



# RAF Butterworth/Penang Association



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

## NEWSLETTER

## SPRING 2007

**Aims of the Association**

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

### Chairman's Corner

I write in great haste; the editor – he who should be obeyed told me weeks ago to “get on with it” and I am now left with hours to go – “OR THERE WILL BE A BIG BLANK SPACE ON THE FRONT PAGE!”  
*(I'm like that, once a teacher, always a teacher-Ed).*

I have just got back from a trip to Yorkshire and took the opportunity to visit the Reunion Venue whilst in transit to Leeds. I believe the crew have chosen well and I only hope that this year's reunion will be well supported.

A number of you are off to Kuala Lumpur in the Summer for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Malaysia's Independence on 31<sup>st</sup> August. I know those going under the guidance of Ron Blain will have a great time representing the British Servicemen and women who were out there in 1957! I fervently believe that any wounds that might have existed between elements of the Malaysian and British authorities in the past are well and truly healed. The enthusiasm of the Malaysian's seem to have to get you to KL for the celebrations, and to recognise those who helped during confrontation with the award of the Pingat Jasa Malaysia Medal, are evident of their appreciation for all the assistance they received.

I hope those who receive the hard copy of the Newsletter are pleased with the revised printing format. We saved some Association funds doing things differently, and once again, I thank all the Committee for their help in keeping us on the progressive track.

Best wishes, and in great haste.

*Tony Parrini, Chairman*



Celebrating 50 Years of Nationhood

**2007 is 'Visit Malaysia Year'**  
**Malaysia to Celebrate 50 Years of Nationhood**



## ***EASTWARD***



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Geoff Fean

## IN GENERAL

**Ken Jones:** it is with regret that we have been informed of the death over the Christmas (2006) period of Flt Lt Ken Jones (33 Sqn Eng O).

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

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

Again member's feedback concerning this version of the newsletter is still a bit 'thin on the ground' but those who have commented have been in favour of this means of receiving their copy.

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

### **Origins of the name Penang : from various sources**

**T**he name Penang is derived from the word 'pinang', the Malay for the betel or areca nut palm (scientific name *Areca catechu*), many stands of which can still be found in Penang to this day. The betel nut is a product of great cultural and symbolic significance to the Malay, being used in everything from marriage ceremonies and shamanic rituals to cosmetics. Its most widespread use was as one of the ingredients used in 'sireh' – a concoction that consists of shaved betel nut fragments, lime and cloves wrapped in fresh palm leaves and chewed as one would chew gum. As it is chewed, it forms an aromatic mixture which colours the lips and saliva red and is reputed to produce mild narcotic effects.

The significance of the betel nut palm to Penang is not limited to just its name. The modern-day tricolour flag of Penang also features the ubiquitous tree.



It is likely that Penang was known by its Malay name Pulau Pinang since it was first settled by the Malays. In 1591, the 'Edward Bonaventure', the vessel of English adventurer Captain James Lancaster; visited Pulau Rimau, an island just south of what he called 'Poolo Pinang'. Manoel Godinho de Eredia's map of the Malay peninsula in his 'Description of Malaca' in 1613 refers to the island in Portuguese as 'Pulo Pinam'. However, Penang was also known to Kedah inhabitants at the time as Tanjung Penaga (Cape 'Penaga') and

that particular name was even used in Government land grants as late as 1800. Up to today, there are Kedah folk who refer to Penang as Tanjung'.

The Penaga was a hardwood tree used to make walking sticks and its leaves were reputed to have medicinal value. There also still exists the town of Penaga on the Kedah coast opposite the island.

W. E. Maxwell's 'Notes and Queries' (1887) notes an account that appeared in Logan's Journal of the Indian Archipelago' of the voyage of the legendary Malay seafarer Nakhoda Ragam that gives an even earlier name for Penang. According to the legend, Nakhoda Ragam traded in the waters along the length of the western coast of the Malay peninsula from Lingga at the southern tip to Kedah. It was said that, because he found no higher or larger isolated island in these travels, he named it Pulau ke Satu ('single island'). Nakhoda Ragam was also reputed to have given the names to the various bays, rivers and points of Pulau Pinang. On one occasion, when sailing off the south-western end of the island, his 'kendi' or water-pot fell into the sea, and it was immediately transformed by the 'jinn' (genii) of the place into an island which still bears the name of Pulau Kendi.

On leaving Pulau Kendi, he pulled into a bay on the southern coastline of Penang. At the mouth of the river which flows into the bay, he released a tame bird called Bayan, and thenceforth the place has been called Bayan Lepas (or the 'free Bayan').

At another voyage, he attempted to land again at the shore of that bay. However, the sea was too rough and as his boat pulled away from the shore, it was nearly swamped. The boat rolled and pitched heavily, and as he was steering her off, his exertions loosened the knot (or 'sanggul') of his long, flowing hair. He therefore named the place Gertak Sanggul ('shaken knot'). On another occasion, while passing Pulau Bitong on the western coast of Penang, he encountered a heavy gale. On passing a point on the island, the storm grew fiercer and he saw his wife's face turn pale with fear. He henceforth referred to that place as 'Pucat Muka' or 'pale-faced'.

