

## FIFTY YEARS LATER

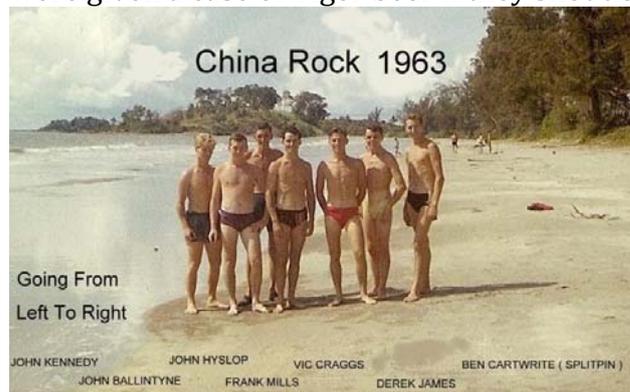
This is a story of a group of young Royal Air Force (RAF) Regiment airmen who first met at RAF Tengah in the 1960's and by the use of modern communication systems were able to meet again some 50 years later.

The story starts when 63 Field Squadron were posted from RAF Felixstowe to RAF Tengah in December 1960. This was to address the rundown of the RAF Regiment (Malaya) before its disbandment .

From the late 1950's there were continuous uprisings on the Maldivian Islands in the Indian Ocean. In the early 1960's, No's 1,15 and 63 Squadrons now Singapore-based took over 4 monthly internal security detachment duties at RAF Gan from the UK-based No.48 squadron. Detachments continued until the Maldives gained Independence from the UK on 26 July 1965.

In 1963 as the Indonesia - Malaysia confrontation developed and the threat from the air became serious, the squadron was re-roled to a Low Level Air Defence (LLAD) squadron, equipped with the L40/70 Bofors Gun delivered directly from the United Kingdom (UK). Gun training began under the watchful eye of Flt Sgt George Cairns in the second half of 1963. On completion in early 1964, A and B Flights converted to Gun Flights with C Flight becoming Control & Reporting(C&R)Flight, responsible for manning the Command Post and Observation Posts (OP's).

From mid 1964 until the end of 1966 the squadron permanently manned 5 gun sites on and around RAF Tengah. These were Chestnut Drive, Track 14 Hulme Heights, and North and South ends of the runway. Also 2 OP's based at Chestnut Drive and Kilo near the SAF Sailing Club. These deployments were enhanced by rotational detachments from 9 and 12 Battery, Royal Artillery who were equipped with 40/70 radar controlled Bofors Guns. The length of each gun crew deployment was 2 weeks on site and 2 weeks back at camp, rotated between A and B Flight. The general routine on site was stand-to at dawn and dusk, man the radio 24/7, gun drill, clean the gun, check and refuel the generator, site improvements and guard duty. After the Detachment Commander (DC) the next most important member of the crew was the cook, who having done a good job would be excused guard duties. An annual firing camp was carried out at China Rock with the equipment being transported by Landing Craft. The squadron airmen looked forward to this event, particularly the No.2's (The Layer's) as they were given a case of Tiger beer if they shot down a drone.



In the mid 1960's the squadron carried out a number of air defence deployment exercises at Kuantan Airfield. This now civil airfield lies 200 mile north of Singapore on the Malaysia east coast facing the south China Sea. During this period the airfield was used by aircraft on detachment from RAF Germany and was used periodically to refuel aircraft operating out of Singapore. Memories of Kuantan was watching hundreds of Horseshoe crabs running up the beach and disappearing in the beautiful white sand.



HMS Fearless

In 1967 following the end of the Indonesia - Malaysia confrontation the squadron started to carry out internal security detachment duties in Hong Kong, at RAF Kai Tak and at the RAF Signals Unit based on the peak of Tai Mo Shan. Personnel and equipment were transported from Singapore docks to Hong Kong via HMS Fearless. These detachments were a show a force against the cultural revolution being waged by Chairman Mao from mainland China. Many squadron veterans still recall their visits to the China Fleet Club in Hong Kong which was also used by Americans airmen on Rest and Recreation (R&R) from Vietnam. At times it was more like World War 3 in the bar rather than R&R I'm told. Also during this period the squadron carried out jungle training in the Cameron Highlands, riot drill at Tengah and a major exercise at Batu Pahat, with the Gurkhas. Used by the squadron as recreation / teambuilding exercise was the occasional organised tour of the Tiger Brewery, below is a group photograph taken in 1967 at the entrance of the brewery.



