Kampong Australia:

The Colonial Reckonings of the Australian Military Community in Penang, 1955-1988

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I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and to the best of my knowledge it contains no material previously published or written by another person, nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma, at Macquarie University or any other educational institution.

I also declare that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work, except to the extent acknowledged in the thesis.

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Contents

Abstract

This thesis explores the experience of establishing and maintaining a large Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) base on the northwest coast of the Malay Peninsula at Butterworth from 1955 till 1988. It draws on official and private records to examine the complex social and cultural encounters and interactions that resulted between the Australian military community and the many and varied local communities of Penang as a direct result of the RAAF base at Butterworth.

This thesis begins with an analysis of the political and strategic circumstances which led to the decision by Australian Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, to permanently deploy Australian military forces to Malaya in 1955. An understanding of this Cold War 'failure' on the part of Menzies establishes the necessary context for understanding the unique 'garrison' type nature of the RAAF presence at Butterworth.

This thesis suggests that, in the absence of any genuine knowledge of Malaya, military officials viewed the task of establishing an Australian garrison at Butterworth in the mid-1950s predominately through the lens of British Colonialism. In doing so, military officials reflected not only the dearth of knowledge about Australia's northern neighbours amongst some sections of the public in the late 1950s and early 1960s, but also the impossibility of any more nuanced understandings of the region while colonialism continued to be the main organising principle through which the majority of Australians continued to perceive a homogenous Asia.

Because military officials understood the local environment in largely colonial terms, many of the administrative and structural aspects of the RAAF presence in Penang were guided by the 'knowledge' and practices of the extant British military communities in the region. In the first decade of the Australian garrison experience at Butterworth, this colonial dynamic operated not only at the level of political and military authority, but also informed the majority of daily interactions between individual Australians and members of the various local communities. This overarching 'colonial' framework, however, should not obscure the fact that, even during the late 1950s and early 1960s, significant opportunities were afforded to Australian servicemen and their families to reassess their own personal views of cultural difference as a direct result of their day-to-day experiences with the foreign landscapes of Malaya.

The large RAAF presence at Butterworth survived the British withdrawal 'East of Suez' in the late 1960s and continued to operate throughout the period of Australia's participation in the Vietnam War. Although some of the 'colonial' conceits which informed the first decade of the Australian presence continued throughout the late 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, a gradual erosion of this colonial mentality gave way to a more nuanced understandings of the local environment on the part of both military officials and the Australian military community in general. In turn, this led to further opportunities for engagement with the peoples, cuisines, cultures and landscapes of the region. For some Australians, the social and cultural exchanges experienced as a result of a posting to Penang led to not simply a further hardening or a complete dismissal of long-held prejudices, but rather to a complex recasting and reimaging of preconceived notions of the foreign landscapes of Asia that incorporated the new realities of first-hand contact and critique.

It is one of the overall contentions of this thesis that, although one of the most substantial and indeed on-going means of engagement with Asia in the post-war period has been via Australian military deployments to the region, the many and varied social and cultural aspects of these engagements remain largely unrecognised, under-appreciated and unexplored. In this thesis, I argue that the social and cultural dimensions of Australian military deployments to Southeast Asia in the post-war period demand a deeper appreciation than has been afforded them in the extant historiography of both Western communities in Southeast Asia and Australia's Asian context. The case study of the RAAF base at Butterworth is used to highlight the significant social and cultural encounters and interactions at the heart of many of these Australian military deployments to Southeast Asia in the post-war period.

Abbreviations

AMDA	Australia, New Zealand, Malayan Area
ANZUK	Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom (force)
ANZUS	Australia, New Zealand, United States Treaty
ARCS	Australian Red Cross Society
BCFESR	British Commonwealth Far East Strategic Reserve
BCOF	British Commonwealth Occupation Force
CSR	Commonwealth Strategic Reserve
FARELF	Far East Land Forces
FPDA	Five Power Defence Arrangements
HMAS	Her Majesty's Australian Ship
HMS	Her Majesty's Ship
HQ	Headquarters
IADS	Integrated Air Defence System
JCS	United States Joint Chiefs of Staff
MCA	Malayan Chinese Association
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
MQ	Married Quarters
NAA	National Archives of Australia
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NFSA	National Film and Sound Archive
PAC	Prophylactic Aid Centre
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RAAFNS	Royal Australian Air Force Nursing Service
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAN	Royal Australian Navy
RAR	Royal Australian Regiment
RN	Royal Navy
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
WRAAF	Women's Royal Australian Air Force

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And finally to my parents, Judy and Norman Radcliffe, whose life experiences in the armed services of Australia and subsequent posting to the RAAF base at Butterworth in the early 1970s served as the primary inspiration for the topic of this thesis. Without your

service my interest in the Australian military community in Penang would never have been aroused.

Prologue

On a hot and humid day in December 1973, I, followed a mere fifteen minutes later by my twin brother, was born at the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) base at Butterworth on the northwest coast of the Malay Peninsula. Consequently, many of the stories of my early childhood were played out against a complex backdrop of human relationships between men and women of different races, religions, cultures and classes. Tales of exotic festivals, comic misadventure, delicious local cuisine and, at times, clumsy ignorance told the story of my own family's experience in Malaysia in the early 1970s. But the foundation of these experiences stemmed from the very real intermingling of thousands of Australian families with the multi-racial Asian communities of the Malay Peninsula as a direct result of the establishment and maintenance of a large RAAF base in northern Malaya from 1955 till 1988.

I can still recall the story my father tells of the day my twin brother and I first left the maternity ward of No.4 RAAF Hospital at the Butterworth base. To get across to Penang Island, where the majority of married quarters were located for the Australian servicemen who worked at Butterworth, my parents had to queue for the ferry service. Being mid-December, the day was unbearably hot and humid, especially for two very small newborn babies. Given this state of affairs, my father decided to drive around the other waiting traffic to the front of the queue, a privilege usually reserved for senior officers, in order to plead the unusual and pressing circumstances of his situation. On hearing the news of not one but *two* tiny white babies on the way home from hospital for the very first time, a small but enthusiastic local Malay crowd gathered around the car to confirm the story. Entirely unconscious of the royal treatment now being bestowed upon Australia's proudest overseas parents, my brother and I rode the ferry from the Malaysian mainland to Penang Island amidst an excited throng of local Malays and Australians. The occasion of our birth had heightened the already festive atmosphere of the Christmas season to such a degree that everyone present on the ferry that afternoon surrendered completely to the prevailing mood of celebration.

In December 2012, as part of the research undertaken for this study, I returned to Penang Island for the first time since I had departed as a rather unsteady toddler all those years ago. During the first few days of my visit I explored many of the tourist attractions that would have lured Australian servicemen, their families and their friends over the three-

decade period during which the RAAF maintained a large presence at Butterworth. I walked around the old stone walls of Fort Cornwallis, I took the train up to the top of Penang Hill, I visited local temples, mosques and museums, I spent a day swimming at some of the beautiful beaches in and around Batu Ferringhi and I even took the ferry across to Butterworth for a walk among some of the disused buildings of the former RAAF base, including some of the buildings of the old RAAF Hospital in which I had been born.

Although some traces of the former RAAF presence have disappeared entirely, including the beloved RAAF Hostel or 'Hostie', much remains, albeit now in the hands of locals. The buildings of the first RAAF School in Penang along Residency Road now house the Penang Medical College and the Fortune Inspiration Holdings Company. The buildings of its replacement, the Australian-built RAAF School at Hillside remain standing but are currently being used by the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) as an Officer Training facility. The distinctive 'European' style houses of the numerous RAAF housing estates have long been sold off to local families and the former RAAF base at Butterworth is now firmly under the sole control of the RMAF. In many cases, without the prerequisite knowledge gained from my many years studying the Butterworth base, many of these former glimpses into the lengthy RAAF past in the area would have completely escaped my notice. Indeed, with the exception of an old *Mirage* fighter jet on display at the front gates of the Butterworth Air Base and several even older Australian-made *Sabre* fighter jets on display in various other locations around the state, there are really very few reminders of the three decade presence of the Australian military here in Penang.