Another sea captain - Captain Francis Light - landed in Penang on 17th July, 1786 to acquire it for his King and country. He too pondered on what new name to give to the island to mark this momentous event. He finally decided on naming it after England's regent - the Prince of Wales, who was to later be King George IV of England. The island was, in fact, formally named Prince of Wales Island during a flag-raising ceremony there on August 11th - the Prince's birthday. The name, however, was rarely used -even the British administration always referred to it as Penang - and Prince of Wales Island was quickly forgotten. He named the settlement they built there after King George III and that name - Georgetown - has lasted to this day.

### Who or what was Butterworth named after?

Can any member help with the naming of Butterworth? I believed it was named after Colonel W. J. Butterworth, C. B., Governor of Prince of Wales' Island (Penang), Singapore and Malacca, 1843 to 1855. However another source indicates the name comes from a local tree whose poisonous resin was once used by Aborigines!.....Ed

### *Glimpses of Penang in the 1800's; from records researched by Dr A. L. Hoops 1937*

**R**eading an article in the Straits Times Annual for 1937 prompted me (Ed) to think of the times we, as airmen, had to seek the attentions of the MO and after the visit to pass comment (unfairly sometimes) that aspirin and kaolin mixture was his normal stock in trade. With this in mind I have 'lifted' part of the article dealing with the 'cure' of tropical illnesses of European soldiers in Penang in the early 1800's....it makes interesting reading!

*"Fever is observed to bear a large proportion of one third of the whole number of ascertained causes of death among the adult residents. The island has long been noted for the very fatal form in which the disease presents itself (Pinang Fever), dreaded as a new undescribed affection....by it's uniformly fatal issue."*

The article goes on to say that several recoveries from fever were made. Fever was often attributed to exposure to the sun and weather 'against which Europeans were warned sternly'

"Case 1. - An Ensign in the 35<sup>th</sup> regiment aged 22 whose fever was attributed to getting into his boat and sailing about Penang Harbour in the sun, was bled 76 ounces of blood from his arm, and 24 ounces by leeches, making altogether 6 lb. 4 ounces of blood on the first day. This was followed by the free exhibition of mercury - castor oil in the mornings with Jalap and Epsom salts at intervals, and repeated doses of from 2 to 8 grains of Calomel during the day and a Bolus of from 15 to 20 grains of Calomel at bedtime - a mild nutrient diet, and sometimes an anodyne draught at night.

He bore this treatment for 18 days, when Salivation was established and the Calomel was stopped: a week later he was removed up the Hill, where three weeks after his ascent he could walk with the assistance of a stick. In two months he was able to rejoin his corps."

"Case 2. - A Lieutenant in the same regiment, aged 28, spare of body and of dark complexion, who was in the practice of exposing himself to the sun and weather...wading to his knees in mud and water, reported sick with a shivering fit and fever, chills and flushes, pains in the head, loins and limbs. He was immediately bled 40 ounces, and given 4 grains of Calomel hourly, 3 doses. The

same evening he was ordered 30 leeches to be applied over the pained parts. Next morning only 20 more leeches were applied – 30 ounces of blood were calculated to have been drawn by then. Calomel was given frequently, especially a 20 grain bolus each evening, and mercurial ointment was rubbed into the body 3 times daily.

After 6 days the patient developed burning pains in the stomach, violent sickness and restlessness. The mercurial treatment was then suspended, and two ounces of a cold infusion of Cinchona bark given every two hours; the patient was blistered and given an ounce of mulled Port every hour, Mulligatawny soup and animal jellies.

In consultation with Dr. C., it was recommended to persevere diligently in the use of Stimuli of the diffusible kind, Champagne, Burgundy, Hock, Beer or Port, (it was believed at the time that alcohol was good for the health in the tropics) as the patients fancy may direct, to support the circulation by Shampooing and the temperature by warm bottles. Four men shampooed him constantly for several hours on end. On the ninth day vomiting abated and he was a little better: during the night he drank one bottle of Port, ¾ bottle of Champagne, and half a bottle of Burgundy, besides soups, jellies and Mulligatawny. Two grains of opium were given him which produced sleep. Next day the shampooing was continued and he had one bottle of Hodson's Beer and one of Burgundy.

Under such a regime he improved steadily, though suffered occasionally from Liver pain this was attributed to debility rather than to any serious disorganisation of that organ, and was met by large doses of Blue Pill and Castor oil. He was able to ascend the Great Hill for a change of air a month after his illness started.”

At this period of British presence on Penang ‘each white soldier was given a ration of one pint of rum daily’. The article concludes with ‘ The cause of malaria was unknown and the treatment worse than the disease’.

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

### **SAC W. H. Leppard**

From member Ron Calvert, who has just returned from Penang and a visit to the Western Road Christian Cemetery grave of 3140567 SAC Leppard (Summer and Autumn 2006 Newsletters), is a query relating to the possible whereabouts of any surviving relatives of the young airman killed by the unfortunate 1955 accident. The name of a sister ‘Brenda’ is evident on the gravestone but Ron also believes there may be a brother. Can any member help? Ron mentions that the cemetery and grave are tended with great care.

