



# *Eastward* *Christmas 2020*



*RAF Butterworth & Penang Association*

*Issue 58*



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

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Pictures: cover image and this page - RAF Horticultural Show 1949

## CHAIRMAN'S CORNER - WINTER 2020

Firstly, I hope that you are abiding with the various levels of restrictions. Like many of you, Anne and I have stayed at home most of the time although we have no underlying health problems and, at the time of writing we are in Level 1. We consider ourselves to be very lucky, we have each other, plenty of space, a large garden and a diversity of interests, We are also computer 'savvy' and are able to use different means to communicate, so our days are filled. Our hearts go out to those of you living alone, with perhaps family and friends being some distance away, and maybe, for whatever reason, restricted from leaving home. But as Sir Captain Tom Moore has said "*Tomorrow will be a better day*". I hope he's proved correct.

**The Singapore Grip.** I watched the 'Singapore Grip' hoping to learn more of the difficulties faced by ex-Pats prior to the invasion by the Japanese. Alas, the interpretation of J G Farrell's book glossed over much of the actuality of the situation in 1942 and onwards. I now have the book and wonder how close the TV version was to it? I may be disappointed. I'd hoped that the conscription of the rubber plantation planters to the various Malaya Volunteer Groups might have been covered, although the chaotic evacuation of families was played out well. I'm sure our member, Rosemary Fell, and her colleagues of the MVG will have words to say on this in their newsletter?

**Cenotaph Parade in London-2020.** Despite sterling efforts to make sure that the small '*Units of the Far East Air Force*' contingent was registered for the Cenotaph Parade, it was not to be. Initially the NMBVA allocated their spare places to our members and the Seletar and Changi Associations, to reduce paperwork. The contingents were reduced to eight places each - the NMBVA lost over 80 bookings. I therefore reinstated 'Units of the Far East Air Force' and notified our eight members that I had done so. Then the Government decision came that COVID requirements could not be met by the remaining 2000 veterans and the RBL felt the safety of the ex-services contingents could not be guaranteed. It was with great regret that I notified our group that the formal parade was cancelled.

**Reunion and AGM - 2021.** There is still uncertainty about the possibility of holding the planned reunion in May 2021. Much depends on COVID restrictions nearer the time. It might be necessary to delay until next Autumn and hold a 50th Anniversary of the Withdrawal of the RAF from the Far East instead, in the hope the virus will be under control. Please be aware that members of the committee are in contact with the tour operators and as soon as a clear path becomes apparent all members will be informed, whether, or not, they have previously booked places.

**Chairman's own Zoom meeting.** This is a Chairman's initiative as I feel an obligation to try to ensure we all stay in touch. If you don't already know about Zoom meetings (a web-based video conferencing tool), check the system out. In early January, out of the blue, all those for whom we have an email will be sent an emailed invitation to join me for a Zoom meeting. It will be a chance, especially for those locked down, to meet up online with familiar faces, and some new ones, for an hour or so. If it proves successful, and is supported by even as few as ten members, I will deem it worth doing it again on a regular basis for as long as the lockdown continues.

**Thank you to all.** We are all going through difficult times, but your committee is still working, recording the gains and losses on the membership list, chasing you for unpaid subs, producing and distributing the newsletter/magazine etc, and sadly we have also sent out quite a few condolence messages. As Chairman, I offer my thanks on your behalf.

**Recent reading.** To finish, I recently have been reading the book '*And we thought the war was over*' by ACM Sir David Lee. He was in charge of an RAF Fighter Wing between VE day and the eventual capitulation of the Japanese. It is an official account of the (Forgotten Army) RAF operation of the recovery and repatriation of POWs and civilian internees from camps in Java and was continued until 1946.

To all, have a great Christmas.

*Tony and Anne Parrini*

## From the Editor

Further to informing the death of **Les Downey** (page 6), three more members have also recently passed away.

**Robert (Rob) Lewis**...The Association was informed on the 4th October of the death, after a short illness, of member **Rob Lewis** by his wife, Judith, who added that Rob (a member of 487 Signals Unit, lodged at RAF Butterworth - 1st January 1956 to May 1957), enjoyed his time as a member of the RAFBPA, his meeting with fellow members and looking forward to each copy of the Association newsletter/magazine. Rob also made a number of contributions to the newsletter, always with a touch of humour added to each.

**John Holmes**...We were informed that **John Holmes** (SNCO i/c RAFP Dog Section 1964-1966) passed away on the 12th October. When at Butterwoth he investigated a mysterious illness at the kennels which caused the deaths of a number of police dogs, an investigation that led to the award of the B.E.M. My thanks to John Muter for sending a detailed account of the investigation.

**Rowland (Rowly) Christopher**...13 th October. Don Brereton informed me that Sonia Williams (ref: page 16), a friend of Rowly, had contacted him to say that Rowly peacefully passed away the previous week in a King's Lynn nursing home. Rowly was in Butterworth Pay Accounts 1956-1958 and Secretary to the RAFBPA at one time.

**RAF Career.** During the pandemic this Summer, our Chairman, Tony Parrini, as a personal project, has taken to writing about his RAF career and marriage to Anne, but also asked if I was interested in his story for the newsletter/magazine. The answer was yes, and I'm glad I did as part one covering RAF Ternhill (and Majunga) brought back many memories for when my father was stationed at Ternhill, then at nearby Buntingsdale Hall in the late 40s, early 50s. We lived in married quarters and I remember the Saturday morning matinees (usually a Western) at the camp Astra cinema. I also remember colliding (head-on) with a milk float on the Tern Hill AMQ road...I was going too fast on my push bike downhill into a blind bend and the milk float was travelling in the opposite direction, out of my sight! Not a good outcome for me. I also remember hanging onto the back of the milk float as it set off to see how fast I could run when holding onto a faster object. Frightened the life out of me! Later my father was posted to RAF Abu Sueir (Egypt) and the family joined him much later.

**Shackleton Association.** After receiving a copy of the Shackleton Association's excellent magazine of maritime aviation, *The Growler*, I thought it might be a good move to apply for membership under my name and 'For and on behalf of the RAFBPA'. The application was duly accepted and I think, in time, both associations might benefit from this membership.

**Christmas 1945.** A late arrival for the archives was a set of c1945 Penang based material in PDF form from Steve Lonsdale...not a member but someone who is aware we exist. Steve, in his letter states he has been "clearing out his father's 'stuff' (Alan Lonsdale, a WW2 Fitter who was posted to Penang 1945) and has a 1945 Christmas menu and some 1945 material relating to RAF Butterworth (Glugor Detachment) that might be of interest to Association members?" Included were two pages copied from the Christmas Day Service of 1945 (pages 28-29 of this issue) held at the Chinese Methodist Church, Penang. Interestingly on the second page of the Order of Service the Christmas Message was given by the Rev. J. N. Oates RAF (Squadron Leader John Northey Oates (S. E. Asia 1945-1946). This name might be a missing link in the 'Chico' story from Issue 57.

**Proof reading 'Eastward'**...my regular proof reader, **Laurie Bean**, was unable to take on the task this time around and both **Len** and **Nadine Wood** have kindly stepped in to proof read this copy. This was a bit of a relief for me as inevitably errors still crop up even when I have 'proof read' the copy before release for proper proof reading. My thanks to both.

## RAF Correspondence and Stories

**Les Downey...**The RAFBPA was informed on August 16th 2020 of the death of member *Les Downey* by his daughter, Anne Fitton. Aged 95 years, Les passed away peacefully in hospital after a short illness. He will be sorely missed at the annual reunions, where he always had a story to tell of his immediate post war RAF service in Penang, Malaya and Singapore, much of it punctuated with humour. The last article from Les, received following his 95th birthday (January 2nd 2020) is shown on the following page...

**RAF Fruit and Vegetable stand at the Royal Horticultural Society 1949...**although not a Far East related event, a recent set of 20th century images in a newspaper included a picture of LACW Jessie Brodie (WRAF) holding a giant leek (below left) at the RAF stand in the RHS Hall at Westminster. The RAF vegetables were home grown, with the RAF cultivating over 6000 acres of land to produce food for RAF personnel during WW2. The fruits, bananas, pomegranates, lemons, grapes and nuts etc, (a not too common sight in 1949) on display at the stand were flown in from Gibraltar by RAF transport.

It was also the year that the WAAF became the WRAF (1st February 1949).



### *1949: Seventy one years ago!*

"There were reasonable supplies of imported fruits and vegetables as well as seasonal home grown varieties. Chickens and other poultry, rabbits and pigeons were to be found in shops and the variety of fish was greater and the quality better."