With two further days in Penang before returning home, I became determined to find one particular remnant of the Australian presence in Penang that I knew remained on the Island and indeed would continue to remain here for centuries to come. After a short walk from the Cititel Hotel in Georgetown where I was staying, I disturbed one of the local Indian vendors from his morning coffee and collected the keys to the scooter that I had been using for the past week or so. In the cool morning air and with map in hand, I rode west. After travelling up and down Jalan Utama several times without recognizing the entrance to my final destination for the day, I eventually stopped and asked a local man for directions. With a wry smile, my cheerful companion informed me that just beyond the thick hedge of trees to our left was the entrance to the Western Road Cemetery.

Proceeding through the moss covered stone arch, I encountered the huge open expanse of the cemetery. At first glance, the headstones all bore the markings of a foreign

language, with more than a few headstones containing photographs of the deceased. But a large sign just inside the stone arch gate confirmed that I had indeed located one of the cemeteries where RAAF servicemen had been buried in the early years of the Australian presence at Butterworth. The large official-looking monument just beyond the entrance read, 'In Memory of the Fallen During the Emergency Campaign 1948-1960'. Members of several British units were listed as buried at the cemetery, including members of the Royal Air Force, the Royal Navy, the Ghurka Rifles and even the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry. Amongst these British units was the heading 'Royal Australian Air Force', followed by the names of three RAAF officers and seven RAAF airmen who had been buried at the cemetery.

Despite the inscription on the large stone tablet near the front gate of the cemetery, none of the Australian officers or airmen buried at the Western Road Cemetery in Penang died as a result of the Malayan Emergency. In fact, one of the first Australian gravestones I found in the Commonwealth section of the cemetery marked the grave of Aircraftsman W.G. Hignett, who passed away on 1 December 1970, almost ten years after the Malayan Emergency had been officially declared over. Although most of the other Australians buried here passed away in the late 1950s or early 1960s, none died as a direct result of Emergency operations. Indeed, like many of their compatriots who were posted to Butterworth between 1955 and 1988, these Australian servicemen had not been deployed north for any particular war-like operations but rather they had lived here as part of a large, permanent Australian military garrison. After a brief search, I find the particular gravestone that I had set out to discover.

On 11 September 1962, despite the rather inclement weather of the day, one of the Australian flying units at the RAAF base at Butterworth, No.3 Squadron, decided to 'carry on with Exercise Brandy Snap', an exercise being conducted with two Royal Navy ships, the aircraft carrier HMS *Ark Royal* and the HMS *Bulwark*. A total of seven sorties were flown for the exercise, with a further 18 sorties conducted throughout the day as part of the squadron's routine training schedule. After completing the day's flying programme, one of the squadron's aircraft, A94-958, was to be ferried to the RAF base at Tengah in Singapore to take part in a static display for the forthcoming Air Force Week celebrations. An engine failure in A94-958 just after take-off, however, forced the pilot, Flight Lieutenant (FLTLT) R.E. Offord to eject from the aircraft. Due to insufficient altitude, the parachute failed to deploy and the pilot was killed instantly on impact with the ground. The next day, 12 September 1962, FLTLT Offord was buried here at Penang's Western Road Cemetery.

The other Australian servicemen of the RAAF buried alongside FLTLT Offord include Flying Officer (FLGOFF) M.V. Curtis, whose Sabre, A94-977, crashed into the United Patani Rubber Estate some 15 nautical miles north of the Butterworth Base on 16 June 1961 and Squadron Leader (SQNLDR) J.W. Potts who died in May 1970 of bronchial pneumonia while being treated in intensive care for viral encephalitis. Leading Aircraftsman (LAC) W. Duffy and LAC J. Lawson rest beside the other Australians at the cemetery having died together as a result of a motorcycle accident in the early hours of the morning on the streets of Penang in July 1959. The other five Australian airmen buried at the cemetery died as a result of similar tales of misadventure or tragedy.

Having begun my own life at No.4 RAAF Hospital at the Butterworth airbase, I looked down upon the graves of these servicemen with a strange sense of wonder and curiosity. How did over half of the RAAF's airpower come to be permanently stationed at Butterworth for over three decades? What was life really like up here in Penang for Australian servicemen and their families? How did this Australian community interact with the local cultures and peoples? What characterized the boundaries between the Australian, Malay, Indian and Chinese communities who lived in such close proximity to each other? How protean and porous were these boundaries and why? As I began to take a few photographs of the gravestones of the Australian servicemen, I noticed a rather dishevelled local Malay man walking towards me, perhaps one of the groundsmen of the cemetery. "Have you found what you're looking for", he asked me in perfect English. "I think so", I replied.

I spoke to the groundsman for some time before his eyes suddenly widened. "There is one more gravestone that you may be interested in", he told me, "but it's not here with the other Australian graves". With some confusion I followed the groundsman as he headed towards the very back of the cemetery, where the gravestones end abruptly and a dense lush jungle begins to climb the neighbouring hills. All of a sudden, amongst a disparate array of gravestones of various sizes and ostentation, we stopped in front of a solitary, standard military-style tablet. The brief inscription offered no name, only the information that here lay the stillborn daughter of an Australian airman, Gene Fisk, and his wife, Janice. With a heavy heart, it became clear to me that for all of the formal military activities that bound the many Australians who had been posted up here to the local area, there were also many other types of experiences, some tragic and sad, others bewildering, disconcerting, bittersweet or even

mundane or trivial, that continued to connect many Australians to Penang Island and the mainland around Butterworth.

Before we left the grave, the groundsman asked me if I would like him to clean up the area surrounding the headstone and perhaps plant some flowers. Although I was unsure as to the exact number of Australians who actually made to trek over to the Western Road Cemetery on their various pilgrimages back to Penang, I was quite certain that not many would have found their way up to this particular site. For the second time that day the groundsman's eyes widened. I pulled out more money than he could possibly have needed. "Sure", I said, "it would be great if you would".

Figure P.1. Gravestone of Gene and Janice's daughter in the Western Road Cemetery, Penang (author's image).

Towards the end of this project, I advertised and distributed a questionnaire to hundreds of former Australian servicemen and their families who had been posted to the RAAF base at Butterworth. As fate would have it, Gene Fisk, an LAC with No.3 Squadron from November 1960 to January 1963, responded. Although I recognised the name almost instantly, I could not pick the exact context and, having worked on this project for over four years, I thought that I must have simply come across it somewhere in the archives. But after reading Gene's response to the questionnaire, it finally dawned on me where I had seen the surname Fisk.

I subsequently wrote an e-mail to Gene about my visit to the Western Road Cemetery, about how I had come to stand at the grave of his daughter and about how moved I was by the experience. I attached a photograph that I had taken of the gravestone. Gene replied to

me soon after that the gravestone had only been placed at the cemetery some 40 years later by military officials and, as he and his wife had never returned to Penang, he had not actually been there to see it in person. He replied, "Many thanks for the beautiful picture of our daughter's gravestone … it was a pleasure to add to your knowledge of what it was like at Penang and Butterworth in the early 1960s … all the best and good luck with the project, Gene".

Over the course of Australia's thirty-three year military presence at the Butterworth Air Base, thousands of Australian service families resided in the Penang region on two year tours of duty. As Gene and Janice's story highlights, not only did the Australian community in Penang witness a number of significant moments in Australian history, including the demise of the 'White Australia' policy, Australia's economic and cultural disengagement with Britain, the growing tensions of the Cold War in Southeast Asia, the strains of the Vietnam War and Australia's growing economic and social engagement with the newly independent Asian nations to the north, but they additionally experienced the highs and lows of daily life within the hybrid spaces surrounding one of Australia's largest overseas military bases. Exploring these rich threads of history is the principle aim of this thesis.