Mike Ward who is also a member of NMBVA, Bristol Branch has written to say that when attending a meeting the Treasurer (John Smith-RAF Seletar Association) showed him a photograph he had taken of SAC Leppard's grave. In this photograph, dated February 2002, the original official gravestone is being replaced by a new one. Mike writes “During my forthcoming visit to Penang in September 2007 I intend to visit (the cemetery) and would like to lay a wreath at the memorial on behalf of the RAF Butterworth & Penang Association, but will discuss this with our Chairman at the reunion/AGM in March”. The question of SAC Leppard's sister ‘Brenda’ is also raised by Mike...if she is alive should the Association attempt to contact her?

### **Merdeka 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.**

Mike and Pam Ward are joining the NMBVA contingent for the above celebrations which also involve a parade and gala dinner in KL on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2007. This is to be followed by stays in Penang and Singapore. Whilst at Penang it is Mike's intention to repeat a journey made with fellow Butterworth member ‘Curly’ Hartley in 1956, when they visited the Thai border by motor car (*next issue*). It would also appear the NMBVA has, via the Malaysian High Commission, obtained permission for Mike's party to visit RMAF Butterworth!

Mike has been approached to write about his visit to Malaysia and has agreed to ‘pen’ an article for a future issue of the newsletter (see page 17).

### **Chin Peng's guerrillas, 1968**

From Laurie Bean, in answer to the '1968 incursion of Chin Peng's guerrillas across the Thai border' query raised on page 6 of the Christmas 2006 newsletter came the following:

Hi Dave,

Since you mentioned this incident, I have been looking through various books that I have regarding the MCP and its revival of the "armed struggle" in 1968.

Have just found a passage in a book called "The Communist Party of Malaya - The Inside Story", by Aloysius Chin, a former Deputy Director of Special Branch (Operations) relating directly to an incident in June 1968.

On Page 163 he writes: *"On 17 June 1968, the MNLA ambushed a Malaysian Security Force convoy near the border town of Kroh, North Perak, en route to Betong, South Thailand, killing 17 policemen. The incident was intended to serve as a dramatic gesture to mark the beginning of the current multi-staged offensive, blue-printed in the Party's 20th anniversary policy statement."*

The document he refers to was issued by the MCP on 1 June 1968 to mark the 20th anniversary of the declaration of the first emergency and warned, "that the outbreak of a new revolutionary storm is inevitable".

So, you see, you are not losing your marbles at all!!

Regards,

Laurie.

And from Gordon Shores in response to a previous e-mail request:

Hello Dave

I do indeed remember the incident on the border thinking at the time we were a bit vulnerable travelling on those coaches to work. As I remember there were about 15 killed and many injured, the injured were brought to Butterworth hospital which we passed every morning. I particularly remember all the relatives cooking outside the hospital wards as I believe they had to provide all their own food and (personal) care and only got medical care from the staff at the hospital.

Regards

Gordon.

Many thanks to Laurie for searching out this information and to Gordon for his timely response. This incident happened in 1968 and Chin Peng was still making his presence felt. Don Donovan, please take note!

### **New members:**

Mr D Arthur G Jones (known as Arthur), Electrical Tech, Airfield Tower Section, Butterworth March 1955 to August 1956.

Mr C Tagg (known as Charlie), Armourer, 33 Squadron, Butterworth December 1952 to May 1954.

### **New version of The History of Changi**

A letter was received from Brian Lloyd of the RAF Changi Association requesting we raise awareness of members to the new version of the book "The History of Changi". As there are members of the Association who also served or passed through Changi, and who might be interested in the book they will find details further on in this newsletter. It is worth noting that when the RAF Changi Association

have covered their costs in respect of producing this book they plan to pass any surplus monies onto military charities.

#### 45 Squadron 1955 – 1959 via Tony Parrini

Dear Sir

Please find attached some photos that may be of value to the archives. My name is Ron Lonie, born in Scotland and served in the RAF 1955 to 1959. I now live in NZ and was stationed at Butterworth and Changi in 1955 to 1959, during the communist terrorist operations.

The photo(s) are taken at Butterworth of 45 Squadron on the 40th anniversary. We flew venom fighter bombers under the command of S/Ldr Cooper and then flew Canberras when we were posted to Singapore.



I have other photos that may be of interest, please let me know if you would like them. I have many fond memories of Malaya, (and jungle courses on Fraser's Hill.). I was there when "Merdeka" (freedom, independence) was declared and spent lots of time on Penang island when trishaws were the only transport for us and the "City Lights" dance hall was the attraction for some of the lads after a few beers and a bunch of rambutans! There were not many buildings then.

Yours 4168194 S.A.C. Lonie.

Dear Tony.

After finding the website and reading the stories, my foggy memory has been awakened somewhat. The story by Eric Sharp on Butterworth 1956 covered the time I served there. I witnessed the sad death of Mr Leopard (Leppard) from the aircraft next to the accident, and will always remember the shock and the sight of one of the lads covering his body with a fire blanket. I took the rest of the day off (as did one or two others) probably in shock. I can also recall the T11 crash and a Venom that crashed on take off after one of the tip tanks had not been filled! It was good to see the swimming pool and the cinema, places that meant so much to lads with little to occupy us on time off. I played badminton and captained the basketball team, and that kept me busy. We played a few games off station with the Malays and Chinese but their basketball (often 14 year olds) was good and they usually won.