*Victory Cookbook 1940-1954*

**The RAF Strike at Seletar in 1946...**This article by **Les Downey** was received earlier in the year and is now included as a tribute to Les, who also added that the the article was written before he became a member of the Seletar and Butterworth Associations (ages ago!) as well as being a member of the Air Sea Rescue and Marine Craft Section Club, also The Fellowship of the Services when living in Sheffield previous to his moving to the Nottingham area.

"Mention of the RAF Strike at Seletar in 1946 brought the memories flooding back - soya links, beans and corned beef of allegedly WW1 vintage! The tented sites (were) thrown up on any available plots of land (at Seletar), our site was in a semi-circle known as Mornington Crescent in front of the married quarters, now full to bursting with 'erks. Toilets and sanitary facilities were minimal, and tempers were very frayed at the queing involved. The meeting in the big hangar at which we were harangued as to the poor conditions of other servicemen on Sumatra, Java etc and what had we to grumble about etc, completely glossed over the fact that if the top brass had not been so concerned with getting the British presence back into Malaya, the condition would never have arisen.



The meeting which had been orderly, was brought to an abrupt and hilarious end, when an unknown wag shouted that he had heard more flannel (was) used in the last few minutes than there had been flannel drawers in 1910. After the strike, conditions did start to improve, and many men were posted to other stations throughout Malaya. I was posted to Butterworth in Northern Malaya and other units were disbanded and split up. One of my mates went to Japan, and others to Hong Kong etc. Those of us on the posting to Butterworth and Kuala Lumpur were put on the night mail train but were stopped at Kuala Lumpur because of a rail strike. After staying in the transit camp for about a week we finished the journey by road, sleeping in the trucks for the overnight stop at Ipoh.



Later I was posted back to RAF Seletar, to find the place quite unrecognisable, The quality of the food had improved, the tented sites (above) had disappeared and other amenities were much improved, The numbers of men on the base was drastically reduced.

This incident was not the the only one to occur in this area. My own unit had moved from Kharagpur in Bengal to Calcutta to eventually, after a long a long and tedious wait at a transit camp on the outskirts of Calcutta, to being shipped aboard the troopship *Derbyshire*. By the time we sailed the boat was rather full. When the ship pulled into Madras to take aboard another five hundred Indian troops, tempers flared and large numbers of the troops walked off the boat and stayed on the dockside for 2-3 hours until certain promises had been made by those in charge, The rest of the journey was uneventful, unlike the voyage made by the MT Section Crew accompanying the vehicles on the freighter - this struck a mine outside Singapore but was able to reach port without loss of life. But a lot of our personal kit was damaged and I served the rest of my time in SE Asia with the minimum of kit and a very long deficiency list."

*L. F. Downey (RAF Air Command Far East)*

## Kellie's Castle - A 20th Century 'Castle' of Scottish, Moorish and Tamilvavan Architecture in Perak.

The story behind this unfinished mansion (*below*) recovered from encroaching jungle was initiated by RAFBPA member **Tam McCrorie**, who in turn was told of its existence by a friend who spends part of each year in Malaysia.



William Kellie-Smith (1870 - 1926) was born in Kellas, Moray (Scotland) and arrived in Malaya in 1890 and later contracted to a survey firm as a civil engineer. Following a build up in his funds he branched out on a variety of business ventures, some lucrative, others not! Later whilst visiting Scotland sometime time prior to 1903, he was to marry Agnes Smith (25) on the 25 March 1903 in London before returning to Malaya. Agnes was the daughter of a wealthy Liverpool based cotton broker and was (eventually) due to inherit a large sum of money following her father's death in 1901. The inheritance money came through in 1908! From the marriage came two children, Helen in 1903 (or 1904) and Anthony in 1916<sup>1</sup>

In 1909 Kellie-Smith built their first home 'Kellas House' at Batu Gaja, followed in 1915 with the plans for a mansion featuring Scottish, Moorish and Tamilvavan architecture next to Kellas House. Included in the design was to be Malaya's first elevator, except it was never installed as the building was never completed. However for the initial start, 70 Tamil craftsmen were 'imported' from Madras to work on the building, which later included a temple for the craftsmen following a virulent strain of Spanish flu that killed a number of his workers. In return for the temple they included on the temple wall a statue of Kellie-Smith (*right, with rifle*) with the other temple deities.



William Kellie-Smith died of pneumonia during a visit to Portugal in 1926, although 1928 has also been stated for his death<sup>2</sup>. It is believed that the family were, or had been, visiting Anthony who was at boarding school in the UK at the time. They didn't return to Malaya and the property was sold to a British company who then left it to be claimed by the jungle. The property was in a state of neglect for some 80 years, with Kellas House believed to be damaged by Japanese action in the early stages of WW2 The mansion was eventually (c2012) 'rescued' through the Malaysian Government and renovated as a tourist attraction.

<sup>1</sup> 67029 Captain Anthony William Kellie-Smith 1916 - 1942. Royal Artillery (75 Anti-tank Regiment). Died whilst attending Army Staff College, Camberley, 9 June 1942. He is interred in the Chaytor family (his wife's parents) grave at St Peter's Church in Croft, North Yorkshire...Sources: CWGC and Find a Grave Memorial.

<sup>2</sup> Different sources give different versions of the story of Kellies Castle - where available information in this account is taken from official documents.



*Above left*-William Kellie-Smith.



*Above right*-William and Agnes Kellie-Smith in the family car.



*Right*- A photograph of a main room in Kellas House, taken in the early 1900's.

## An Extraordinary Journey

From **Rosemary Fell** (Secretary/Editor Malayan Volunteers Group and RAFBPA member) is the story of several misadventures that 'happened' on the train journey from Tanjong Pagar Station in Singapore to Butterworth.

'Geoff Fean's newspaper cutting answer (*'Eastward'* Issue 57) to Tony Parrini's question about the upgrading of the Malaysian Railways (KTM) reminded me of a journey Donald and I made from Singapore to Butterworth in 2007. This was before the upgrading and electrification of the line had been completed and Singapore still had a railway station at Keppel Road.'

'For 20 years we had planned to travel by train from Singapore to KL and then take the overnight sleeper to Butterworth before going over to Penang for a holiday. In February 2007, when we were in Singapore to attend the annual service at the Civilian War Memorial in Beach Road to the victims of the Japanese occupation, we decided that this was a good opportunity to realise our dream.

With great excitement, we took the MRT to 'Tanjong Pagar' and walked to the wonderful old station building, designed by Serbian architect D. S. Petrovich and opened in 1932 by the then Governor, Sir Cecil Clementi (1930-1934). We found the booking office and announced that we wanted to book two tickets from Singapore to KL and then take the overnight sleeper from KL to Butterworth. Imagine our disappointment to be met with words "Oh, the overnight sleeper no longer runs from KL to Butterworth. It was taken off last month." So we booked first class tickets (at half price for OAPs!) on the morning train - *keretapi ekspres* - which left Singapore at 7.40 a.m. and was due to arrive at Butterworth at 7.30 in the evening. It was going to be quite a long journey, but we arrived at the station at 7 a.m. armed with books, games, a packed breakfast and mounting anticipation for an exciting day. We duly went through customs and passport control on the platform before we got on the train. Our first class seats looked comfortable if a little the worse for wear, and we settled down for the long journey as the train pulled out of Singapore station. Our peace was short lived.

In a short while we reached the Causeway, but before we crossed over it into Malaysia we were turfed out of our carriage to go through customs and passport control again (in order) to enter Malaysia<sup>1</sup>. While we were doing all this sniffer dogs went through the carriages to check the luggage for drugs. Finally we climbed on board again and we were off.

Once more we settled down to enjoy the journey. We looked at our packed breakfasts - cold leftover chips, a bread roll and a hard boiled egg was all there was. "Never mind" said Donald "We'll be able to stroll down to the dining car for lunch and dinner." One look at the buffet car told us that a gourmet delight was not to be - a cup of coffee and a bun, or a *nasi goreng* would be all if we were lucky. We looked again at our packed breakfasts in a different light - cold leftover chips taste good when you are hungry! The *keretapi ekspres* was anything but 'express.' It stopped at nearly, if not every, station, but at least the scenery was lovely. We chatted to our neighbour on the other side - he was a Canadian on holiday from a job in Beijing, teaching the Chinese English and English customs! Before we had gone very far we stopped at a small station, and there we sat for what seemed ages, while a lot of raised voices could be heard at the back of our carriage. "I'll go and see what's happening" said our companion. He returned a couple of minutes later to inform us that the carriage door had fallen off and that the train could not continue until it was fixed, and no-one seemed able to fix it. Our Canadian companion fished in his bag and produced a set of tools, "My brother works for the Canadian Pacific Railway" he said, "and I always carry a set of their repair kits in case of emergency." He went back to the scene of the broken door and within minutes he had fixed it, Off we set once again. Some time later, shortly before we were due to arrive in KL, the train came to a grinding halt and a lot of black smoke started to billow around the carriage from the diesel engine. "Oh dear", said our

companion, "This looks ominous. I think the engine has blown up." And he was right. We waited for about an hour before a relief engine arrived to pull us into KL Sration. There we had to say goodbye to our Canadian friend who was planning to climb the twin towers in KL as part of his goal to climb all the tallest buildings in the world.