‘All the same, Butterworth was a darned good posting. There was hardly anyone in the RAAF who did not hope to get there on a posting, detachment or visit’.

Air Commodore John Jacobs, Officer Commanding Airbase Butterworth, 1977-1979

Introduction

On 1 April 1955, Australia's Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, announced the deployment of military forces to Malaya as part of Australia's contribution to the newly formed Commonwealth Strategic Reserve (CSR).[1] By combining with forces from both the United Kingdom and New Zealand, the commitment of substantial military resources to the Strategic Reserve was the embodiment of Australia's policy of 'forward defence' during the Cold War in Southeast Asia. As part of this overall endeavour, Australian Defence officials established a large RAAF base on the northwest coast of the Malay Peninsula at Butterworth.[2] Indeed, Australia's largest 'Cold War' garrison – the RAAF base at Butterworth – became home to the majority of Australian airpower for the next three decades.

The decision to establish a military garrison in northern Malaya in 1955 forced Defence officials to create a new scale of service entitlements for Australian members of the Strategic Reserve. With a tour of duty in Malaya of between two to two and a half years, military officials decided to allow the families of married servicemen to accompany them for the duration of their overseas posting, just as they would in Australia. This decision necessitated the provision of off-base housing estates, schools and expanded medical and recreational facilities for the wives and children of Australian servicemen. The simple act of allowing families to join serving members in Malaya led to the creation of a bona fide Australian military community being implanted among the Asian communities of Penang for over three decades.

From 1955 until 1988, upwards of 50,000 Australian servicemen and their families lived at the Butterworth base. Yet, both the complex political genesis of the RAAF presence at Butterworth and the subsequent social and cultural dimensions of the base remain unexplored. This aim of this thesis is to address this gap in the historiography by analysing the experience of the Australian military community in Penang from 1955 till 1988. It

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[1] Throughout this thesis, the term 'Federation of Malaya' is used to denote the first successor to the Malayan Union (1946-1948). The Federation of Malay began in 1948 and gained independence from the British in August 1957. For events taking place after 1963, the term Malaysia is used. When discussing the entire Australian experience from 1955 to 1988, which covered both the Federation of Malaya (1957-1963) and then Malaysia (1963-1988), the term Malaya is used to represent the place at which the Australians first arrived in 1955 and remained in until 1988.

[2] The Malaysian State of Penang consists of Penang Island and an adjacent small strip of land on the mainland approximately twice the size of the Island itself, on which the town of Butterworth is located. As a reasonably small state, and in order to avoid confusion, throughout this thesis, Penang, as in the state of Penang, is used to describe the area in which the total RAAF presence existed. If further detail is required, the specific terms Penang Island or Butterworth are used instead.

proposes that, although the coming of the Cold War to Southeast Asia provided the initial impetus for Menzies' decision to establish an Australian airbase at Butterworth, the base's eventual significance lay in its role as one of the last military outposts of the British Empire – remarkably, one that was Australian.

Establishing and maintaining a RAAF base at Butterworth forced military officials to articulate their understandings of Asia in practical ways that defined the administrative and structural dimensions of the Australian presence. This thesis further suggests that, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Australian military officials, and indeed many within the broader Australian military community, viewed Malaya predominately through the lens of British colonialism. In doing so, military officials reflected not only a general dearth of knowledge about Australia's northern neighbours amongst some sections of the public during the late 1950s and early 1960s, but also the impossibility of any more nuanced understandings of the region while colonialism continued to be the main organising principle through which the majority of Australians continued to perceive a homogenous Asia during this period.

In contrast to the colonial reckonings of military officials, a two year posting to Malaya for individual members of the Australian military community in Penang often challenged, in both positive and negative ways, perceived notions of the peoples and cultures of the region. By examining both the 'official' and 'private' experiences of Australians in Penang, this thesis explores the ways in which both official military policy, as well as the first-hand interactions and experiences of servicemen and their families, shaped and reflected broader Australian responses to the rising political, social and cultural relationships between Australia and Asia in the post-war period.

Initial plans estimated that approximately one thousand Australian servicemen would be permanently based at Butterworth. In addition to these uniformed personnel, officials expected a non-military presence of 440 wives and 572 children to travel to Malaya with their serving husbands and fathers. To cater for an Australian community of this size and scope, RAAF personnel from No.2 Aircraft Construction Squadron (No.2 ACS) built, in addition to the runways, taxi stands, hangers and bomb storage facilities associated with actual military operations, a number of ancillary amenities on and around the base. In keeping with the strict bureaucratic scales of military life, these included - one operating theatre, two dental surgeries, seven tennis courts (at one per 150 personnel - four of which had to be lighted for night play), four playing fields (two of which needed to be capable of hosting games of

Australian Rules Football) and a swimming pool with not less than six lanes.[3] A cinema, chaplain's hut, base Post Office and school facilities for dependent children rounded out the major facilities eventually built for the Australian military community in Penang.[4]

As the RAAF settled in to their 'new' surroundings in Malaya, the size of their presence continued to expand. The initial estimate of 440 families trended upwards almost immediately. Throughout the 1960s, as services and facilities originally provided by the British military drew down, more Australian servicemen were required in Malaya to fill these roles. In parallel with the gradual British withdrawal, the RAAF presence again expanded considerably when, in the late 1960s, Australia phased out the aging *Sabre* jet fighters (two squadrons of which were permanently located at Butterworth) and replaced them with French-built *Mirage* fighters. The added technical and operational support required for this next generation of fighter aircraft necessitated a further expansion of the overall Australian presence, not only in terms of personnel, but also in terms of space, noise, pollution and every other consumptive aspect associated with a large military establishment.

Australian *Sabre* jets line the flight-line at the RAAF base at Butterworth in 1966. Penang Island is in the background. (http://www.3squadron.org.au/subpages/Confrontation.htm).

By the early 1970s, the number of families accompanying Australian servicemen working at the RAAF base at Butterworth had grown to over 1,200.[5] With wives, children

[3] Planning documents titled "RAAF, Malaya, Butterworth – Strategic Reserve – Works Requirements", A1196 – 45/501/285, NAA.
[4] *Ibid*.
[5] Commanding Officer's monthly report of October 1971 listed 1227 married quarter hirings in Penang by base housing section; A9435 – 74, NAA.

and single servicemen included, the total of number of Australians permanently living and working in Penang as a direct result of the RAAF presence had grown to approximately five thousand. And each time the RAAF base expanded, so too did the requirement for further medical, educational and recreational facilities to accommodate the force. Consequently, the Australian footprint associated with the RAAF base at Butterworth continued to grow. By the early 1970s, the Australian presence in Penang included a large Australian school teaching a curriculum combining those of both Victoria and New South Wales, and, for those individuals feeling particularly homesick, there was even an Australian radio station transmitting 'the voice of the RAAF in Malaya' from 0600 to 2330, seven days a week.

Following on from the decision to close down the British Military Hospital in Taiping at the beginning of 1964, extensions to the sick quarters at the RAAF base at Butterworth resulted in the establishment of an 86 bed hospital at the base. No.4 RAAF Hospital opened on 1 March 1965 and provided medical facilities for over 9,000 personnel, both Australian and local, connected to the RAAF presence. A maternity wing, added to the hospital in December 1971, delivered approximately one thousand babies to the wives of Australian servicemen over the next decade, including nearly two hundred in 1972 alone.[6] Enrolments at the RAAF School on Penang Island likewise peaked in the early 1970s, with the total number of Australian children attending the school regularly exceeding one thousand students. As this brief outline demonstrates, the Australian military presence in Penang was lengthy, substantial and, in a variety of ways, intriguing.