We had a game with an American team that visited us, all equipped in the best of strips and all at least six feet tall, their warm up was most impressive and they had several spare players. Our team was short of players due to a late night out! (I borrowed a badminton player that often practiced with us) that made up the five, and no spares. And as luck would have it our strips were still at the dhobi and we had to play in all sorts of attire. Not an impressive lot, but we made up for it by winning by a good margin (lessons learned from the Malays and Chinese, fast and accurate). The Americans went off to a nice dinner, we were not invited! My exciting story was getting lost at Fraser's Hill on one of the three visits I had there. About seven of us I think got lost in the jungle and had to spend the night



huddled up together, not a comfortable night. Next day the search aircraft was asking us to "make smoke". Not one of us had a light, we were soaked to the skin. Then at last the dog "Puti" found us with the ground search group close behind. Three signal rifle shots later we enjoyed the best chocolate bar I have ever had, or will ever have. After removing the many leeches, a hot shower, and a good meal, we rested. The NCO in charge was absent, probably having a little chat to explain the situation! There was a little bit of mutiny involved.



On this photograph (sent originally on my first e-mail) I am 5<sup>th</sup> from the top row at the hangar and 3<sup>rd</sup> from the left on the Venom. Included is (a picture of) the silver 'Flying camel' of 45 Squadron.



If anyone can confirm (or correct!) my story I would like to hear from them through your website. I live in New Zealand now.

Thanks for the memory.

4168194 S.A.C. Ron Lonie

### **RAOB Penang**

From John Feltham:

In the Newsletter Summer 2006, there is someone asking if there ever was a Buffaloes Lodge in Butterworth or Penang.

Yes there was a Lodge. I joined the "Penang Lodge" # 9060 sometime in 1963 or 1964. Grand Lodge in London would be able to inform the person concerned of the year when the Penang Lodge opened. We met in a house in Penang that we rented.

I later joined the "Guildhall Lodge" 9069 in Cambridge, and then "BramRAF Lodge" 8530 in Huntingdon.

Many thanks to John for his reply. Would he contact the editor (Dave Croft) with his e-mail address?





The 'night sleeper' from Singapore was a misnomer for us. We did not sleep. We formed the armed



(rifle and five rounds) escort for the train against the Communist Terrorists. One bod in each carriage peering through an open carriage window, rifle (presumably) at the ready. One up the spout, safety catch on! It wasn't at all funny at the time, though. The night sleeper was a favourite target of the CTs who would block the line and then go through the train at will. As it happened the train came to a halt near Gemas in Negri Sembilan (*see map*) - and it was not at the station. The CTs *had* been active further up the line but the Security Forces had dispersed them and after about

three quarters of an hour the line was clear for us to proceed. I freely admit at that time I was nothing short of being petrified but I can remember that I would have readily fired at the enemy had the need arisen.

The road up to Fraser's Hill was one way and took about three quarters of an hour to negotiate. One had to present ones self at the upper and lower 'gates' within prescribed times otherwise a long wait could ensue.

I cannot recall much about the RAF station, or unit itself but it was obviously comfortable, the food was good and the discipline rather relaxed. We were issued with jungle green outfits and jungle boots - the same gear as worn by the Security Forces. We then spent each day carrying out jungle training; preparing ambushes, identifying traces of an existing ambush, living off the jungle and carrying out patrols. We were, in fact, a 'live patrol' with strict instructions on what to do if we encountered any CTs, as that area of Selangor/Pahang was still designated as 'Black'.



One of the most interesting exercises we carried out was the construction of an improvised stretcher from bamboo and the evacuation of an 'injured' colleague, strapped to the stretcher with rattan strips, down a steep jungle slope.

In the evenings the Unit had a film show facility and the Maxwell Arms pub was within walking distance. I remember the OC lived in Bishop's House, off Lady Maxwell Road, on the Northern side of the golf course.

