

# MALAYSIA REVISITED

## B COY BUTTERWORTH TOUR — DEC. 80 to MAR. 81.

Due to a desperate need to protect the Butterworth Swimming Pool, the Bl Bar, the Shangri-La Pub and associated RAAF infra-structure the Australian Army deployed B Coy, to Malaysia on 2 Dec. 81. When the Christmas crisis was over and a lower standard of security became acceptable these crack troops were withdrawn and replaced by a company from 1 RAR.

Prior to departure the company took what leave they could during October and early November, returning from leave for a ten day training programme in preparation for security duties at Butterworth. The company group was assembled during this period and included personnel from Support and Admin. Companies as well as those from 9 Transport Squadron, 3 Field Engineer Regiment and Townsville Education Section. An FO party from 108 Field Battery was included in lieu of a partridge in a pear tree.

The RAAF maintain 2 interceptor squadrons of modern MIRAGE fighters at Butterworth, and an enormous support system (over one thousand personnel to maintain 20 aircraft serviceable). Some soldiers of B Coy: Pte. Fieldhouse and Pte. Wilkinson to the fore, were apparently under the impression this whole outfit is located in Malaysia in order to provide the Rifle Company with female companionship from within the ranks of daughters and service-women. The less romantic truth is that the fighters have been there for some years due to an agreement between the governments. Also located at Butterworth are RAAF squadrons flying F5-E fighters and Sikorsky and Alouette helicopters and a mixed-nations unit which is the headquarters of the Integrated Air Defence System (IADS).

The RAAF units are very busy and fly operational sorties against communist bases near the border with Thailand; expansion of their operations will lead to an eventual withdrawal of the RAAF within a few years. IADS on the other hand, with a cast of thousands and commanded by a British Air Vice Marshall have the not-too-difficult task of planning 10 days of air defence exercises each year. This unit has never had a heart attack or stress-related medical problem in all its history but is proud of its continuing record of success in the Pan-Arion, all comes, international, inter-unit adventure training competition (undefeated since 1968).



Home for three months - first class accommodation from the RAAF.

The main aspect of security duties at Butterworth was provision of the Quick Reaction Force (QRF), a section strength force trained and constantly practised in reacting to protect 32 key points within the Butterworth base. All the sections took their turn riding in the truck with the live ammunition, a hazardous journey later enlivened by the return of the search-light to active duty.

No real incidents occurred during the B company stay although the odd thief was chased out and once CPL Rasolos was caught breaking in over the fence after a prolonged close recon of the Bl Bar. Mostly it was slow routine and dull waiting while reading a huge pile of magazines, training pamphlets and 'blue' literature.

The major training activity conducted was a Subject 1 for Cpl. Course conducted in January and February which qualified soldiers from B Company and other units. The course was demanding on the students and the company supporting it and it kept most of us pretty busy while it was running. Roping and Rapelling, and Watermanship kept the pace reasonably easy over Xmas and a platoon signals operator course was conducted just prior to return. Education training was conducted like baths for pommies, everyone got some on a regular basis whether they needed it or not, courtesy of the teetotal Lt. Forbes.

Each platoon spent a week at PULADA in the south of Malaysia (previously known as KOTA TENGGH) for live firing and range practices. The accommodation was pretty rough by our standards but with 'good old Aussie ingenuity' at work on the drains and toilet (?) well above the standards of the Malaysians. At PULADA we were lucky enough to watch the Malaysian NCO's instructing recruits. Here we learnt the real meaning of 'getting them by the short and curlies' and 'driving your point home' - suffice to say discipline was hard.

A large amount of ammunition and a lesser amount of safety restrictions assured the activities were varied and interesting. In particular all ranks enjoyed tackling the swamp at the platoon assault even if a few people 'disappeared' here and there.



LCpl. Phill Mollane provides fire support for the platoon assault at PULADA.



6 Platoon after the swamp - 'Boof' in looking for a place to lie down.

The platoons also spent a week training with blank ammunition on Langkawi Island to the north of Penang. On Langkawi, despite the rumours from previous companies, the only tigers encountered were sighted at the Langkawi Country Club.