The establishment of a RAAF base at Butterworth in 1955, however, was only one of a number of significant Australian garrisons established in Asia in the post-war period. A number of these garrisons have hitherto escaped the attention of Australian historians. As part of Australia's contribution to the Strategic Reserve, for example, the Australian Army also deployed a battalion to Malaya, on a two year rotational basis, from late 1955 until the early 1970s. Because the Australian Army initially deployed to Penang, some aspects of this deployment are covered in this thesis. The decade from the early 1960s to the early 1970s, when Australian soldiers and their families had moved from Penang to a purpose built barracks at Terendak near Malacca, however, is not covered in this thesis and thus remains unexplored. Similarly, the social and cultural dimensions of Australian forces and their families deployed to Singapore, Thailand and Hong Kong during the post-war period also

[6] According to Register of Births by descent recorded at the Australian High Commission at Kuala Lumpur, 975 births occurred at No.4 RAAF Hospital between 1971 and 1981, with 197 in 1972, 10842, NAA.

remain largely unexplored by Australian historians. As a consequence, Australian history has remained insulated from important insights that international scholars have gained from similar studies into their own overseas military communities.

It is one of the overall contentions of this thesis that, although they were some of the most substantial Australian-Asian engagements in Southeast Asia in the post-war period, the post-war phenomenon of Australia's Asian garrisons, and the many and varied social and cultural aspects of these engagements, remain largely unrecognised, under-appreciated and unexplored. In this thesis, I suggest that the social and cultural dimensions of Australia's Asian garrisons demand deeper recognition and analysis than has been afforded them in both the extant historiography of Western communities in Southeast Asia and the extant historiography of Australia's Asian context. In support of this overall argument, this thesis explores the experience of the Australian military community in Penang from 1955 to 1988.

The Historiography of Western Communities in Southeast Asia

In the late eighteenth century, with the loss of America's thirteen colonies and the rise of political and administrative responsibility on the Indian subcontinent, the axis of Britain's imperial aspirations tilted increasingly towards expansion in the Far East.[7] In July 1786, following a series of negotiations between Francis Light, a country trader acting on behalf of the East India Company, and Sultan Adbullah Mukarram Shah, the first swath of territory on the Malay Peninsula passed into British hands. Soon after these negotiations, the distinctive red and white striped flags of the East India Company's ships entered the waters off Kedah to take possession of the Island of Penang.[8] In a ceremony conducted on 11 August 1786, Light, recently granted the rank of Capitan for the occasion and dressed in the dark blue tailed coat of an East India Company officer, celebrated Britain's newest colonial possession by officially renaming the territory 'Prince of Wales Island' after the future King George IV.[9]

The arrival of the British on Penang Island in 1786 marked the beginning of a series of further territorial acquisitions, treaties with local rulers and expanded commercial activity in Malaya that, by the late nineteenth century, led to British ascendency throughout the whole

[7] Philippa Levine, *The British Empire: Sunrise to Sunset* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2007), p. 68.
[8] See Mary C. Turnbull, *A Short History of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei* (Stanmore, NSW: Cassell Australia Ltd, 1980) for further details of the exact nature of the negotiations between Francis Light and the Sultan of Kedah.
[9] Andrew Barber, *Penang Under the East India Company, 1786-1858* (Kuala Lumpur: AB&A, 2009), p. 55.

Peninsula. From 1800, the British territory of Penang expanded to include a strip of coast on the opposite mainland called Province Wellesley, and in 1819, Sir Stamford Raffles founded a settlement at Singapore at the southern tip of the Peninsula. The Anglo-Dutch treaty of 1824 further saw Britain claim Malacca from the Dutch in exchange for its trading post at Bencoolen. In 1826, Penang, Malacca and Singapore were united as the 'Straits Settlements' and administered by the East India Company's Bengal Presidency in Calcutta. The social history of the British on the Malay Peninsula during the nineteenth century is, fundamentally, a history of life within these settlements as they functioned within the existing structures of Britain's other possessions in the region, most notably those on the Indian subcontinent.

With the exception of George Woodcock's 1969 study, *The British in the Far East*, much of the social and cultural life within these early British communities of the Straits Settlements has been included, albeit often as mere snippets, within larger studies of the British in India.[10] Important contributions to the exploration of these British communities includes the works of both Dennis Kincaid and Percival Spear on the 'social life of the English in Eighteenth Century India', followed later by the works of Zoe Yalland, E. M. Collingham and Catherine Hall. More recently, Tillman W. Nechtman has explored British identity through the controversy that surrounded the return of some of the more high profile 'Nabobs' to England after years of cultivating fortunes in the East.[11] By emphasizing the cultural connections, and disjunctions, between the 'metropole' and Britain's colonial peripheries, Nechtman reflects recent debates in the historiography of the British Empire regarding the social, cultural, emotional and financial impacts of the Empire on Britain itself, especially on London.

In *Empire Families*, to take another example, Elizabeth Buettner explores the childrearing patterns and family experiences taking place in both Britain and India from the late nineteenth century to the end of the British Empire in India in 1947.[12] Like Nechtman,

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[10] George Woodcock, *The British in the Far East* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969).
[11] Dennis Kincaid, *British Social Life in India, 1608-1937* (London: George Rutledge, 1938); Percival Spear, *The Nabobs: A Study of the Social Life of the English in Eighteenth Century India* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963); Zoe Yalland, *Traders and Nabobs: British in Cawnpore, 1765-1857* (London, Michael Russell Publishing Ltd, 1988); E. M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experience of the Raj, c.1800-1947* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001); Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Colony and Metropole in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose, eds., *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Tillman W. Nechtman, *Nabobs: Empire and Identity in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
[12] Elizabeth Buettner, *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Buettner highlights important social and cultural connections between Britain's colonial possessions and the 'metropole'. Buettner argues that it was the nature and frequency of formative experiences at home in Britain for the 'children of empire' that distinguished higher class British society from not only the colonised, but also from both the less affluent sectors of the British community in India and the racially ambiguous 'domiciled Europeans' and Anglo-Indians.[13]

Other works, most notably those by Margaret MacMillan, John Keith Stanford and Harban Singha Bhatia have instead viewed the social and cultural life of these British colonial communities from the perspective of European women in India and the Far East.[14] These works not only highlight the daily lives and routines of the women who supported Britain's imperial project, but often reveal that the daughters, sisters, mothers and wives of the men at the centre of British imperialism were indeed integral agents of empire in their own right. More recently, scholars such as Anne McClintock, Ann Laura Stoler, Philippa Levine and Piers Brandon, have provided significant contributions to both the substantive and theoretical understandings of social life, intercultural connections, racial relationships and the gendered dynamics underpinning the quotidian conditions of life within these European communities of the British Empire during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[15]

The development of newer and more sophisticated modes of travel in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as the increasingly unchallenged power of the British Empire, resulted in a number of changes in the attitudes and behaviours of British colonial societies. As Levine notes, from the late nineteenth century onwards, British communities in the East began to develop a formalism and rigidity that cocooned them into white enclaves where their 'social lives revolved around a racially exclusive club, a Christian church, and a set of neighbours of mostly similar background'.[16] Segregated hospitals, train

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[13] *Ibid*.

[14] See Margaret MacMillan, *Women of the Raj: the mothers, wives, and daughters of the British Empire in India* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2007); J.K. Stanford, *Ladies in the Sun: The Memsahibs' India, 1790-1860* (London: The Galley Press, 1962); Harban Singha Bhatia, *European Women in India: Their Life and Adventures* (Michigan: Deep & Deep Publications, 1979).

[15] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); Philippa Levine, *Gender and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Philippa Levine, *The British Empire: Sunrise to Sunset* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2007); Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race & Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003); and Piers Brandon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire, 1781-1997* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010).