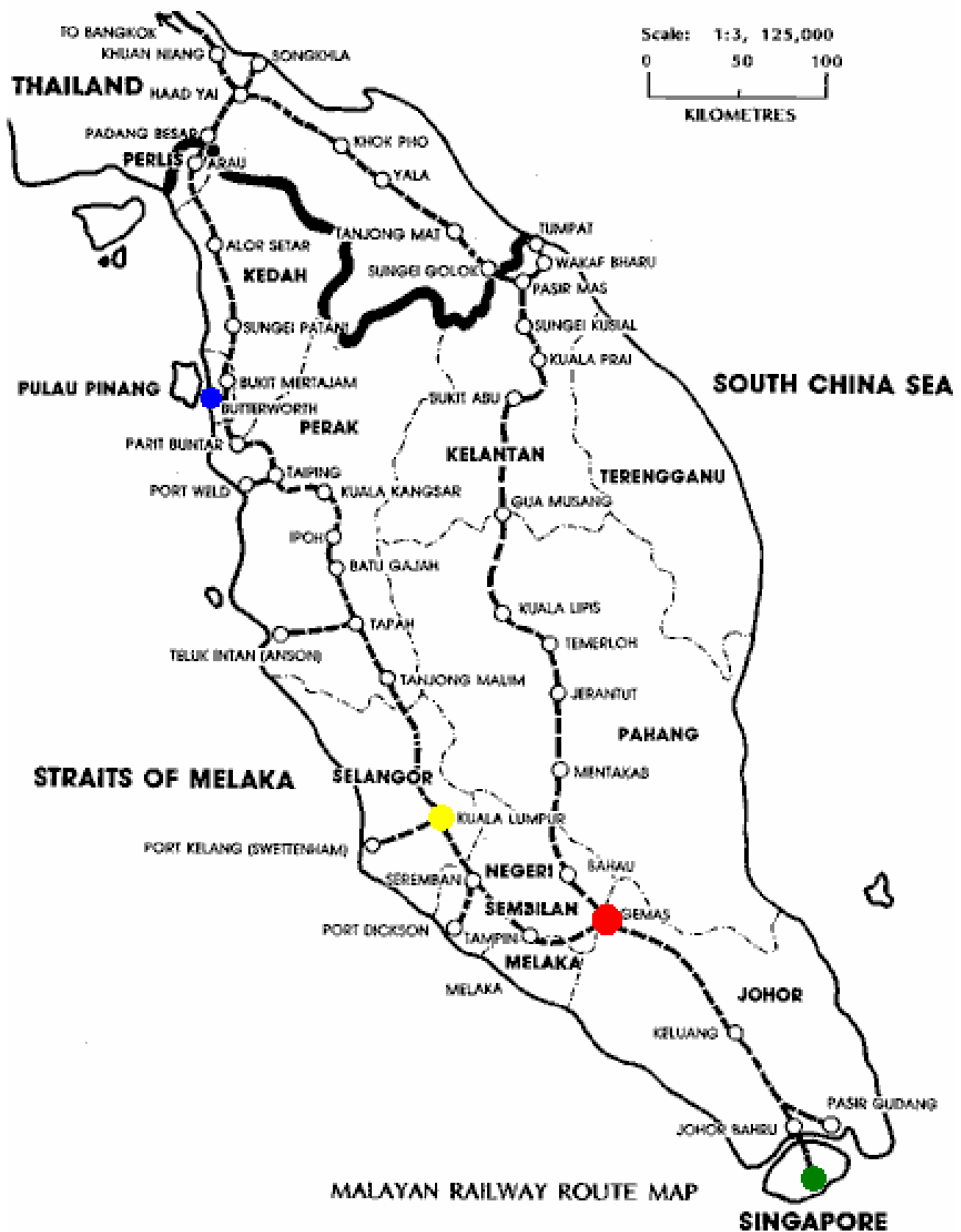
I found the week most enjoyable and interesting. All our group seemed keen to learn and overall, we had a very good time. We were even sorry to have to return to Seletar but the train journey back *was* during daylight.

As a PS, my wife and I were married in Singapore in 1960 and went to Fraser's Hill for our honeymoon staying at the Parr Bungalow. We called at the Unit (it was still there!); introduced ourselves and were made most welcome. We were invited to an evening meal and film show which was most pleasant.

As a PPS: I still have the pair of jungle boots I was issued with. I think we were allowed to retain them as they were only meant to be worn by one person. The rubber parts are a bit perished now but the canvas is still in excellent condition.

They made things to last in those days!

Jim Stowe



## The Train – Singapore – KL – Butterworth 1955

Mike Ward continues with his experiences of being posted to the Far East by recounting his journey from Singapore to Butterworth in 1955.

After disembarkation at Singapore 3 of us were each given a .303 and ammunition for the 24 hour journey to Butterworth. Prior to leaving Singapore on the day train to KL we were kindly informed by movements control that a train had been derailed by terrorists a couple of days earlier but the track (single) was now clear. An armoured vehicle would travel ahead of the train.

The day journey to KL was quite pleasant travelling through jungle and countryside totally foreign to us new arrivals (unlike the fields of England). I remember most of the stations were very clean with splendid floral displays.

We had a break at KL Station before the overnight journey to Butterworth. We 3 airmen were walking the platform at the station about 7 pm when we were approached by an Army 'Red Cap'. "Where are your long trousers?" he said. "You are improperly dressed after darkness". We of course were still wearing our shorts and totally ignorant of the dress code.



CT derailment outside Gemas

20/21 June 1955



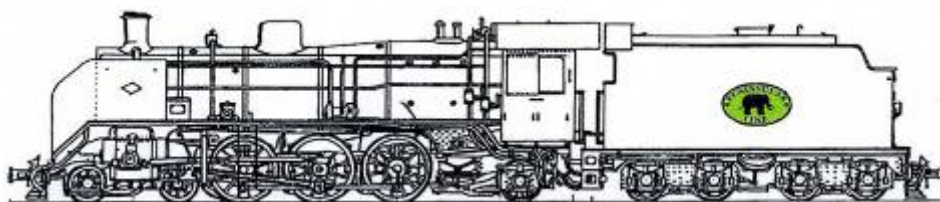
Mike Ward Alan Lambert (MTD) John Gray(Medic)

On the night train we did guard duty near the platform and steps at the end of the carriage (very similar to the old 'wild west' carriages). We stopped at one station and our carriage had not reached the platform – one of the lads' on guard had a nasty shock when a Chinese gentleman, who had walked along the track, climbed the steps into the carriage....nearly had one dead Chinese person! This incident kept us alert for the rest of the journey.