- |                      |                     |                    |                   |                   |
|----------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1. PADDY ANDERSON.   | 6. BREWERY REP.     | 11. DAVE SMITH.    | 16. SEAN DOYLE.   | 20. PHIL LEWIS.   |
| 2. SCOTS OFFICER.    | 7. HARRY McCLEAN    | 12. P.O. VALENTINE | 17. RAY LAZENBY.  | 21. TAFF DUNN.    |
| 3. TREVOR HUMPHREYS. | 8. DAVE BARSTON.    | 13. BILL ROBSON.   | 18. BOB SHARPLES. | 22. BOB PAWLEY.   |
| 4. TAFF HOPKINS.     | 9. MICK OTLEY.      | 14. TAFF PRICE.    | 19. PADDY WILSON. | 23. TAFF BOLITHO. |
| 5. JOCK DOUGLASS ?   | 10. ANDY FAIRHURST. | 15. JIMMY EWART.   |                   |                   |

During its period in the Far East the squadron excelled at sport, especially on the football field. Below is the squadron football team of 1963.



On Remembrance Day each year the squadron laid a wreath at Kranji War Memorial to honour the men and women from the Commonwealth who died in the line of duty during World War II. Earlier this year I was one of 4 squadron veterans to visit Kranji War Cemetery to pay our respects while on a tour of Singapore and Malaysia. All credit to the War Graves Commission for the care taken and condition of the cemetery.

Following the withdrawal of No. 1 (LAA) Squadron from RAF Butterworth to RAF Bicester in 1967, the RAF Regiment units based in Singapore began a withdrawal to the UK in 1969. No. 63 Squadron being the last RAF Regiment squadron to

leave, when it returned to RAF North Luffenham in November 1971.

On the 3 March 2004, the Pingat Jasa Malaysia (PJM) (English: Malaysia Service Medal) was established by the King and Government of Malaysia for service during the various Indonesia - Malaysia Confrontations. The important dates for ex 63 Squadron personnel were 90 days service in Singapore between 31 August 1957 and 9 August 1965. Approval of this medal by the British Government was not given until early 2006 with the initial PJM presentation being done in London on 19 July 2006. It was announced by MoD in 2011 that British Veterans would be able to wear PJM starting Remembrance Day 11 November 2011.

As news spread of the PJM via Forces Re-United, Facebook, British Legion Clubs, RAF and RAF Regiment Associations and etc. Personnel who served in the Far East during the qualifying periods began to apply for the medal and resulted in ex 63 squadron personnel beginning to meet at various PJM award presentations around the UK. Email addresses were exchanged and soon a small group of ex 63 (Tengah) squadron personnel were in contact with each other. In July 2007 Lewis Baker decided to invite the ex Tengah members to a weekend in Blackpool and at this point No 63 Squadron (Tengah) Reunion was born. Over the next 8 years under the guidance of Lewis these reunions had become a great annual social event, with new members being found year on year.



On the weekend of 3/4 October 2015 our last No. 63 Squadron (Tengah) Reunion was held at Sketchley Grange Hotel, Hinckley, Leicestershire. This was attended by some 35 ex Tengah veterans plus wives. Many had not met for over 50 years, coming from Ireland, Scotland and Wales to this very special event. Sadly this was our final reunion because of ever decreasing numbers due to death, ill health, ability to travel etc. Running concurrently with No. 63 Squadron's (Tengah) reunions have been No1 (LAA) Squadron (Butterworth) reunions. They unfortunately have suffered a similar decline in numbers so it was agreed earlier this year to combine the 2 groups. These reunions in future will be held in May and November at Teeside Airport (formally RAF Middle St George). For details of future reunions please contact Ian Nisbet by email at: [iannisbet@virginmedia.com](mailto:iannisbet@virginmedia.com)

Below is the group photograph taken at the Hinckley on the weekend 3/4 October 2015. Unfortunately Gary Armitage, John Weston, Sean Doyle, John Kennedy and George Gault who were in attendance are sadly not in this photograph.



PHOTO "HINCKLEY 2015"

50 years on and the things we still talk about. Tiger Beer, Tengah and John Haig bars, Pick-up taxis, Rickshaws Races, Bugis Street, Singapore Brewery Tours, Miss Sew - Sew, Sab the Bearer, Malcolm Club, McGregor Club, Monsoon Drains, Praying Mantis, Chit Chats, China Rock, Croaking Frogs, Snakes, Squadron Football Team and Gibson Block. Then the people, to name but a few,

The Officers, Broadbent, Reed-Purvis (later to become Commandant General of the Regiment), Bangy, Cooke, Johnston, Janes, Elmes, Rochford, Old, Bryce, Collinge, Valentine, Bessant, Allcorn.

Warrant Offices: Ginger Martin, Jimmy Black, George Cairns,

SNCO's: Askew, Underwood, Smith, McCarthy, Jones, Agnew, Tucker, Lazenby, Back, Lopeman, Duffy, Storey, Hastings (and last but not least) Jim Cummins i/c Stores and Squadron Football Manger,

CPL's: Chapman, Hill, McQueen, Milne, Wilshaw, Voss, Whitfield, Cairney, Nicholas and Barber.

Finally I would like to thank ex 63 Squadron veterans who contributed to this article, specially Harry Nichols and Lewis Baker who provided the photographs and after much research added names to faces.