As we set off from KL on the second leg of our journey to Butterworth, we were joined by a new companion, a Chinese man who turned out to be a doctor on his way to Ipoh to visit his future in-laws before he married their daughter. He was going to tell them that when they were married they planned to leave Ipoh and move to KL. Her parents didn't know this and needless to say he was rather apprehensive about his visit. He spoke excellent English and as we chatted to him we asked where he trained to be a doctor, expecting him to say KL, or Singapore, or Penang. "Oh", he said, "Edinburgh, and I want to return to the UK with my wife." We guessed this news would not go down well either with his new in-laws.

Just before we got to Ipoh, the carriage seemed to be getting hotter and hotter and then the lights failed. By this time it was getting dark, so the guard escorted us all into the next carriage where the lights and air conditioning were working. When we arrived at Ipoh we bade farewell to our doctor friend, and wished him luck with his in-laws. Then we settled down for the last part of the journey, wondering what else might happen to the train and whether the ferries would still be running when we got to Butterworth.

Eventually we arrived at Butterworth at about 10.30 p.m. and discovered that we would have to walk to the ferry terminal, which was some distance away, carrying our cases. It was not an easy walk in the dark, not knowing quite where to go. We also had to lug our cases up and down stairs as we crossed over roads to get to the ferry. Luckily the ferries were still running, and so were the taxis meeting the ferry passengers in George Town. We eventually arrived at our hotel in Batu Ferringhi after midnight. The reception staff wondered where we had got to, until we explained (the journey).

We flew back to Singapore after our holiday, not risking taking the train again - but we dined out on the story of our interesting train journey many times after.'

<sup>1</sup> This rather unusual situation lasted until July 2011. Prior to that on the outward journey from Singapore, passengers boarding the train at Tanjong Pagar cleared Malaysian Customs and Immigration before boarding. The train travelled for about 30 minutes before stopping at Woodlands Train Check Point (WTCP) for passengers to clear Singapore Immigration. This practice allowed passengers to be granted entry into Malaysia before clearing Singapore Immigration, contrary to international practice! To get round this, Malaysian Immigration officers did not stamp passports.

## **Memories with Harry (Norrie)... Part 2**

The first part of this two part story by RAFBPA member **Lee LeClerq** was featured in the Summer 2019 issue of 'Eastward'. Unfortunately Part 2 was overlooked and remained in the editorial files until a nudge was received from Lee. So here is Part 2 with an apology for the delay.

**Singapore.** 'Images of the Indonesian island of Bali with its white sandy beaches, turquoise waters, amazing Hindu temples and beautiful, affectionate women wearing very little but a smile, inspired another of our expeditions outside Malaysia, though I have to be honest and say we didn't necessarily rate the attractions in that same order of importance! We misguidedly thought at the time it was the Bali Hai of Rogers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific*, but with our limited resources, and even with a dream, there was little chance of us reaching that magical island. Unfortunately however, Harry (19 Signals Regiment, RAF Western Hill. late 1960s) and I decided that Indonesia was to be our next destination. We concluded that a ship from Singapore might be a cost effective option so, in keeping with naivety of youth, and with absolutely no pre-planning whatsoever, we arrived at Singapore's Collyer Quay to see what we could find.

As we went through the door of the *Lucky Shipping Company*, (I'm really not making this up!) we felt confident and, sure enough, the elderly desk clerk, strangely wearing a tuxedo and wing collared shirt, informed us that they had a vessel leaving that night for Palembang. Palembang? Where on Earth is that? He directed us towards a fading wall map and with a thin bamboo pointer, which now made him look like he was striking up the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, he identified a town towards the southern end of Sumatra. We could have passage for a ticket price if US\$25 each (less than £10 at the time-1969) which Harry and I agreed seemed a good deal! "*Be at Clifford Pier at 5 pm*" he said. "*Don't be late.*" We left the office, eagerly anticipating our bargain cruise.

Clifford Pier today serves gourmet food rather than shipping - some of its old deck timbers, still in situ, can be seen below the glass dance floor in a restaurant at the luxurious Fullerton Hotel. The pier still stands in water though best described today as a lake surrounded by high rise. Reclamation has pushed the sea way back beyond sight. In 1969 the view was very different! The South China Sea stretched from the quay to the horizon and, out in the 'roads' as the sea lanes were known, a thousand boats of all shapes and sizes filled the scene. Somewhere out there, heaving gently at its anchor, was the two and a half thousand ton *Tanjung Koba*.

Around half past five, Harry and I stood at one of the gates on Clifford Pier wondering if we'd been scammed (though I don't think the word was in regular parlance then, but you know what I mean). We were both wearing long sleeved white shirts, charcoal grey trousers, black polished shoes and clutching a



medium sized suitcase each. But then didn't we all? It was so terribly British! Just as we were wondering if we'd got the right location, a small Chinese man came up and beckoned us towards the wooden staircase leading down to the water level. At the bottom of the stairs we were ushered into a sampan which looked far too small to be doing

this, but we settled down as best we could. With the pier retreating behind us, we were off. Harry spotted it first. The *Tanjung Koba* was not going to win any beauty competitions - in short, it was a rust bucket...a typical small coastal cargo vessel with its bridge amidships and flat decks for and aft covering the holds and clearly very well used. As we drew closer we began to set aside initial concerns seeking consolation in the fact it was cheap and we were only talking about *cosmetics*! After all, it wasn't listing...was it? Hauling ourselves and a suitcase each up the narrow iron ladder from the bobbing sampan to the deck of our 'cruise liner' was no easy task, but as we arrived on the deck it was a relief to be on something more stable than the sampan. We waved down a cheery farewell to our 'taxi driver' and, thinking it a little odd that there was no one from the crew to meet us, we set off to find our cabins.

"Up there, up there". The crewman gesticulated towards the small ladder which provided access to the cambered roof of what seemed to be a machine room of sorts. "The cabins?" We asked. "No cabin." He replied, "You stay up there."

The reality of this trip was beginning to dawn on us as we climbed the short ladder to the roof area, and we were not the only passengers on the voyage. As we poked our heads over the ridge line, we noticed half a dozen or so young men and women had already staked out their bed spaces and they all glanced at the odd couple looking at them - they were Westerners, but looked nothing like Harry and I.

Here were the Flower Children of contemporary songs; the gentle people; stardust and summertime; long hair and delightfully scruffy...though truth be told, just a bit smelly! But they were friendly enough and we must have appeared just as incongruous to them as they did to us. There was a couple from Germany, two blond Norwegian men and a beautiful threesome - two very attractive young women clinging tightly to Jake from Abilene. He seemed to have a permanent smile on his face which probably wasn't surprising, but we thought it best not to ask him why he wasn't with his fellow country men 900 miles further north? Later, it was Jake who passed onto Harry and I the tip of sleeping close to the vents along the ridge of the roof.

"It gets pretty cold at night" he advised in a slow Texan drawl. "you'll find the warm air coming out of those a great comfort." Jake didn't need any additional comfort for himself of course, but he was right - it became very cold as darkness fell.

We finally left Singapore around midnight as the lights of the city slipped below the horizon we settled down for the night. Until the storm hit! For about three hours Armageddon raged. Heavy rain and strong winds amid the thunder and lightning tested the resilience of the *Tanjung Koba* as she was tossed on the heavy seas. The ups lasted forever and each time we thought the downs would end in briny oblivion. We had all abandoned the roof to huddle in a covered area below the bridge but the rain got through nonetheless. The ship was carrying raw rubber in its holds and the odour was very strong. We hadn't really noticed it higher up but down here it was almost overpowering.

Soon after dawn the skies were clear, decks had dried out and we had returned to our allocated accommodation. Some crewmen were brushing the decks below us and I asked what time breakfast was. The hippies thought that was very amusing and the crewmen just ignored me. We'd had nothing to eat since lunch the day before and we weren't due to dock in Palembang until late afternoon. It was time for action! Jake and his friends thought we were wasting our time but Harry and I headed towards the bridge. We were polite and it paid off. Soon we were sitting in an enclosed dining cabin with some of the Indonesian crew enjoying the delights of Batavian corn flakes and some sort of milk. Instead of a full English we were offered a fish dish (of sorts) which we declined in favour of some more corn flakes.