From Prai Station we were transported on a 3 ton Bedford (truck) to RAF Butterworth – our home for the next 2 ½ years.

Hopefully if I do get to the Merdeka 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations at KL in August 2007 I would like to incorporate a day journey on this train to Butterworth or Singapore.

Mike Ward



Malayan Railways Standard Pacific Class 56

## Continued: Don Brereton's journey to the Far East on board HMT Devonshire

### Aden to Singapore

Even though at that time it was part of the British Empire (or was it the Commonwealth?) it would have been nice if Aden had been a bit more pleasant. Aden was a dump, a let down, a dirty smelly little town.



Aden



Both pictures Bill Bohannon

The only bright things about it were the new Mercedes taxis that plied their trade around the town and the duty free shops full of cheap and cheerful dross. We were all tempted by the cheap and plentiful junk and everybody bought their share of trinkets.

The beggars fascinated me. I had never seen professional beggars before. They had their limbs broken at birth and sat around on most street corners with either their arms or legs sticking out at sickening angles. The saddest sight were those that had been blinded. The beggars lived on handouts from people that came ashore from the ships that stopped at the port to bunker.

There were servicemen stationed at Aden at RAF Khormaksar. We saw them riding through the town in open Landrovers, brown as berries. They had no time for us moon men, the name given to newcomers who looked a sickly shade of white until they got a tan.

As well as being shabby Aden was hot, really hot so after a bit of shopping and several hours of walking we were happy to make our way back to the quay, to the ship.

The first thing we did when we returned to the ship was to take a long cool shower. As 'Bunk' walked from the shower to his bedspace he called over to us with an agitated voice "Look at this".

He had bought a watch in Aden for a really ridiculous price. He had put it on his wrist and forgotten about it so when he went into the shower the watch went with him. As he came out of the shower he looked at his wrist and saw the watch....but it was what the watch was doing that had caused him to cry out! The watch was rusting up as he looked at it. We all stared as the watch hands slowed, stopped and turned a pleasant shade of rust colour.

"Bunk" was not a happy man, but also not disheartened as he set about cleaning it with the intention of disposing it to his benefit should the opportunity arise.

That evening the ship sailed leaving behind one poor lad who had been swimming in the sea when a shark got through the nets and attacked him. Sadly he died of his injuries. There was an air of gloom throughout the ship for the next few days, however this was broken for us by a change in our spud locker routine. A couple of days out from Aden two officers and a Warrant Officer appeared at the entrance to the spud locker. They looked a bit surprised and they wanted to know all about the job. I expect it looked really hard, us covered in soil, water and white starch surrounded by sacks of potatoes. They were really impressed when we told them we did the job every day.

"Well gentlemen, I'm not having the RAF doing more than their fair share. We will (He meant the Army lads, not himself) do it every other day. See to it Sergeant Major" he ordered.

"Right away Sir" the Sergeant Major replied.

We didn't argue. We couldn't get the smiles off our faces. This meant we now worked three hours every other day and the rest of the time was our own, plus the added luxury of a lie in on alternate days. Volunteering can pay off....sometimes!

The last port we stopped at before Singapore was Columbo in Ceylon (Sri Lanka as it is now). We anchored in the harbour and were soon surrounded by 'bum-boats'. For some reason we were forbidden to trade with them but of course that didn't stop us, but this time it had to be done in a furtive manner through portholes near the water line.

I bought a box of evil looking cheroots and 'Bunk' thought he saw an opportunity to get rid of the watch he bought in Aden. He opened a porthole in the NAAFI bar which was just above waterline and when a 'bum-boat' came alongside he called out to them and showed them his watch, telling them in sign language he wanted to swap the watch for a trinket on the boat.

The boatman asked to see the watch so 'Bunk' passed it over. The instant he passed it over we heard a noise in the NAAFI behind us...it was two RAF policemen so we closed the porthole quickly. We sat down and pretended to read newspapers as the policemen walked around the NAAFI and then left. 'Bunk' leapt up and opened the porthole but the boat was nowhere to be seen. The famous watch had gone, never to be seen again.

I often wonder about the mans' reaction when thinking he had got a prize, finding instead a watch made out of rusty tin...I would have liked to have seen the expression on his face.



At all the ports we stopped at we discharged and took on mail and cargo and of course supplies. We were in for a surprise at Columbo! Amongst the mail taken on board were our postings. Although we had never talked about it I think we assumed we were all being posted to the same place in Singapore. We didn't know at the time that there were three airfields on Singapore as well as other units.

Halfway through the morning the postings for all the RAF people on the boat were pinned up on the notice board set up on deck. There was a large crowd around the board jostling to see where they had been posted to, names listed under the appropriate base.

I looked down each list, Changi, Seletar and Tengah but no sign of my name! As the names were in alphabetical order I also checked on 'Bunk' but with no luck. I then looked at the shorter lists for the smaller bases...still nothing! Then there in a corner of the board I saw it, the only heading with just two names under it, Banks and Brereton...'RAF Butterworth'.