[16] Levine, *The British Empire*, p. 110.

carriages and 'colour bars' on the progress of any but 'white' Europeans in the majority of administrative positions followed the trend set by the racially exclusive clubs, further isolating the colonizers from the colonised. By more faithfully adopting the manners and customs of English society, the cultural hybridity of previous colonial communities was rejected in favour of all things British, from the social prohibition of native mistresses to a disinclination for local food and even as far as the formal adoption of British dress – the notorious white linen suits and topees - in place of cooler local garments. In addition to these practical measures, the newly self-conscious isolation of British communities in the East found particular resonance in the adoption of social codes of behaviour that further acted as barriers to racial and class intermingling.[17]

Scholarship on the British community in Malaya and Singapore during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries largely concurs with these more general observations of British society in the East. In his 1979 study, *The British in Malaya 1880-1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia,* John G. Butcher noted 'the tendency of the European population to become an increasingly self-contained social group' during the late nineteenth century.[18] Published some two decades later in 2000, Margaret Shennan's study of the British colonial experience in Malaya over roughly the same period similarly noted that, 'in a society where a white man was treated as a minor God, few questioned the rights and wrongs of their assumed superiority'.[19] Janice N. Brownfoot further added an important feminist perspective to this historiography in her study of the plight of 'European wives' or 'Memsahibs' in colonial Malaya during the first four decades of the twentieth century. Brownfoot argues that it is indeed essential to reflect on the 'functions and influences of wives' in colonial arenas in order to reveal the full nature of the relationships that developed between 'white and indigenous societies'.[20]

With British rule barely surviving 'the Japanese typhoon' of the Second World War, the twilight days of the Raj often mark the point at which scholars also conclude studies into

[17] Brandon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire*, p. 347.
[18] John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya 1880-1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 57.
[19] Margaret Shennan, *Out in the Midday Sun: The British in Malaya, 1880-1960* (London: John Murray, 2000), p. 114.
[20] Janice N. Brownfoot, "Memsahibs in Colonial Malaya: A Study of European Wives in a British Colony and Protectorate, 1900-1940", in *The Incorporated Wife*, eds. Hilary Callan and Shirley Ardener (London: Croom Helm, 1984), pp. 186-211.

the social and cultural lives of the British in Malaya and Singapore.[21] But as a number of first-hand accounts and memoirs by British planters, Malayan Civil Servants and British journalists highlight, many of the social and cultural traditions of the colonial era continued well into the post-colonial period for members of the British communities which remained domiciled in Malaya and Singapore.[22] Although a number of scholars focus on the post-colonial financial and political aspects of Malaysian history, none have explored the continued social and cultural dimensions of the post-colonial British military presence on the Peninsula.[23] This thesis adds to this historiography of Western communities in Southeast Asia by arguing that imperial legacies not only continued to guide the behaviour of the remaining British military community in Penang, but also influenced Australian conduct in response to the establishment and maintenance of a RAAF base at Butterworth in the post-colonial period.

As the sun was setting on almost two centuries of British colonialism in Malaya and Singapore, a new Western imperial power began to influence events in the region. With large military installations in the Philippines, Japan, Korea, Vietnam and Thailand, American social and cultural engagement became increasingly pervasive, not only in the immediate areas surrounding U.S. military bases, but throughout the entire Southeast Asian region. In addition to the numerous works on the U.S. led Allied occupation of Japan in the immediate post-war period, a number of scholars have sought to make sense of the phenomenon of this American military encounter with the region. Typical of these types of studies is the recent work by Maria Höhn and Seungsook Moon, *Over There: Living with the U.S. Military Empire from World War Two to the Present*, with other notable contributions by Mark L. Gillem, Anni P. Baker, Susan Zeiger and Jin-Kyung Lee[24]. Important feminist perspectives,

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[21] Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Armies: Britain's Asian Empire & The War With Japan* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), p. 463.

[22] Michael Thorp, *Elephants, Tigers & Tappers: Recollections of a British Rubber Planter in Malaya* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Pty Ltd, 2009); John Dodd, *A Company of Planters: Confessions of a Colonial Rubber Planter in 1950s Malaya* (Singapore: Monsoon Books Pte Ltd, 2007); Peter Moss, *Distant Archipelagos: Memories of Malaya* (New York: iUniverse Inc, 2004); Derek MacKay, *Eastern Customs: The Customs Service in British Malaya and the Opium Trade* (Bloomington: Arthur House, 2007).

[23] For example, see Nicholas J. White, *British Business in Post-Colonial Malaysia, 1957-1970: 'Neo-colonialism' or 'disengagement'?* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004); Nicholas J. White, *Business, Government, and the End of Empire: Malaya, 1942-1957* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Anthony Milner, *The Invention of Politics in Colonial Malaya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[24] Maria Höhn and Seungsook Moon eds., *Over There: Living with the U.S. Military Empire from World War Two to the Present* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Mark L. Gillem, *America Town: Building the Outposts of Empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Anni P. Baker, *American Soldiers Overseas: The Global Military Presence* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2004); Susan Zeiger, *Entangling Alliances: Foreign War Brides and American Soldiers in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York

most notably those of Cynthia Enloe and Katharine Moon, further highlight the connection between U.S. military bases in East and Southeast Asia with the subjugation of women and social problems such as trafficking, the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and military prostitution.[25]

While this American scholarship has considered the entire period of U.S. military engagement with the region from the Pacific War till the present, Australian scholarship is yet to place many of its post-war overseas military enterprises in Southeast Asia within this broader global scholarship of foreign military bases.[26] With the exception of Sean Brawley and Chris Dixon's account of allied servicemen 'searching for Dorothy Lamour' during the Pacific War and Lachlan Grant's recent account of the experiences of Australian soldiers in the Asia/Pacific region during the same period, Australian historians have instead limited their attention to the social and cultural encounters that occasioned Australia's contribution to the Allied occupation of Japan.[27] The social and cultural dimensions of Australia's large overseas military bases in Malaya and Singapore in the post-war period have, unfortunately, not been exposed to any such scrutiny by Australian historians. This thesis begins to fill this gap in the extant historiography.

The Historiography of Australia's Asian Context

Although Ien Ang reminds us that Australia's national 'anxieties and prejudices' regarding defence and immigration have 'not fully disappeared from the Australian cultural landscape',

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University Press, 2010); Jin-Kyung Lee, *Service Economies: Militarism, Sex Work and Migrant Labour in South Korea* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

[25] Cynthia Enloe, *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Cynthia Enloe, *Globalization and Militarism: Feminists Make the Link* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007); Katharine H.S. Moon, *Sex Among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S. Korea Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

[26] Indeed the work of Beth Bailey and David Farber examines the highly volatile racial and cultural encounter of American soldiers staging through Hawaii *on their way* to the Pacific War, see Beth Bailey and David Farber, *The First Strange Place: Race and Sex in World War II Hawaii* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1992).

[27] Sean Brawley and Chris Dixon, *Hollywood's South Seas and the Pacific War: Searching for Dorothy Lamour* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012); Lachlan Grant, *Australian Soldiers in Asia-Pacific in World War II* (Sydney: New South, 2014); James Wood, *The Forgotten Force: The Australian military contribution to the occupation of Japan, 1945-1952* (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1998); George Davies, *The Occupation of Japan: The Rhetoric and the Reality of Anglo-Australasian Relations, 1939-1952* (Brisbane: UQP, 2001); Christine de Matos, *Imposing Peace and Prosperity: Australia, social justice and labour reform in occupied Japan* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2008); Caroline Carter, "Between War and Peace: the experience of Occupation for members of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force 1945-1952" (Ph.D., thesis, UNSW, 2002); Robin Gerster, *Travels in Atomic Sunshine: Australia and the Occupation of Japan* (Melbourne: Scribe Publications, 2008).

a growing engagement with the Asian region in the last three decades has prompted Australian historians to undertake a significant re-examination of Australia's Asian context through an increasingly diverse range of social and cultural perspectives and productions.[28] An exploration of Australian perceptions and images of Asia marked the initial thrust of this new endeavour. Utilizing a variety of historical lenses, the pioneering work of John Ingleson, Adrian Vickers, David Walker and Alison Broinowski revealed the depth and complexity of Australian perceptions of Asia throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[29] Mirroring the fears which informed the politics of White Australia, these cultural histories exposed a variety of racial, colonial and Orientalist discourses based on ignorance and contempt that combined to paint a national portrait of Australia dolefully stained with anxiety and uncertainty vis-à-vis its Asian neighbours.[30]

Further contributions to the burgeoning field of Australia's Asian context followed, including important work on Asian communities in Australia both prior to and following colonization[31], as well as investigations by scholars such as Robin Gerster and Agnieszka Sobocinska into the complex nexus between travel, tourism and the recasting and reimaging of preconceived images of the 'Other' as a direct result of increasing first-hand contact.[32] Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds's recent collaboration, building on the pioneering

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[28] Ien Ang, "From White Australia to Fortress Australia: The Anxious Nation in the New Century", in *Legacies of White Australia: Race Culture and Nation*, eds. Laksiri Jayasuriya, David Walker and Jan Gothard, (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 2003).