Towards the end of the day we docked at Palembang but before leaving the ship we enquired about a return journey. The *Tanjung Koba*, together with the hippies, was off to Java that evening and wouldn't be back in Singapore for about a month. That should have rung alarm bells, but it didn't.'



**Palembang.** Palembang had a large modern suspension bridge (Ampera Bridge) over the Musi River, a significant waterway that flows through the city. It looked so out-of-place because, there were no paved surfaces on either side of the bridge, just a dusty or muddy track depending on the weather prevailing at the time. The bridge was started on April 1962 by the Indonesians and opened on September 1965. Funding for the bridge was from Japanese War Reparations and the bridge was designed and built by Fuji Heavy

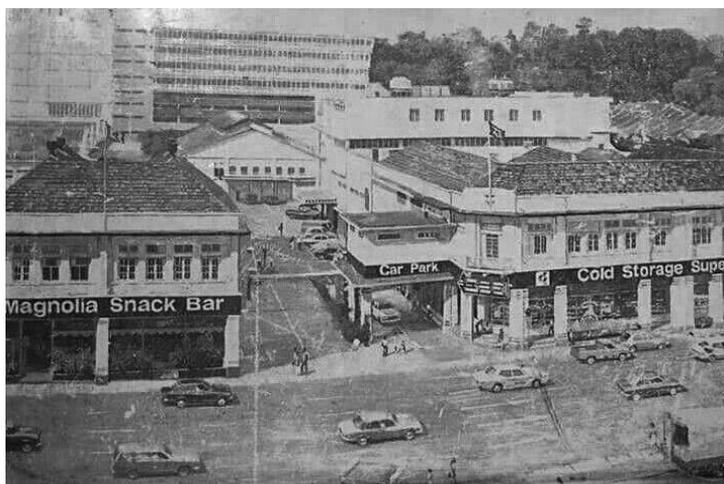
Industries. Today the track either side of the bridge is a surfaced roadway carrying a large number of vehicles daily. That evening the road was dry and as we went in search of a hotel we soon became aware we were being followed. A small group of children grew into a mixed group, obviously curious to know what these strange people were doing on Main Street, Palembang. None spoke English but our smiles were

returned, We found a small hotel and our band of followers were still with us until we went inside. They were out again the following day, no less curious, as we explored the city. At no time did they indicate they wanted anything from us - there was no begging, just a friendly desire to tag along, We were perfectly content to oblige. In the following few days we toured around the area, including visiting a jungle where we were told we might catch sight of a Sumatran Tiger, but we never did! The guide tried to sell us a tiger tooth but we turned him down. I'd like to say we were motivated by the issue of wildlife conservation but in those days that sentiment hadn't really gained traction - he was simply asking too much for it. It was also a molar and Harry suspected a vet would have identified it as coming from a horse!

Later a mix of train and rickety bus journeys took us to the south coast of Sumatra and from a hillside overlooking the small ferry port of Bakau we stared across the Sunda Straits to Anak Krakatau - the growing 'child' of probably the most destructive volcano on Earth.'

**Return to Singapore.** 'By now we were becoming concerned about how we were going to get back to Singapore. There were no ships from Palembang any time soon. We considered going north, almost the entire length of Sumatra, to Medan and catching a ferry we knew crossed the Malacca Straits directly to Penang. But the journey up through Sumatra in those days would, we were told, have been dangerous and extremely unreliable. To avoid absence without leave, there was only one viable option - a twice weekly flight from the small airport at Palembang with Garuda Airline. It cost us a fortune, draining all possible reserves and putting the mockers on any further trips for Harry and I for months ahead. No regrets though - definately no regrets.'

**Chico ('Boy').** From RAF Member **Don Brereton** is the first of three pieces of writing for this issue. This, his first story of *Chico* was initiated by the the story of the orphaned Gurkha boy that appeared in Issue 57 of '*Eastward*': 'Chico and his brother (right) were popular figures around Butterworth in the mid fifties - Chico's brother was only ever known as 'Chico's brother', and as they were alike he could only be recognised by the noticeable scars on a knee, the result of a nasty jellyfish sting. I think they worked for the Singapore Cold Storage, and they usually came around the billets in an afternoon on three wheel bikes fitted with a large cold box on the front selling Fraser and Neave



orange juice and a flavoured milk drink called 'susu manis'. They were Chinese and wore white shirts and shorts - that's most of what I know about them. Does anybody know how long they operated at the Butterworth base? The Singapore Cold



Storage also had an American style shop (called the Magnolia Snack Bar) on the road from the ferry to town - it also had air conditioning. It was my first stop in George Town where I used to have a huge

knickerbocker casa bianca served up in a tall glass that had everything in it. Does anybody remember that shop?'

The picture of 'Chico' and his brother on the previous page is courtesy of Al Campbell. When asked where the picture came from, Don replied: 'I have been in touch with member Barry Jones (Butterworth 1956-1958), who in turn was in touch with Al Campbell (Canada). Barry suggested that I e-mail Al, which I did, to find we had a lot in common, including Bidan. Al sent me a lot of photograph copies and to my surprise among them was a copy of the 'Chico' brothers on the base. As I had just written the article about them, it seemed appropriate to include it. I would be happy to hear from anyone who remembers the brothers.'

**Don Brereton**

**The Second Man.** Don indulged in a bit of detective work whilst enjoying the sunshine in his garden: 'It all



started on Thursday 16th April 2020. It was really the fault of the pandemic as I was spending time in the garden, in the sun. I was catching up with reading back copies of *'Eastward'* that I had missed. One in particular, Summer 2019, I found what I thought was a blast from the past - on page 22 was a photograph (left) sent in by Rowly Christopher, mainly featuring SWO Preston. But next to him was a man (with the moustache) who looked like our warrant officer (**WO Wright**) from the Control Tower. That's where the trouble started! I sent copies of the photo to some of my old mates from the tower. One, Cpl Bill Boulton, didn't recognise

him, and SAC Roy Hill-Baldwin recognised him but couldn't remember his name. Airfield electrician J/T Tony Waldron thought he knew him but also didn't recognise the photo. My only choice was SAC Martin O'Keefe, who lived in Barrow, and had a very good memory, but I found out he was in hospital. Then I had a 'light bulb' moment - Rowly would probably know who it was in the picture as he had sent it in...but he didn't know! However he did say he would get in touch with Sonia Williams (née Wright) who had sent him the photograph (Issue 54, Summer 2019).

However Rowly was going to be unavailable for a while, but in the meantime I told Roy Street about the photograph and Sonia. He dropped his own 'bombshell', that Sonia was the daughter of the Air Movements **WO 'Wilbur' Wright**, who was not the Control Tower WO. Back to Marty O'Keefe! On May 13th 2020, Marty's nephew, Michael, spoke to Marty in the hospital. Believe it or not, he asked Marty about WO Wright and he replied there were two WO Wrights. The following Sunday, May 17th, with the help of Rowly Christopher, I got in touch with Sonia Williams. She didn't recognise the man with the moustache in the photograph, but said she would ask her sister, Pat, who might know. Pat also didn't recognise the man with the moustache either! Her father, 'Wilbur' Wright (real name Frank Wright) was the WO in Air Movements (right), and also we did know some of the same people. But the big coincidence was we had both worked for the Army. I was with station operations for about two months, Sonia was there a year later teaching the Army guys how to type. So on Tuesday 26th May, I came to the conclusion that the WO in the first photograph of this article was Warrant Officer Wright from the Control Tower 1956 to 1957. I remember him as a lovely man.' And to top it all. I also discovered there were two warrant officers named Wright at Butterworth at the same time.



**The Big Brunei Bash - May 1957.** 'In May 1957, 45 Squadron from RAF Butterworth were chosen to provide a display team to perform on the opening day of the new Brunei airport. The aircraft, pilots, 15 groundcrew and additional personnel were to be housed at the RAF base at nearby Labuan, the support staff being flown to Labuan by Vickers Valetta (110 Squadron RAF) and Bristol Freighter (41 Squadron, RNZAF).

Five Venoms went to Labuan. The tail letters were **H, S, Q, E** and **N**. The pilots were: Sqdn Ldr G S Cooper (solo), Flt Lt's R N Baff, F J Barrett and W E Close, Fg Off K R Curtis with Flt Lt Dave Proctor as reserve pilot. Also there was a Venom held in reserve at RAF Tengah (Singapore) along with its pilot, Fg Off Bainbridge. Among the additional personnel were Flt Lt Clarkson and Cpl Bill Boulton from Air Traffic Control, RAF Butterworth.