The problem was nobody knew where it was. We eventually found out it was somewhere in Malaya and only discovered its exact location when we arrived in Singapore. The rest of the lads on our course were posted to one or other of the Singapore bases.

Some of the RAF lads on the ship found they were posted to RAF Negombe in Ceylon, just south of Columbo. These poor lads had to go below and pack all their belongings and get off the ship before it sailed. They were taken ashore by motor launch.

One of the people that 'Bunk' and I asked about Butterworth was an 'oldish' army sergeant who had seen action in World War 2. A big sunburnt man with two rows of medals, he was now in the Australian Army and had been on leave to his home town in England. Unfortunately he didn't really know where Butterworth was but thought he had heard of it being somewhere in north Malaya.

The ship left Colombo that evening and made its way south of Ceylon and across the Indian Ocean towards the Islands of Indonesia. We sailed into the Straits of Malacca and down to Singapore

Island. Like all good holidays, as they come towards the end, the pace tends to quicken and once we had left Ceylon it seemed like no time at all before we dropped anchor in Singapore Roads.

There was a feeling of excitement running through the ship. Everybody was looking forward to going ashore. Twenty odd days with only one small break is a long time. During the whole trip I had not one alcoholic drink, and that included the last night on board. But the Royal Engineers going on to Christmas Island were not of the same bent! This could be their last chance to have a good booze up as they didn't know at the time if the island was dry or not.

So they took over the NAAFI bar and proceeded to drink themselves out of their minds. It started peacefully with a sing-song but that there would be trouble was inevitable. A couple of them started fighting. The Military Police grabbed them and started to drag them up to the main deck with a view to taking them forward to the Brig. The rest of the Engineers chased after them and confronted the MP's at the Brig entrance, which was entered by steep downward steps. The MP's were trying to force their 'captives' down the steps but the men wouldn't go. The Engineers pressed forward threatening to grab the captives back into their midst. We were close by watching the whole ugly scene.....!

At this crucial point the 'oldish' sergeant mentioned earlier appeared from nowhere and stepped in between the MP's and the mob, for that is what they had become, and managed, with skill, to calm everyone down allowing the MP's to take their charges to the Brig.

The sergeant then proceeded to usher the remaining Engineers away from the front of the ship and down below to the mess deck, to their quarters. The NAAFI bar was now closed.

During all this hullabaloo there was no sign of any officers, or for that matter Senior NICO's, apart that is from the good old sergeant who on his own saved the day.

The following morning everybody seemed to want to forget the incident and at breakfast the Engineers were most subdued.

We said our goodbyes to the chief cook and kitchen staff. I bade a last farewell to Louis Gomez who by now had become a good friend. We also said goodbye to our little spud locker.

There was no peeling that morning, that was all finished with.

Down below, for the last time, kitbags were taken out and we stowed out gear ready for leaving.

The ships tannoy called us up onto deck. It was raining and was just like many of the lifeboat drills we had on the voyage, most of which were organised chaos.

We stood on deck clutching out kitbags waiting to disembark. 'Bunk' and I said a quick farewell to our new friends, and to our old ones from Shawbury, as our names were called out and we headed down the gangplank onto Singapore soil.

The cruise, as I called it, was a great experience and I still look back to it with much pleasure.

'Bunk' and myself was grouped with about twenty lads who were going to Kuala Lumpur. We were directed to a coach standing on the quayside its motor ticking over. The lads going to Singapore bases were boarding lorries and we wondered why we were getting the VIP treatment?

The bronzed driver with his smart fitting KD's, ours hung on us like rags in comparison, jumped into the coach and drove us off the quay towards RAF Changi. It took about half an hour to get there but gave us a chance to see the sort of environment we would be living in. Of course we didn't know at the time that Singapore was, and still is, a city state and bears little comparison to Malaya.

We arrived at Changi and taken to the reception building where we had to wait until 1700 when we would be taken to Singapore railway station for the journey to Prai which was the railhead nearest to RAF Butterworth.

### **We had arrived in the Far East.**

*RAF Policeman cartoon courtesy of Pete Wiggins.*

Don Brereton

## Past Scenes



HMT Devonshire



MS Devonia

Further to Don Brereton's stories of his journey to Singapore on board the 'Devonshire', this ship was involved in the evacuation of European civilians from Singapore on the 5<sup>th</sup> February 1942. (ref: SOE Singapore 1941-42). In 1962 the Devonshire was converted as an educational cruise ship and renamed 'Devonia'. She was scrapped in 1967.



This picture is from the 'unknown contributors' members file and shows a Butterworth traffic policeman in front of a signpost showing the direction of Mitchell Pier. The 'box' he is standing on is interesting!

From member Norman Clements we have a 1953 photograph of Mitchell Pier.



Also from Norman we have a photograph of airmen taking part in the Coronation Parade.



An informal picture showing that parades can be an enjoyable activity!

(Note...this photograph appeared in the Autumn/Winter 2002 newsletter. 5 years on and it can be reproduced much better!)





A number of Association members will be travelling to Malaysia in August as part of the NMBVA contingent to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Malaysia's Independence 'Merdeka' next August.