[29] John Ingleson, "Australian Images of Asia", in *Eastern Asia: An Introductory History*, ed. Colin Mackerras (Melbourne: Longman Australia, 1995), pp. 643-656; David Walker & John Ingleson, "The Impact of Asia" in *Under New Heavens: Cultural Transmission and the Making of Australia*, ed., N. Meaney (Melbourne: Heinemann Educational Australia, 1989); Adrian Vickers, "Racism and colonialism in early Australian novels about Southeast Asia", *Asian Studies Association of Australia Review* 12, no. 1 (1988): pp. 7-12; David Walker, "Invasion Literature: The Yellow Wave: Moulding the Popular Imagination", 1988 Asian influences on Australian literature: proceedings of a symposium held by the Library Society, State Library of New South Wales; Alison Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady: Australian Impressions of Asia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[30] David Walker, along with significant contributions from Lachlan Strahan, continued to develop this literature throughout the 1990s - David Walker, *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia, 1850-1939* (Brisbane: Univsersity of Queensland Press, 1999); Lachlan Strahan, *Australia's China: Changing Perceptions from the 1930s to the 1990s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[31] Paul Macgregor, ed., *Histories of the Chinese in Australasia and the South Pacific* (Melbourne: Museum of Chinese Australian History, 1995); John Fitzgerald, *Big White Lie: Chinese Australians in White Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2007); Mei-fen Kuo, *Making Chinese Australia: Urban Elites, Newspapers and the Formation of Chinese-Australian Identity, 1892-1912* (Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2013).

[32] Robin Gerster, ed., *Hotel Asia: An Anthology of Australian Literary Travelling to 'the East'* (Melbourne: Penguin Books, 1995); Gerster, "A bellyful of Bail: travel, writing and Australia/Asia relationships", *Australian Literary Studies* 13, no. 4 (1996): pp. 353-363; Gerster, *Travels in Atomic Sunshine: Australia and the Occupation of Japan* (Melbourne: Scribe Publications, 2008); Agnieszka Sobocinska, "Innocence lost and paradise regained: Tourism to Bali and Australian perceptions of Asia", *History Australia*, 8, no. 2 (2011): pp. 199-222; Agnieszka Sobocinska, "Visiting the Neighbours: The Political Meanings of Australian Travel to Cold War Asia", *Australian Historical Studies* 44, no. 3 (2013): pp. 382-404.

comparative work of Sean Brawley in the mid-1990s, highlights the 'transnational solidarities' linking ideas of racially inspired segregation in Australia to similar policy platforms in the American South, California and South Africa.[33] Similarly, scholars such as Julia Martinez, Regina Ganter and Sophie Loy-Wilson have explored the relationship between Australian and Asian labour.[34] Sean Brawley and Nick Gouth further extended the extant historiography of Australia's Asian context by focusing on the 'hitherto neglected role played by sport' in Australia's cultural interactions with the Asian region in the period before the Pacific War.[35]

Although many of these explorations of Australia's Asian context problematize the original focus on matters of defence and immigration and instead 'highlight the longevity, depth and dimensions of Australia's encounter with Asia', none sufficiently engage with the significant post-war interactions between the Australian military and the many and varied cultures and peoples of Malaya and Singapore.[36] This dearth of interest in the topic of the social and cultural aspects of Australian military forces in Malaya and Singapore in the post-war period is perhaps best highlighted by examining several recent works by Australian scholars.

Like many similar edited publications on Australian-Asian engagement, the recent edited collection of David Walker and Agnieszka Sobocinska, *Australia's Asia: From Yellow Peril to Asian Century*, finds no place for a contribution regarding Australia's substantial military presence in Malaya and Singapore.[37] Further, in her specific contribution, Sobocinska declares that Australia's contribution to the British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF) was 'the first (and to this day only) time Australians soldiers on an overseas mission were joined by their families', a supposition that completely disregards Australia's

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[33] Sean Brawley, *The White Peril: Foreign Relations and Asian Immigration to Australasia and North America, 191*-78 (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press Ltd, 1995); Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the Question of Racial Equality* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2008).
[34] Sophie Loy-Wilson, "'Liberating' Asia: Strikes and Protest in Sydney and Shanghai, 1920-39", *History Workshop Journal* 72, No.1 (2011): pp. 75-102; Regina Ganter, *The Pearl-Shellers of Torres Strait* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994); Julia Martinez, "Asian Workers in Pre-war Port Darwin: Exclusion and Exemption", *Maritimeretimees* 109 (November/December, 1999): pp. 19-27; Julia Martinez, "Questioning "White Australia": Unionism and "Coloured" Labour, 1911-1937", *Labour History* 79 (May 1999): pp. 1-19.
[35] Sean Brawley & Nick Gouth eds., *Australia's Asian Sporting Context, 1920s-30s* (New York: Routledge, 2013).
[36] Lachlan Strahan review of *Australia's Asia: From Yellow Peril to Asian Century* by David Walker & Agnieszka Sobocinska eds., *Journal of Australian Studies* 38, no. 1 (2014): p. 134.
[37] David Walker and Agnieszka Sobocinska eds., *Australia's Asia: From yellow peril to Asian Century* (Crawley: UWA Publishing, 2012).

three decade experience in Malaya and Singapore, an experience where Australian soldiers and airmen were indeed accompanied by theirs wives and children.[38]

Like the broader literature on Australia's Asian context, the more specific extant literature on Australia-Malaysia relations also ignores the social and cultural dimensions of the large Australian military communities in Malaya from 1955 till 1988. Rita Camilleri's study into the attitudes and perceptions at the heart of Australia-Malaysia relations, for example, examines six highly controversial media stories between 1985 and 1999.[39] By limiting her focus to these media stories, Camilleri's work fails to consider Australia-Malaysia relations through the lens of the large Australian military communities that actually resided in Malaya for over three decades during the post-war period.