Langkawi Island control HQ have the situation well in hand - the missing player has just been shot by the 2IC for reneging.

All members of the contingent (except the CSM who was jock-strapping at the Ambanado Hotel on Penang and couldn't go to PULADA) visited Singapore after the week at PULADA. The two RAEME craftsmen from Admin. Coy. (NED and SPARRA) just about knew the city better than the taxi-drivers as they spent well over a month at PULADA and had the enviable task of escorting each group into Singapore and picking them up when they finished.

A large percentage of the contingent took the railway pilgrimage to Bangkok where they had their eyes widened and their wallets flattened by the many expert ladies of the city. Many amusing (?) incidents on the trip (mostly at the border) kept the platoon commanders on their toes. Many notable firsts were scored in Bangkok (and a few good seconds) but very

few can be publicised. The kodak made a fortune from the photos taken but they mostly went up in smoke before return.

Notable excursions were led by the CSM and Lt. Forbes to lesser-known places in Malaysia and Thailand. These were known as cultural exchanges and certainly added to Lt. Forbes' collection of shots of exotic Asian fruits.

Shopping in all these places was popular, satin sheets have kept a lot of people on the move, a multitude of cameras to record it and cassette players to listen to at the same time.

On the sporting side the highlight was a 3-0 washout of the RAAF at Australian Football and the rugby league team playing in the final of the 10-a-side carnival. A seven-a-side carnival (rugby union) within the company saw two very tired teams from 4 platoon playing in the final. Basketball was also played with some success but volleyball was not continued after we found out the locals played it better than us using only their feet!



Officers seven-a-side football team complete with mascot.

Living at Butterworth was a culture-shock for most of the contingent. Several new types of people, all mounted on some kind of motor-bike or car and all going flat out. Traffic in Malaysia must be experienced first hand to be believed. There were surprisingly few accidents although everyone has a story of some hair-raising close shaves. We also found out that amateur swimming is more glamorous in Malaysia and attracts a lot of 'pool groupies'.

Going out in Penang is basically buying, because everyone is busy selling something to you and the city never seems to close down. Eating out is the national pastime and the variety is endless. Within the base popular places for a quick lunch or evening meal were the golf club and the boat club.

During the tour each of the religions had a major festival. Christmas naturally for the Christians, but the Moslems celebrated Hari Rudi Hara and the Prophet's Birthday but the Hindus topped them all with the festival of Taipusan. The streets were filled

by a procession of the devoted with skewers through their faces or hooks in their backs and bearing elaborate frames with religious motifs. These acts are performed to repay a debt to the deities they worship and the requirement can be passed from father to son if the father dies before it is completed. Oddly enough there were no conversions to Hinduism amongst the contingent.

There were of course some unforgettable moments and some rather best forgotten. Some we will remember were Cpl Rasoios and the tackle (?) on PROPSTING in full flight; a platoon of Father Christmas at PULADA; Cpls YOUNG and BRADLEY conducting recon at the Langkowi Country Club; Christmas Day at Butterworth; gecko racing at PULADA (courtesy of Sparra, Ned and Wheels); Pte Carter (on lone from C Company) and half a game of incredible football; 2Lt Webb's bed at the Lion City Hotel; Pte Warrilow crowing in the back of a RAAF truck; and all those that cannot be printed.

Among those best forgotten are the "roast turkey and cranberry sauce" and rice-wine which was Xmas dinner at Pulada; Pte Harris' driving; catching the ferry; the state of the orphanage before 4 platoon cleaned it up; Pte Price's driving; 24 hours locked in the armoury on picket duty; the smell (even at 1500 feet in a helicopter); route-marching around the airfield perimeter; waking at six o'clock by a Bofors 40mm blank outside your window; attending a dining-in night at the RAAF Sergeants Mess.

It was a long haul from start to finish and the contingent boarded the plane to return with the same feeling we had when we left - glad to be on our way. The experience was valuable and all members got satisfaction from a job well done and the recognition earned. We saw a different country with different problems and different ways of getting things done. We enjoyed the stay but returned convinced the Australian way is best.



*Honorary member of contingent in company T-shirt presented by O.C. Loyalty is suspect as he was doing the same job for the Japanese in 1943.*



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