Merdeka means 'freedom' in the Malay language. In the 1950's Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Chief Minister of the Alliance Party, who strove for Malayan nationalism, offered an amnesty to the Communist terrorists by meeting the Communist leader Chin Peng at the Baling (peace) talks of 1955. The meeting was unsuccessful.



Tunku Abdul Rahman at the Baling talks

In 1956 the Tunku successfully led a delegation to London to negotiate for independence. On August 30<sup>th</sup> 1957, at midnight, in front of huge crowds at the Selangor Club on the Padang at Kula Lumpur the Union Jack was lowered for the last time.

The following day, 31<sup>st</sup> August, at the Merdeka Stadium the Tunku received the formal instrument of independence and declared the independence of Malaya to the crowds by shouting "Merdeka" seven times. The independent Federation of Malaya had come into being....



The PJM is a commemorative medal awarded by the Malaysian Government to the peacekeepers of the Commonwealth for service in upholding Malayan and Malaysian sovereignty during the Emergency and Confrontation...from 31<sup>st</sup> August 1957 to 12<sup>th</sup> August 1966.

The award and wearing of the PJM is very much a part of the forthcoming 'Merdeka' celebrations and for Commonwealth veterans who are entitled to receive the medal it is a thing of great pride to be able to do so when in KL this August. Let us hope the medals are received in time for this historic occasion? It is hoped that members of the Association who attend the 'Merdeka' celebrations will take plenty of photographs and even pen a few words for the newsletter on their return to the UK?





These Embroidered Blazer badges are available at £4.00 each.

**Badged Goods – price list (Nov. 2006)**

Sweatshirts	£18.00 each
Acrylic Jumpers	£25.00 each
Wool Jerseys	£34.00 each
Polo Shirts	£15.50 each
Gold Wire Badges	£19.00 each
Blazer Badges	as above

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**ASSOCIATION TIES** – now available from Tony Parrini (address on page 2 of the newsletter) at £10.50 (cheques to be made out to ‘RAF BPA’ together with your name and address) or pay and collect at the 2007 Reunion - which for those members who are still uncertain about attending is being held at the **Ramada Hotel at Bradford/Bingley** over the weekend of the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> March. As a reminder, the cost for Dinner, Bed and Breakfast and Sunday Lunch is £64 per person...further details can to be found on your Reunion 2007 Booking Form or from Len Wood.

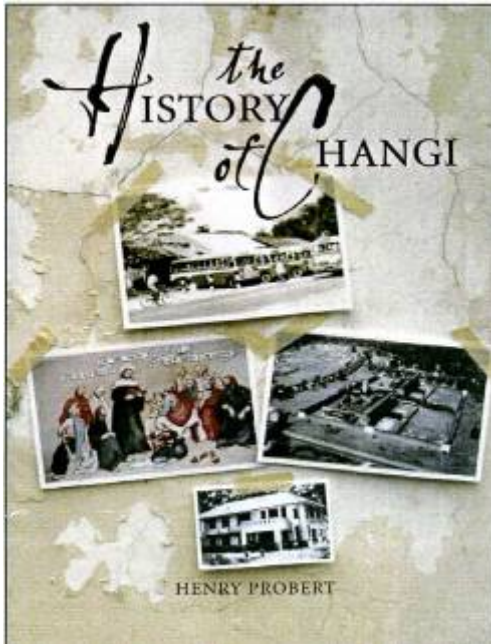


Wear your Association tie with pride!

## HISTORY OF CHANGI – NEW EDITION

**The History of Changi by Henry Probert. A Changi University Press Publication, Singapore. ISBN 981-05-5580-6. 132pp sbk illus £10.00 inc p&p to RAF Changi Association, Jerry Evans, Book Sales Rep, 'Lilac Cottage', Bank, Lyndhurst, Hants SO43 7FD.**

Some 40 years ago, when serving in Singapore, Squadron Leader - Now Air Commodore - Henry Probert wrote a short history of RAF Changi and its origins, including the wartime years as a Japanese prison camp. Printed and published locally, the booklet was well received, not just at Changi but also in the United Kingdom and Australia. It has remained on the scene, especially in support of the Changi Museum and Chapel, whose Director recently invited the author to revise it and bring it up to date.



The resultant book, twice the length of the original, completes the RAF story and leads on to the development of the International Airport. It was launched in Singapore on 28 July 2006, and subsequently publicised on a web site in Singapore. In his foreword, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, the first Prime Minister and later President of the Republic of Singapore, writes:

*'I commend this book as a story of how a mangrove swamp went through an eventful series of transforming turns until it became a major aviation hub in Southeast Asia - an improbable story.'*

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### National Service Days

Members might also be interested in a book about RAF National Service. Details are given below:



#### **Bad Lads RAF National Service Remembered**

BY Alf Townsend

Alf Townsend was one of the many eighteen year olds who were called up for national service. He was transplanted from a north London slum into a world of misfits and officer types, rogues and entertainers. The highs and lows of life as a lowly Aircraftman Second Class in the early '50s are described in Alf's inimitable style.

ALF TOWNSEND has been a London cabbie for forty years. His first book for Sutton, *Cabbie*, was published in 2003. Alf lives in Hampstead.

Hardback, 128 pp, 70 b&w illustrations  
ISBN: 0750941545 RRP: £12.99

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