The work of Camilleri is not unique in this regard. As director of the Australian-Asian Perceptions Project, Anthony Milner oversaw the writing of a three volume series focussing on Australia in Asia.[40] The project provided a sophisticated analysis of the cultural differences that exist between Australia and the various countries of the Asian region. In the third volume of the series, concern shifted from a general survey of values and concepts to case studies of interaction between Australians and societies from a number of Asian countries. In his specific contribution, 'Understanding Malaysia', Harold Crouch mentions the 'large number of Malaysian students' studying in Australia as part of the Colombo Plan, as well as the 'significant numbers of tourists' which travelled between each country in the post-war period. Crouch, however, fails to consider, or indeed, even mention, the large Australian military communities that lived in Malaya from 1955 till 1988.[41]

Paul Battersby's recent work, *To the Islands: White Australia and the Malay Archipelago since 1788*, also avoids considering the substantial post-war Australian military presence on the Peninsula. Instead, Battersby focuses primarily on economic interaction between Australia and Malaysia, and although the initial chapters leading up to the Second World War do include the experiences of Australian travellers, businessmen and politicians on the Peninsula, the final chapters dealing with the post-war period are largely devoid of any

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[38] *Ibid*., p. 181.
[39] Rita Camilleri, *Attitudes and Perceptions in Australia-Malaysia Relations: A Contemporary Profile* (Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Bebangsaan Malaysia, 2001).
[40] Anthony Milner ed., *Australia in Asia: Comparing Cultures* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1996), Anthony Milner & Mary Quilty eds., *Australia in Asia: Communities of Thought* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1996), Anthony Milner & Mary Quilty eds., *Australia in Asia: Episodes* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1998).
[41] Harold Crouch, "Understanding Malaysia" in *Australia in Asia: Episodes*, ed. Anthony Milner & Mary Quilty (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 37-60.

such social and cultural discussion. In any case, Battersby avoids any reference or discussion of the Australian military communities that lived in Penang, Malacca and Singapore during this period.[42]

Perhaps the most glaring and curious omission concerning Australia's post-war experiences in Malaya and Singapore is the edited collection of Christine de Matos and Robin Gerster, *Occupying the "Other": Australia and Military Occupations from Japan to Iraq*. The collection attempts to place Australia's 'long overlooked role as an occupier' on the map.[43] The overall focus of *Occupying the "Other"* is on the broader neo-colonial nature of Australia's post-war military expeditions and much of the analysis within the text draws on the opportunity occupation provided for cultural interaction. Specific attention is given to the attitudes and behaviours of Australians as occupiers. Included in the study are several chapters on Australia's participation in the American led military occupations of Japan and Iraq, as well as several chapters on smaller Australian-led regional interventions in the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. There is not one mention of Australia's large three-decade post-war military presence in Malaya and Singapore.

By invoking Edward Said's notion of the 'Other' in the title, de Matos and Gerster clearly wish to highlight their use of 'Orientalism' as the foundational methodological and theoretical platform of their study. In other words, the message conveyed by the title essentially suggests that Australian military deployments to the 'East' continued to draw on centuries old assumptions of "the separateness of the Orient, its eccentricity, its backwardness and its feminine penetrability" as a justification for occupation and control.[44] Rudyard Kipling's exhortation to the United States to take up 'the white man's burden' is also described in de Matos' introduction to the study as both a 'well-known euphemism for imperial hegemony' and 'one of the defining tags of the great age of British influence'.[45] Such an analytical framework merely highlights the deficit of not including in their study the Australian military presence in Malaya - an Australian military expedition that not only drew directly on the prejudices of past British colonial culture but actually constituted a significant

[42] Paul Battersby, *To the Islands: White Australians and the Malay Archipelago since 1788* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2007).
[43] Robin Gerster and Christine de Matos, "Introduction", in *Occupying the "Other": Australia and Military Occupations from Japan to Iraq*, eds. Christine de Matos and Robin Gerster (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholarly Publishing: 2009), p. 10.
[44] *Ibid*., p. 8.
[45] *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Australian contribution to the physical continuation of the British Empire in Southeast Asia in the second half of the twentieth century.[46]

Importance, Aims, Scope & Methodology: A Military Base as a Web of Human Activity

The military machine, notes Levine, was and still is the 'ultimate expression' of Empire.[47] But foreign military bases, for all their political and strategic import, consist of much more than barracks, parade grounds, runways, hardstands, ammunition dumps, rifle ranges and squadrons of armoured fighting vehicles and aircraft. While they do represent the physical expression of some international strategic doctrine, a foreign military base is also 'a peculiar social creature, a web of human relationships – generally of unequal relationships – between men and women of different races and classes'.[48] The actual people who live and work at foreign military bases, often a mixture of both foreign and local, intermingle in a variety of social and cultural contexts that have no parallel in other instances and forms of foreign engagement. So although the military context framing any particular occupation must always be borne in mind, at the heart of every foreign military base lays the foundations of a significant social and cultural encounter between a number of distinct groups of people.

By investigating the experience of the RAAF base at Butterworth, this study aims to examine the boundaries established by the Australian military community in its dealings with both the numerous Asian communities in the region as well as the large British military community that remained in post-colonial Malaya. In sketching these cultural boundaries it is hoped that the experience of the RAAF deployment to Butterworth can then be placed within the much broader traditions and historiographies of both Western communities in the region as well as Australia's Asian context. Through this examination, the important insights gained in international studies into overseas military communities will be applied to the Australian context.

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[46] This oversight is again repeated in the recent work of Christine de Matos and Rowena Ward, *Gender, Power, and Military Occupations: Asia Pacific and the Middle East since 1945* (New York: Routledge, 2012). Although the term 'military occupation' is interpreted broadly enough to include occupations, interventions, the presence of overseas military bases and peacekeeping/post-conflict operations, Australia's military presence in Malaya and Singapore is not included.

[47] Levine, *Prostitution, Race & Politics*, p. 267.

[48] Enloe, Cynthia, "A Feminist Perspective on Foreign Military Bases", in *The Sun Never Sets: Confronting the Network of Foreign U.S. Military Bases*, ed. Joseph Gerson & Bruce Birchard (Boston: South End Press, 1991), pp. 95-106.

The bulk of the resources for this study have come from the vast amount of archival material held on the Australian military presence in Penang at both the National Archives of Australia (NAA) and the Australian War Memorial (AWM). In addition to this archival material, the National Library of Australia and the State Library of New South Wales have provided a number of military booklets and pamphlets related to the Australian base at Butterworth as well as one first-hand account from an Australian family who lived in Penang from 1957 to 1959. Both libraries also hold a number of annual school magazines from the RAAF School in Penang.

Associated with their supporting role at the Australian hospital on the RAAF base at Butterworth, the Australian Red Cross Society (ARCS) in Melbourne provided access to a large number of files regarding their work in Penang. From the 1960s onwards, the ARCS stationed up to four nurses at any one time at No.4 RAAF Hospital on the Butterworth base. During their time at the base, these Red Cross nurses provided various support services to the Australian military community, such as taking hospital patients shopping, helping out with domestic chores for families with incapacitated or absent parents and generally assisting servicemen, their wives and their children to cope with the unprecedented changes they faced in their daily lives in Malaysia. Many of these welfare pursuits bought Red Cross nurses into direct contact with the very personal and private experiences of the Australian community in Penang. As such, these files provided a particularly rich repository of archival material for this study.

Newspapers, both in Australia and in Malaysia, have additionally provided significant insight into the public debates and perceptions surrounding the Butterworth base. The National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA) in Canberra contributed to the material reviewed for this research in the form of two important promotional films produced by the Department of Defence in the early 1960s. The NFSA provided access to both films, namely *This is Butterworth* and *Malaya Posting*, as well as a number of archived radio programs from the RAAF Butterworth Radio station. Requests to the senior curator at the NFSA resulted in many of these RAAF Radio programs being digitized and made available for this study.

In addition to these resources, this study has made use of photographs and personal collections of souvenirs and possessions from members of the Australian military community who served at the RAAF base at Butterworth. Additionally, a ten-page questionnaire was distributed to, and completed by, over two hundred and fifty former members of the Australian military community in Penang. Using a series of multiple choice and short answer

questions, which focused on such aspects of the Australian experience in Penang as pre-posting preparation, arrival, general first impressions, domestic life, holidays and travel, cultural/racial interaction and memories/reflections, the questionnaire sought to complement the official archival record by illustrating how former members of the Australian military community have come to view their experience in Malaya/Malaysia.

Both the official archival record and the results of the questionnaire inform the writing of this thesis. Although chronology guides the overall presentation of this research, each chapter nevertheless addresses important themes in the analysis of the Australian experience in Penang. Chapter 1 examines the political and strategic factors that influenced Menzies' decision to permanently station Australian forces on the Malay Peninsula in 1955. The consequences of this 'Cold War Failure' on the part of Menzies directly influenced many of the overarching political, legal, strategic, social and cultural dimensions that framed Australia's garrison experiences in Penang, Malacca and Singapore.