The display was on May 8th and all aircraft performed perfectly, with the aerobatic solo performance by Sqdn Ldr Coopers being described as 'breathtaking'. The Sultan was very pleased! Everyone agreed it had been a great show and an enjoyable visit. The detachment however was not at Labuan for very long as they returned to RAF Butterworth on May 9th.



*Top left:* Brunei Venom support party (A)

*Top right:* Venom display pilots

*Bottom left:* Brunei Venom support party B

*Bottom right:* Venom display team in the air

**A reminder to members that the annual subscription to the RAFBPA is due December for the coming following year. Payments to be made to the Association treasurer, Len Wood.**

**Spotlight on Malaya - Jungle Patrol.** This article appeared in the Royal Air Force Review for June 1952 and was sent in by senior RAFBPA Member **Sam Mold**, who in 1952 was i/c 95 Squadron Stores, RAF Regiment (Malaya), based at RAF Tengah.

*"Peace with Germany and Japan on our terms will not bring much rest ... As I observed last time, when the war of the giants is over, the wars of the pygmies will begin."* [Churchill-Triumph and Tragedy 1953]

Apart from the aircrews of Sunderland aircraft operating off Korean shores, the men of the RAF Regiment (Malaya) are the only members of the Far East Air Force to face an armed enemy ready to return bullet for bullet. Operating from their base at Selangor on Central Malaya, which consists of two bungalows and a tented camp in a large compound. placed at their disposal by a local Tin Company, is No. 94 Rifle Squadron of the RAF Regiment. The Malayan airmen are commanded by British officers and senior NCOs, and their task is to keep free from the depredations of the terrorists a tract of country some 300 square miles in size, Working as an integral part of a British Infantry Brigade, in which they are the only non-British troops, Sections and Flights are constantly out on patrol, which may last a few hours or may entail spending several nights in the jungle on the watch for an ambush or enemy movements or manœuvre. The world in which they fight is strange - thick, humid jungle in which the eerie green light makes it seem like an underwater fantasy. Sometimes the patrols find themselves in river valleys or in marshy swamps where the water of innumerable hill streams can find no outlet and through which they must wade. Or, again their path may take them through areas of 'beluka' - thick, tall coarse grass with clumps of thorn trees, saplings and bushes



growing in between, which have to be cleared with deft strokes of a parang or machete. Often their way is blocked by large, long fallen tree trunks, half rotten and crumbling to pieces at touch, as well as by thick creepers hanging down from branches overhead or strong wiry saplings that rear out of the ground. It is through this sort of country that the patrols search for and root out the terrorists. The men are tense as

they move slowly forward, a spearhead of riflemen in front, followed by the patrol leader with his signaller carrying his portable wireless set, with the remainder of the patrol behind, ready to make a flanking or encircling attack while the concentrated fire power of the spearhead keeps the enemy pinned to the ground. Apart from the density of the jungle and other obstacles, there is always the clammy humidity of the climate, in which even the slightest physical exertion causes the jungle green uniforms to become a darker green with sweat and perspiration.

Occasionally, heavy and surprisingly cold, tropical showers soak the airmen to the skin in a matter of moments, and continually in the background are the myriad insects, ranging from the omnipresent mosquito to the red and black ants whose nip on unprotected flesh is sharp and painful - all buzzing and whirring unceasingly as they dart round and round at close quarters, And always there is the unseen threat of attack and ambush lurking in the jungle. The fear that the motionless trees and silent foliage may hide the grinning face and pointed rifle of the terrorist. One of the Squadron's Flights was recently ordered to make an attack at first light on a suspected bandit position in an isolated area of rubber. This entailed a rendezvous at a Police Station shortly after midnight,



with a subsequent march of some six miles with a local guide to show the way. The night was exceptionally dark, and an overcast sky blackened out the moon and stars. Airmen frequently stumbled over unseen obstacles, as the way led through some steep and difficult country. Suddenly a Bren gunner fell into a small pond, and by the time he had collected himself and his gun together, he found the man he had been following has disappeared into the darkness. He and his remaining companions wisely decided to stay put until it was light or they were rejoined by the forward members of the patrol.

In the meantime, the Flight Commander became aware of the absence of his rearguard, whereupon he and his men retraced their steps until they came upon the missing party. While pondering how best to prevent a similar incident, the Flight Commander suddenly noticed that where they had halted there were on the ground some old damp rubber leaves emitting a slight phosphorescence. Without delay he picked some up and gave one to each man to place it securely on his back where it would act as a guide to the man following. The march was then resumed and the position reached without further mishap, only to find that the terrorists had moved on elsewhere. To date the Squadron has a 'bag' of five bandits killed and a similar number wounded.



*Top left:* 'Into the jungle with the Malays goes a British RAF officer, He gives them their orders, outlines the ambush plan and route they will take before setting off.'

*Top right:* 'Malay airmen of the RAF Regiment make their way through the dark jungle to take up an ambush position. En route they may be ambushed themselves. It's a game of hide and seek.'

*Left:* 'A rubber planter stops on the roadside to exchange information with the RAF Regiment Malays. Note the armour plated windscreen and windows.'

**The story of an Earlsfield lad and his RAF career by Tony Parrini.** In the formative years of the Association a request was made at an AGM for the newsletter content to cover a wider area of interest other than Butterworth, This suggestion was taken onboard, not only in terms of geographical content but also of those who served in Malaya/Malaysia and further afield. The following article (part 1 this issue) from Tony covers just that and is intended to continue in parts into 2021.

**Part 1 From RAF Ternhill to RAF (Detachment) Majunga:** 'It was the summer block leave period when I was serving at RAF Tern Hill in Shropshire, the home of the Central Flying School Helicopter Wing,



equipped with Sioux's and Whirlwinds. The annual two weeks summer holidays absence of many personnel left just three bachelor junior officers in charge of the unit, I was one of those! We were required to sort out incoming mail and have anything that wasn't classified ready for the return to work...we were permitted to open bills and mail for the Officers' Mess, and among the mail were invitations to forthcoming events. Among these was one from the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital at Oswestry for members of the Officers' Mess to

attend the Matron's Summer Bottle Party. It was agreed that two of us should attend leaving one to remain behind to hold the fort for the evening - I don't recall how the selection was achieved but Ron McIntyre and I won the evening away from camp.

In due course we arrived at the hospital and found our way to a large room in which were assembled various service personnel from Shrewsbury, Shawbury and other military establishments in the area. However apart from the Matron and a few senior looking nursing staff of a certain age to greet us, there was a dearth of younger nurses to make the evening an attractive proposition. There was some mumbling amongst the servicemen at one end of the room and the Matron's staff at the other - apparently the Matron sent out some of the staff into the various nursing accommodation 'ordering' the nurses to get dressed up and go down to the party.

As the 'girls' arrived, the Matron called each of us forward one at a time and paired us off, Tom meet Mary, John meet Linda, and so on until it was my turn - "Tony meet Anne" (*right*) and that was it! We talked and shared the wine I'd taken to the party, and I realised we had a great deal in common...both Catholics, both brought up in council accommodation, both fathers ex-military and so on. At the end of the evening we agreed to meet again.

Whether by letter or by phone, we agreed a date for a week or so later. I would hire the PSI minibus to drive to Oswestry, collect Anne and we'd have a meal or drink and go to see a film in Shrewsbury. All went well, we parked the Commer Commercial maroon painted PSI minibus in a car park, wandered around Shrewsbury, had a meal and went to see *A Man for All Seasons*, which was on circulation (This movie features Sir Thomas More who opposed King Henry VIII's stance on marriage and was executed for his beliefs). At the end of the film we left the cinema and tried to get our bearings...we had never been to Shrewsbury before, and having wandered around looking for somewhere to eat and then walking round to decide which film to watch we were completely lost, spending the next hour or so looking for a maroon minibus in a carpark. Eventually we found it and Anne was returned safely to Oswestry before "curfew."



Our "courtship" between meeting in August 1967 and the following March was chaotic. I was at Ternhill,

Anne was at Oswestry, studying orthopaedics as part of her intensive care training, then returning to Birmingham Accident Hospital (her main base), spending her time off in Peterborough with her parents. But whilst she was at Oswestry we had days out in the Welsh borders and then when at Birmingham we met occasionally at weekends and also when she returned home. Weekends would be spent there or we would make a trip to see my parents in SW London. Trips into London itself included evenings out in the West End where on many evenings we enjoyed the Spanish Flamenco music and dance in The Chandos Restaurant and Pub. We were both good at letter writing and messages passed quickly between us (I'm not sure the post is as reliable these days!). Without mobile phones at the time, phone calls were frequently difficult to make due to times having to be prearranged and call box numbers exchanged!

