph Parade and Ceremony 2018 was held at the 11th hour of the 11th month this year exactly 100 years since the signing of the Armistice in 1918 to bring the hostilities of the Great War to a close.

The National Service of Remembrance held at the Cenotaph in Whitehall ensures that no-one is forgotten as the nation unites to honour all who have suffered or died in war.

Units of the Far East Air Force: Each year 10,000 ex-service veterans march with their respective associations; our contingent, Units of the Far East Air Force, comprised just 20 this year. These were: RAFBPA two members. RAF Changi four members, RAF Seletar ten members, 48 Squadron and others, four members. As usual, the London taxicab drivers offered their services to us by giving free rides to Admiralty Arch from the Union Jack Club and all mainline railway termini. The taxis were identifiable by a large red poppy and 'Poppy Cab' clearly displayed on the windscreen. This year I noticed many more vintage taxi cabs in use compared to previous years.



I was at Admiralty Arch at 9am where I met RAFBPA member, John Rutland, our only other representative who was accompanied by his son, Paul. John was confined to a wheelchair as he had suffered an accident some weeks previously which resulted in hospitalization and the wearing of a neck brace. It was touch and go whether John would be well enough to attend but luckily his consultant agreed that he could go. We made our way to our contingent meeting point via the north entrance of Horse Guards Parade. I pushed John across the fine gravel of the parade ground and it did seem quite heavy going until I realised that we had made a twenty foot furrow in the surface as the brake was still in the 'on' position on the left side! I'm sure no-one else noticed as the other thousands of attendees were busy meeting up, chatting, laughing and generally soaking up the occasion. Our 'Units of the Far East Air Force' is invariably in Column C of the parade. There are six



columns, A to F, and numbered according to Association. If, like the BBC, you want to identify us in future then look out for C13 or C14. Some of our group had arrived earlier and were holding up the white marker board (left) to enable newcomers like us to find their place in the column.

As 10am approached we had we had our photographs taken for association magazines, held a group 'meeting' to let everyone know where we were going, what we should be doing and most importantly which direction to leave

after the parade. At 10.05 the Horse Guards Marshal gave the order to 'March Off' so our column proceeded through Horse Guards arch, turned right into Whitehall and marched to our waiting position about 200 yards short of the Cenotaph. The hazards and consequences of standing still for two hours became apparent when

one of our number, Margaret Roberts, who was the wreath bearer for the RAF Changi group fell in a faint. The St John's Ambulance responders were soon on the scene and Margaret was attended to and then whisked off to the first-aid post for treatment. I'm pleased to report that she recovered quickly but sadly was unable to get back on the parade.

I'm sure many members will have seen the BBC broadcast of the parade but sadly once again we were not seen marching, nor did we get a mention. Perhaps next year we will be more lucky? Our wreaths were handed over at the Cenotaph and we continued on to Horse Guards Parade where there was a saluting dais opposite the Guards Memorial. At this point in the proceedings a member of the Royal Family takes the salute, this time it was the turn of the Princess Royal, Princess Anne. This was the end of the parade and we dispersed. John was returned to the safe hands of Paul. Despite being in a wheelchair and constricted by a neck brace John thoroughly enjoyed the 'parade' experience, He had travelled from his home in High Wycombe, leaving at 7am, and then had a long journey home but that didn't stop him making the effort. At 85 years of age and a bit of an 'old soldier' he just got on with it - an example to us all that if you really want to do something, nothing will get in your way.

I would encourage more of our membership to try to get down to the Cenotaph Parade next year - it's a rare opportunity to take part in a national celebration and perhaps the experience of a lifetime which gives so many memories. We had only two Association attendees this year and I hope we don't fade away without a fight. Finally, I want to thank our Chairman, Tony Parrini, for all the time and hard work he puts in coordinating to make this event happen for our Association and those other Singapore associations marching with us. May we be able to participate for many more years to come.



ERIC JOHN SHARP

(POLLY)

21ST OCTOBER 1931 - 26TH SEPTEMBER 2018



*Stained Glass window
within St George's Church,
designed by Eric to commemorate
the 60th entry of the Halton
Apprentices
1948 - 1952*

Eric served our country for 38 years

A message from Eric's family

Hello to all of Dad's friends (*from Jo, Jane and Joan*).

I wanted to thank everyone who was able to attend Dad's final farewell and for the many of you who were unable to attend but passed on your regards. The day was absolutely wonderful and very moving in many ways.

Thank you also for all the photos that were sent to me - I added everyone I hope to our memories powerpoint we showed at the Petwood (Hotel).

I have attached the copy of Dad's order of service and we will endeavour to send a hard copy to all who requested one and who sent donations already by post.

Thank you once again.