Fortunately Anne's parents welcomed me into their home at Peterborough, likewise my parents did the same with Anne at their home in London.

It was in the Autumn of 1967 that RAF colleague, Paul Steiner, contacted me to tell me he had completed the Air Movements Course and was posted to RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus. If I could get myself an indulgence flight to Cyprus, he would arrange mess accommodation and the return flight - I decided to take the opportunity to enjoy the Mediterranean sunshine and have my first long period of leave since my commissioning in June 1966. It was whilst in Cyprus that I decided that Anne was the one for me and on returning to the UK I popped the question?. We chose an engagement ring and announced our intentions to our parents - initially both fathers showed some reluctance but were eventually swayed.'

**Majunga (RAF Detachment)<sup>1</sup>:** 'Late in 1967, a spanner was put in the works and our engagement was to be a bit longer than we intended...I was informed that I was to be posted away from RAF Ternhill to the RAF Detachment at Majunga in Madagascar. In preparation for the detachment I was to attend the RAF Fuels Handling Course at RAF Upwood, convenient as it wasn't far from Peterborough, followed with a Sea Survival Course at RAF Mountbatten in Cornwall, both before a pre-detachment preparation period at RAF St Mawgan near Newquay.

January and February 1968 disappeared quickly and in March 1968 we said our goodbyes before I flew from RAF Brize Norton to Majunga in Madagascar, via Cyprus, Bahrein and RAF Gan in a magnificent Bristol Britannia. So began an eight month unaccompanied tour in the tropics on the west coast of Madagascar.

Majunga was somewhat "basic". Our encampment on the side of a large pan where aircraft parked, turned round and sent off again, was in tents and metal huts exposed to the scorching sun...our accommodation was about five miles away in a "shanty" town where we lived above shops and offices in a large apartment with individual bedrooms and a large communal lounge and dining area. Two local lads were employed to do the cooking and housework which they did efficiently, although the cooking was a bit imaginative at times! There were local phones, but making international calls were impossible. For myself and our Engineering Officer, Flt Lt Danny O'Sullivan, if our aircraft were due to fly, our working day started at about 5am at the airfield, meaning being up and about quietly at 4.30am at the latest, washed and dressed for travelling out to the airfield. Danny's men would prepare the aircraft and carry out fuelling and lubrication - with the constant changes in temperature, Shackletons leaked their oil onto large drip trays constantly. Engine tests were also frequently needed as the perennial problem on the four engines of each aircraft were the magnetos. My little complex had to be ready to respond to any requirements for spares. The aircrew would arrive into the airport at about 6.15am for briefing and take-off was normally at sunrise, at about 7am. We would all wait in the airport lounge in case the aircraft returned with a problem, but once our air traffic man gave the thumbs up, we could relax and return to town for breakfast with our colleagues.

<sup>1</sup> A detachment of RAF Shackleton aircraft operated from Majunga from March 1966 to March 1971 to assist the Royal Navy Beira Patrol with aerial surveillance of the Mozambique Channel.

Our working day continued until around lunchtime at the airfield when we then go to the magnificent sandy beach at Amborovy, at the end of the runway, to swim, sunbathe, talk to ex-pats and some well healed locals for the afternoon. As sunset approached, so did the Shackleton on its return from the patrol...we could hear the drone of the engines well in advance which resulted in a quick change into uniform and a dash back to the airfield to see the aircraft back and put to bed, unserviced for the night, as another of our three aircraft would have been prepared during the day.



Once a week we would eat at the little café at the airfield for this was the only night we would have contact to the outside world. Majunga's airfield was in fact an International Airport and once a week an Air Madagascar Boeing 707 would arrive with the post from the outside world. The post room at the airfield would have opened and we would post all our letters written over the past week and wait to receive our incoming mail there and then as the bags from the UK were invariably all for the RAF...any official mail for the RAF Detachment, and any uncollected mail, would be signed for and taken to HQ for later distribution. Although some mail went to the UK in our fortnightly Britannia, letters flew back and forth between Anne and myself via Paris in the more frequent Air Madagascar flights. For me time passed remarkably quickly and in October 1968 I returned to a warm homecoming with Anne and our families.



Towards the end of our earlier letter writing we had agreed upon me accepting a further posting overseas with undertaking that if we were to marry, with me being under the age of 25, we would not be entitled to marriage allowance, married officer's accommodation or married overseas allowances! On accepting the posting, I was to have six weeks leave in the UK and then travel to Butterworth in Malaysia for an accompanied three year tour!...*to be continued.*

**Sequel to 'Bat and Ball'**. An article by RAFBPA Member, John Muter, featured in Issue 55 of *'Eastward'*, mentioned a surname that 'rang a bell' whilst reading the chapter on sport in the book *The Barbed-Wire University*<sup>4</sup>. The name 'recognised' was Geoff Edrich, brother of Sqdn Ldr Bill Edrich, a famous cricketer mentioned in John's article. Geoff Eldrich (5776667) was a Sergeant on the 5th Royal Norfolk Regiment who played cricket for Lancashire prior to the outbreak of war. He was captured in Singapore and imprisoned at Changi, and eventually sent to work on the Burma Railway.

Among the many sportsmen, both professional and amateur, that joined up for the duration of the war and ended up as POWs of the Japanese, Captain Arthur 'Ben' Barnett<sup>2</sup> of the Australian 8th Divisional Signals, is also a part of this story as both played against each other in the 'Changi Ashes', the first day of the three match Test series being held at 10.30am on Sunday 20 September 1942 on a rough stretch of baked earth using kit carried into Changi by the British Team captain.

'Ben' Barnett (who toured England in 1934 and 1938) was the skipper and wicket keeper for the Australian team - Geoff Edrich scores were 100 for all three matches.

Not long after the end of the war Geoff Edrich was invited to visit India to represent England in cricket. He declined the invitation as he was still recovering from malaria, and other tropical illnesses, contracted during his time as a POW in the Far East.

Another famous name from the world of cricket at the time was the broadcaster and prolific cricket writer, Ernest William 'Jim' Swanton, who had also played cricket, and then joined the 148 Field Regiment RA of the Bedfordshire Yeomanry on the outbreak of war. He was posted to the Far East where he was an acting major when wounded in Singapore. later contracting polio and dysentery during his period of captivity. He carried his copy of the 1939 *Wisden Cricketers' Almanack* (958 pages) throughout his travels along the Burma Railway, where unbelievably cricket matches were also held! It was at Tarsao POW hospital, camp in Thailand where he came into his own with the weekly team entertainment laid on for the POWs. One of his simulated broadcasts on cricket was memorable - he introduced his 'broadcast' about the life of the Australian cricketer Don Bradman with "a cricketing feature about the world's greatest batsman."

For the 1946 edition of '*Wisden*', he wrote an article 'Cricket under the Japs' which is still obtainable, but at a price! Swanton's copy, complete with the Japanese 'chop' stamp, and POW 'jungle' repairs is now kept in the MCC Museum at Lord's.

Post-war, E.W. Swanton was at times seen to be unpopular with some people, especially with those he regarded as his 'social inferiors'. The great Ray Illingworth was quoted as saying that "*Jim Swanford was too snobbish to travel in the same car as his chauffeur.*" On another occasion, on a rare visit to a 'less important' match, he expected gin and tonic drinks to be made available on demand and his response to being informed that the bar had run out of ice was "Didn't you tell them who it was for?"

<sup>1</sup> The Barbed-Wire University: *The Real Lives of Allied Prisoners of war in the Second World War* by Midge Gillies.

<sup>2</sup> The Sportsmen of Changi by Kevin Blackburn.



**Diamonds are forever:** This story of the loss of diamonds flown to Australia from Java in 1942 has used different references to describe what happened and the aftermath of that tragic day on March 3rd. With a number of versions describing events differently, some inconsistencies have been identified and changed for this article. Even so, errors in this account are bound to be inevitable...

'On the 3rd March 1942, KNILM DC-3 PK-AFV *'Pelikaan'* was attacked and shot down over Carnot Bay (north of Broome, NW Australia) by Imperial Japanese Navy Air Service Zero's returning from a raid on Broome. Previously *'Pelikaan'* had made flights from Bandung (Java) to Broome, carrying KNILM (Royal Dutch Indies Airways) staff, Dutch service personnel and other passengers to safety from the advancing Japanese forces. For the aircraft captain and his crew it was to have been a routine flight, however it was not to be for on this day, just before take off shortly after midnight, Captain Ivan Smirnoff, was handed a small sealed box by the KNILM airfield manager containing (unknown to him) a valuable consignment of diamonds. Destined for the Commonwealth Bank of Australia, it has been suggested the diamonds had been transferred to Java from Holland before the Germans overran that country (apparently not true). Now they were to go to Australia for safekeeping!

Shortly after sunrise, flying over Australia's Carnot Bay towards Broome. *'Pelikan'* was attacked by Japanese Zero's returning to Timor following their raid on Broome, The DC-3 took a large number of hits and several passengers, including Captain Smirnoff, were wounded. Skilfull manoeuvring of the damaged aircraft put it down at the water's edge of the beach where it 'skidded' nose first into the surf. The zero's followed up by strafing the aircraft as it lay on the beach, causing further injuries that subsequently resulted in fatalities among some of the passengers.

Following the strafing, the radio operator was able to get an SOS off to Broome, and an uninjured KNILM official was able to enter the aircraft and recover the mail, log books and the mystery package which unfortunately was knocked from his hand by a wave when leaving the aircraft and disappeared in the surf! Later in the day a Japanese Kawanishi *'Mavis'* flying boats dropped two small bombs 'off target', and another two when returned later...the latter two failed to explode.

Survivors from the attack were dispatched to seek help from Broome, coming across a group of aborigines on the way who escorted them to the Beagle Bay Mission, an Aboriginal settlement run by German missionaries until 1940. Two RAAF Wirraway trainer aircraft appeared over the crash site on the 6th March and dropped emergency supplies to the remaining survivors. A few days later these survivors were rescued, leaving at dawn to walk to the mission. All the survivors were later taken to Broome by truck. Among the rescue party was a representative from the Australian Commonwealth Bank who was to take charge of the diamond package, by now believed to be lost for ever!

Following the rescue, one Jack Palmer, a 'beachcomber' living on his boat and making a living salvaging along the coast, came onto the scene. Sailing his lugger in the Carnot and Beagle Bays area, he spotted the downed aircraft and set about salvaging material from the aircraft. The story continues...

**From the Cairns Post 4 May 1942**

#### **FORTUNE IN DIAMONDS LOST FROM DUTCH PLANE**

*'When searching for a dugout at Carnot Bay, Jack Palmer, a beach comber, kicked a paper object in the mud It turned out to be £300,000 worth of diamonds which had been lost when raiders shot down a Dutch plane. Addressed to the Commonwealth Bank, the jewels had been sent from Java in one of the last planes to leave. The machine had been piloted by the distinguished Dutch flier, Captain Smerenof (Correct spelling Smirnov or Smirnoff - both are in use). On the way Smerenof was warned by radio of an air attack on Broome. He steered clear of the danger until all was clear, As he reached Carnot Bay, 60 miles north of*

*Broome, homeward bound Japanese raiders intercepted and shot him down, Of the seven persons onboard two men, a woman and a child were wounded. The woman died almost immediately, and the men, both engineers, and the child died some days later.*

**Parcel Missing...** *Smerenof sent an uninjured KNILM official to the plane for a brief bag and a parcel of jewellery. The parcel was missing. Natives found the castaways and rescued them, but an exhaustive search failed to reveal the jewels. Some days later Jack Palmer presented himself at [Major] Gibson's office and pleaded to be enlisted. Middle aged and ill clad, Palmer nonchalantly told of the discovery of the diamonds. He casually produced a large set of salt and pepper shakers and, like throwing dice, cascaded a glittering spray of diamonds over the Major's table.'*

Jack Palmer was taken into custody by an Army investigating officer and later taken back to the crash site where the paper packaging and 'security' seals of the 'diamond' box were found in the sand near the aircraft.

The story is taken further in a newspaper article from ***The Mirror (Western Australia) of May 1st 1942.***

### **He Spilled £20,000 Worth Of Diamonds Out Of Salt And Pepper Shaker**

*'It takes a lot to surprise Major Cliff Gibson [Australian Army Legal Corp]. As Crown Prosecutor in the pre-war days he saw some amazing exhibits - knives, bottles of poisons, fake dice boxes - pulled from the pockets of witnesses. It was all in a day's work. And when he was appointed Officer Commanding Nor'-West L.A.C., he wasn't concerned with trifles like that.*

*He was busy at his desk one day in Broome when John Palmer walked into his office. Not a word was spoken. The beachcomber pulled from his pocket a salt and pepper shaker, unscrewed the tops off them, and - as a mass of dices - strewed them across the table, about £20,000 worth of sparkling diamonds. But (the) lean, gaunt figure of beachcomber John Palmer, in his old tropical suit, shook with laughter - "Huh, plenty of them", as unconcerned as though he had shaken salt from the bakelite shaker in his hand.*

*Such was the amazing story told in Perth Police Court that week when Palmer faced a charge of having stolen £20,000 worth of the sparklers. With him in the dock were aged James Mulgrue, a shop assistant and engineer Frank Robinson, both on receiving charges,*

**Beachcomber...** *"Beachcomber Jack" was how John Palmer (46) was best known on the Nor'-West coast where he had been living for the past ten years. He is accused of having stolen and unlawfully received diamonds worth £20,447, the property of N.V. de Concurrent, Storekeeper [Jewellers) of Bandoeng, Java. Palmer used to have a lugger, but gave it up to enlist.'*

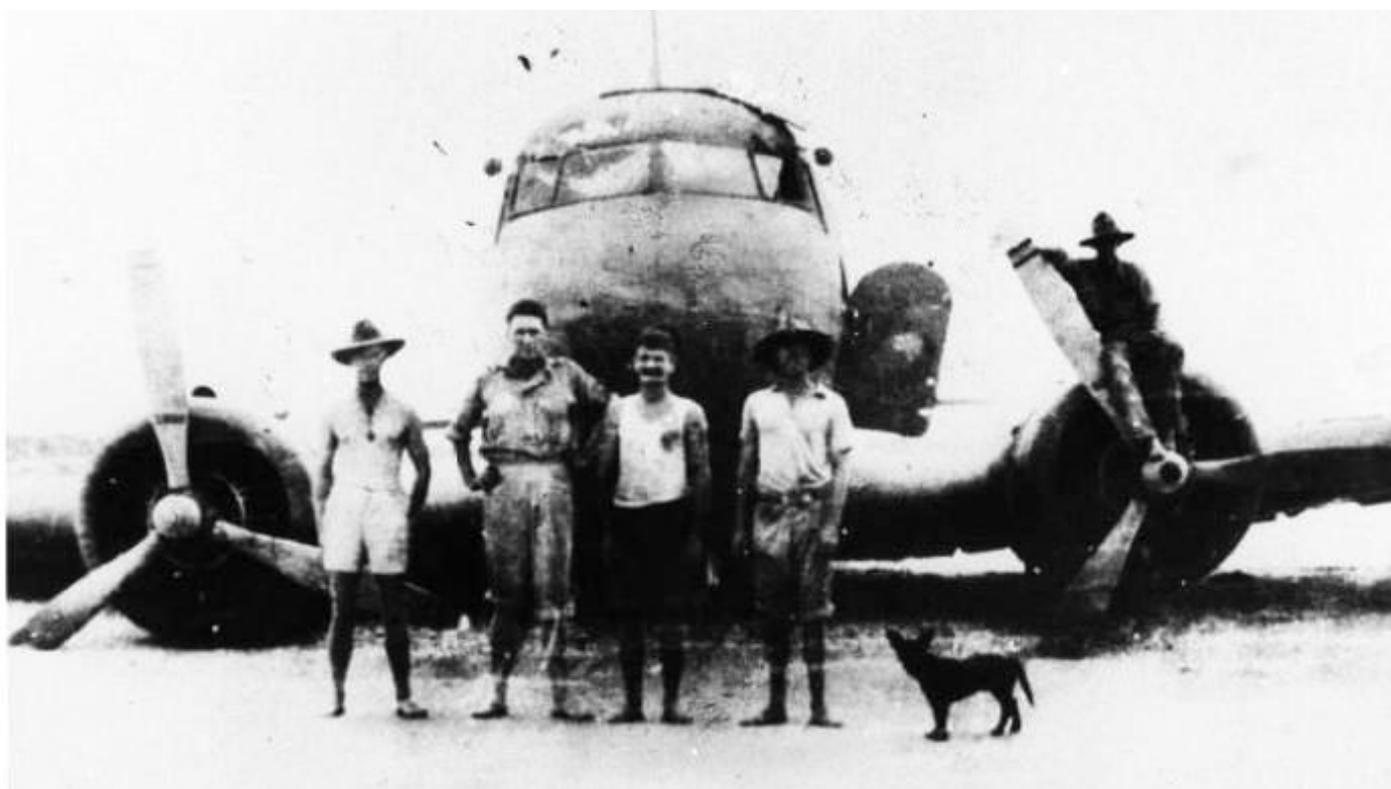
All three were acquitted of the charges.

Jack Palmer handed over to Major Gibson about 7% worth of the total value of the 'lost' package. What happened to the rest is still today a mystery although there have many guesses. Perhaps the most probable is that provided in the document *Broome March 1942 - 3 March 2012*, published by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands - Canberra, Western Australian Museum, in that aborigines from the area discovered many of the diamonds washed up on the beach and didn't realise their value - they were just pieces of worthless glass, mere trinkets for playing with? When those at the Bagle Bay Mission heard that the police were intending make enquiries and a search at the the mission, the diamonds/worthless pieces of glass ended up in creeks, ditches latrines etc. Or so the story goes!



**Above: DC-3 'Pelikaan' on the beach at Carnot Bay**

**Below: The Australian Investigative Team with Jack Palmer, third from left.**



**Ivan Smirnoff in the RAF.** The KNILM pilot of *'Pelikaan'*, Captain Ivan Smirnoff, started his flying career with the Imperial Russian Air Service after being wounded, as a soldier, on the 21st August 1915. Following initial training at Petrograd he progressed to the flying school at Moscow, arriving there on the in October 1915. Following the primary course he moved onto advanced training, specifically fighters in preparation for new fighter squadrons being formed. He qualified as a military pilot in September 1916 and was assigned to an elite unit in the same month. He was to be seen as an outstanding pilot through to 1917 and when the October Revolution led to the groundng of the IRAS in December of that year, Smirnoff and two other pilots deserted, fearing persecution by the new regime. On reaching Vlavostok all three sought freedom via foreign consulates - the British were amenable to their joining the Royal Flying Corps in the UK.

Two of them started the long sea voyage to England, stopping for a time in Egypt were they signed on as pilots with a RFC Squadron based in the Canal Zone. This might have been possible through Brigadier General William Sefton Brancker who in 1917 was GOC RFC Palestine HQ followed by Middle East HQ. Following the Middle East service with the RFC and RAF (formed 1 April 1918) the pair, through Major General Brancker (promoted 1918), were retrained at the Central Flying School at RAF Upavon. However the end of WW1 on the 11th November 1918 saw both out of a job with the RAF.

Following his demobilisation from the RAF, Ivan Smirnoff became a civilian flight instructor at RAF Netheravon, teaching Russian pilots to fly fighter aircraft. This was shortlived and he returned to Russia to join the Volunteer Army. On arrival he was advised to leave the country as the Volunteer Army was on the verge of defeat...he stowed away on a ship and ended up in Paris as the the Assistant Air Attache and Chief Pilot to the Russian government in exile.



In 1920 he joined the Belgian airline SNETA as a pilot until in 1921 a hangar fire destroyed his assigned aircraft..he was out of a job again. He moved to the Netherlands and began flying for the Dutch airline, KLM in 1922 and in 1928 he pioneered the postal air route from Amsterdam to Batavia, setting a record time for the route in both directions. Ivan Smirnoff (*left*) became a naturalised Dutch citizen in 1929 and later (1940) was posted permanently to the Dutch East Indies by KLM where, apart from being a pilot for KNILM he was a reserve captain in the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army Air Force. As the Japanese forces advanced through the Dutch East Indies he was involved in evacuating Dutch VIP's and citizens by air to Australia. His last flight in this role was that of DC-3 PK-AFV *'Pelikaan'*. Following recovery from his wounds after the downing of *'Pelikaan'*, Captain Smirnoff continued his flying, piloting for the USAAF 317th Troop Carrier Group (the Jungle Skippers), based in Australia, throughout the rest of the war.

Post war, the American Atlas Supply Company purchased a surplus C-54 (military version of the DC-4 airliner). The four engined aircraft, to be named *'Atlas Sky Merchant'* was converted into a flying showroom and to visit overseas countries in order to expand business. Starting early January 1948 from New Jersey, the *'Atlas Sky Merchant'* went on a 100 day round-the-world flight of 44,500 miles. The pilot contracted for the venture was Captain Ivor Smirnoff, who also had the responsibilty for the flight logistics throughout the tour...the flight was deemed a success.

Captain Ivan Smirnoff retired as a senior advisor for KLM in 1949.

**RAF Seletar 1934:** The MacRobertson Trophy Air Race, London to Melbourne (Australia) was staged in October 1934. The race was organised by the Royal Aero Club and started at RAF Mildenhall (East Anglia) with five compulsory checkpoints, these being Baghdad, Allahabad, Singapore, Darwin and Charleville (Queensland). The Singapore checkpoint was at RAF Seletar (Kallang didn't open until 1937). The Dutch KLM entry for the air race was its latest airliner, Douglas DC-2 PH-AJU 'Uiver' (Stork) flying its regular passenger route with the race number 44. The aircraft is shown below when at Seletar on day 3 of the race. Note: The lady with the flowery dress appears on both pictures!



# Christmas Day 1945

UNITED SERVICE OF WORSHIP IN THE CHINESE  
METHODIST CHURCH, PENANG  
9.00 A.M.

"Peace on earth; goodwill towards all men."

## ORDER OF WORSHIP

1. Organ Prelude.
2. Call to Worship. *Chinese*
3. Hymn. (M. H. 86)

HARK! the herald-angels sing  
Glory to the new-born King,  
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled.  
Joyful, all ye nations, rise  
Join the triumph of the skies;  
With the angelic host proclaim,  
Christ is born in Bethlehem.

*Hark! the herald-angels sing  
Glory to the new-born King.*

Christ by highest heaven adored,  
Christ, the everlasting Lord,  
Late in time behold Him come,  
Offspring of a virgin's womb!  
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;  
Hail the incarnate Deity!  
Pleased as man with men to dwell,  
Jesus, our Immanuel.

Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace  
Hail the Sun of Righteousness!  
Light and life to all He brings,  
Risen with healing in His wings.  
Mild He lays His glory by,  
Born that man no more may die,  
Born to raise the sons of earth,  
Born to give them second birth.

*English  
and Chinese*

4. Prayer. Mr. Khoo Cheng Hoe. *Chinese*
5. Hymn. (M. H. 97)

THE first Nowell the angel did say  
Was to certain poor shepherds in  
fields as they lay:  
In fields where they lay a-keeping  
their sheep  
On a cold winter's night that was so  
deep.

*Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,  
Born is the King of Israel.*

They looked up and saw a star,  
Shining in the east, beyond them far,  
And to the earth it gave great light,  
And so it continued both day and  
night.

And by the light of that same star,  
Three wise men came from country far;  
To seek for a King was their intent,  
And to follow the star wherever it went.

This star drew nigh to the north-west,  
O'er Bethlehem it took its rest,  
And there it did both stop and stay  
Right over the place where Jesus lay.

Then entered in those wise men three,  
Full reverently upon their knee,  
And offered there in His presence  
Their gold and myrrh and frankincense.

*English & Chinese*

- 6. Scripture Reading. Luke 2. 1-20. *Chinese*
- 7. Anthem: "O Zion that bringest good tidings." Church Choir. *English*
- 8. The Offertory.
- 9. Baptisms. *Chinese*
- 10. Anthem: "Nazareth." British Service Men's Choir. *English*
- 11. Christmas Message. Rev. J. N. Oates, R.A.F. *English*  
(Interpreted by Rev. M. T. Huang) *and Chinese*
- 12. Christmas Carol. Church Choir. *English.*
- 13. Prayers. Mr. Chan Yik King. *Chinese.*
- 14. Hymn. (M. H. 93)

<p>CHRISTIANS, awake, salute the happy morn, Whereon the Saviour of the world was born; Rise to adore the mystery of love, Which hosts of angels chanted from above; With them the joyful tidings first begun Of God incarnate and the Virgin's Son.</p>	<p>He spake; and straightway the celestial choir In hymns of joy, unknown before, conspire. The praises of redeeming love they sang, And heaven's whole orb with hallelujahs rang; God's highest glory was their anthem still. Peace upon earth, and unto men good- will.</p>
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<p>Then to the watchful shepherds it was told, Who heard the angelic herald's voice: Behold, I bring good tidings of a Saviour's birth To you and all the nations upon earth; This day hath God fulfilled His promised word, This day is born a Saviour, Christ the Lord.</p>	<p>Then may we hope, the angelic hosts among, To sing, redeemed, a glad triumphal song; He that was born upon this joyful day Around us all His glory shall display; Saved by His love, incessant we shall sing Eternal praise to heaven's almighty King.</p>
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- 15. Blessing. *English and Chinese.*
- 16. Organ Postlude.

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Christmas Reception in the Church Hall after Service.