Once the commitment of military forces to Malaya had been publically announced, Australian politicians and military planners needed to work out just how a permanent garrison of Australian servicemen and their families would live and work in what still remained a formal Asian colony of the British Empire. Chapter 2 describes the 'official' conditions of service laid down for Australian servicemen in Malaya, which included such colonial niceties as the provision of servants and gardeners for Australian families. The initial conception for the provision of medical, dental and educational facilities for servicemen and their dependents is also covered in this chapter.

The first Australian servicemen began to arrive in Malaya in late 1955. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 correspondingly explore the formative experiences of arrival and new-found exposure to the sights, sounds, smells and peoples of Penang for large groups of Australian servicemen and their families. While initial contact took on a variety of meanings in a variety of contexts for different individuals, what these chapters highlight is the gulf between the 'official' and 'private' conceptions of the Australian presence in Penang. Significantly, Australian officials, both political and military, adopted formal structures for managing difference based on long-standing colonial conceits in which race was the dominant factor. While some individuals privately adopted this colonial aloofness, many others rejected this framework completely. This dichotomy becomes most obvious in instances where sexual contact and emotional intimacy between Australian servicemen and local women developed to the point of formal proposals of marriage. Chapters 3 and 4 address the cultural encounters and

exchanges that resulted in the first few years of the Australian presence in Penang, while chapter 5 deals with both the 'official' and 'private' responses to issues regarding sex, love and marriage between Australian servicemen and local women in Malaya.

At the beginning of the deployment to Butterworth in 1955, Australia, under the leadership of Menzies, remained bound to the 'Mother Country' through a vast array of military, political, social and cultural ties. But by the end of the military deployment to Butterworth in 1988, many of the traditional bonds of kinship with Britain had begun to fade. Indeed, Australia's emergence from Britain's paternal embrace and the eventual triumph of geography over history, as Alison Broinowski might phrase it,[49] forced Australians of all walks of life to begin to think very differently about their place in the world.

While some scholars of Australian identity, most notably Stuart Ward, remind us that this process of re-alignment is perhaps even yet to run its full course, Australian servicemen and their families in Penang in the 1960s and 1970s experienced both the *emotional and physical* departure of the familiar British world to which they had only recently belonged. Chapters 6 and 7, through narratives of the Australian military hospital at the RAAF base at Butterworth and the large Australian school in Penang, chart this history of the Australian military community coming to terms with their new identity as the sole military presence on the Malay Peninsula as British forces withdrew 'East of Suez' in the late 1960s.

In the final chapter, the social and domestic aspects of life for Australians living in Penang are examined. In particular, the role of women in the domestic sphere as an integral part of the Australian military presence is considered. Significantly, Australian women in Penang were often referred to as 'Mems' in the early years of the Australian presence, a shortening of memsahib, the word most commonly used for European women formerly living within the boundaries of the British Raj. From the novelty of having domestic servants to the isolation and boredom of life in a colonial setting, the experience of Australian women in Penang is considered within the context of the experiences of their British predecessors.

Within the extant literature on Australia's Asian context and Australian military history, not to mention the international scholarly work on colonial studies, British imperialism and other histories of Western engagement with Asia, the history of Australia's Asian garrisons remains a vast landscape of unchartered territory. Although this thesis

[49] See also Brawley and Bell, "Between History and Geography: Debates on Australia and Asia", *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (1999), pp. 66-69.

focuses solely on the large Australian military community in Penang from 1955 to 1988, it nevertheless opens up substantial new terrain for investigation and analysis - terrain in which both the official and private experiences of Australia and Australians in Malaya and Singapore in the post-war period begin to gain the academic attention they deserve. Accordingly, the thesis makes not only a significant contribution to several extant fields of academic endeavour in its own right, but additionally points the way for a number of future scholarly investigations.

Chapter One

Butterworth: Menzies' Cold War Failure

An enduring, albeit mistaken, connection persists between the decision to establish a RAAF base at Butterworth in 1955 and the counter-insurgency efforts of the British during the Malayan Emergency. The recent work of Andrea Benvenuti and David Martin Jones reflects the tenacity of this misconception:

> In 1950 … Prime Minister Robert Menzies decided to assist the overstretched British colonial authority in its operations against Communist insurgents by committing a squadron of Dakota transport aircraft and Lincoln bombers to the Malayan Emergency (1948-1960). Subsequently, in 1955, the Liberal-Country Party coalition government increased Australia's military commitment to the Emergency by dispatching ground forces to Southeast Asia as part of the British-led Commonwealth Strategic Reserve (CSR).[1]

The decision, however, to commit a small number of RAAF aircraft to assist with the Emergency in 1950 and the later decision in 1955 to station a much larger permanent force at Butterworth were entirely separate decisions based upon entirely different considerations. As this chapter demonstrates, the decision to establish a RAAF base at Butterworth in 1955 had nothing to do with the Malayan Emergency at all.

This chapter examines the political and strategic circumstances surrounding Menzies' decision to concentrate the majority of Australia's airpower in northern Malaya as part of the Strategic Reserve. It highlights that, unlike the significant geo-political, strategic and economic motivations that drove both British colonialism and the post-war American presence in the region, Menzies' rationale for deploying a large Australian military force to Malaya was based on imprudent judgements and misguided reasoning. In other words, the decision to permanently deploy the majority of Australia's airpower to Malaya in 1955 was both a political and a strategic miscalculation. Indeed, in hindsight, Butterworth was Menzies' greatest 'Cold War' failure.

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[1] Andrea Benvenuti and David Martin Jones, "Engaging Southeast Asia? Labor's Regional Mythology and Australia's Military Withdrawal from Singapore and Malaysia, 1972-73", *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 12(4) (2010), p. 34.

Background

In the late 1940s, Stalin's Soviet Union began aggressively jostling with Western nations for political control in Eastern Europe. Tensions further escalated in August 1949 when the Soviet Union successfully detonated an atomic device and it increasingly appeared as though another global conflict was imminent. Concern immediately echoed through the halls of parliament in Canberra. The assessment that Australia's fate in any future global conflict would be decided on the European continent came quite naturally to a cohort of Australian politicians tinged with an unmistakably British hue. By the early 1950s, Australia's Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, was stressing that 'the possibilities of war are so real and so serious that Australia cannot, with justice to itself or its allies, grant itself a day more than three years in which to get ready'.[2] This policy position was in-line with the massive rearmament programs then currently underway in both the United Kingdom and the United States. Only a few short years after the end of the Second World War, Western governments began actively preparing themselves for a third global conflict.

Australia's participation in the Western effort against the Soviet Union was seen as inextricably linked to its own physical, political and economic security within the British Commonwealth. In resolving the specific role that Australian forces should play in any future conflict, the Defence Committee argued that, since the NATO countries would be able to repel an attack on Western Europe, and since the U.S. 7th Fleet was an insuperable force in the Pacific, Australia should deploy its forces to the Middle East.[3] Indeed, the area had a reassuring familiarity to both Australian war planners and the Australian public from previous wartime experiences. By the end of 1951, Cabinet had agreed to deploy the first Australian Army and Air Force contingents raised to the Middle East in any future war against the Soviet Union. But soon after this Australian commitment had been officially formalised there was a perceptible change in the focus of Australia's Western allies.

Only one year after having returned from London with the dramatic news of an imminent global war, Menzies returned from another trip overseas with almost the exact opposite impression from his counterparts in both London and Washington. In the middle of 1952, Menzies told senior cabinet officials that 'both in the United States and the United

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[2] L.J. Louis, *Menzies' Cold War: a reinterpretation* (Carlton North, Victoria: Red Rag Publications, 2001), p. 20.

[3] David Lee, *Search for Security: The Political Economy of Australia's Post-war Foreign and Defence Policy* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1995), p. 109.

Kingdom, much more emphasis is being placed on the role of South-East Asia'.[4] Underpinning this assessment was a strategic stalemate in Europe predicated largely on the destructive power of nuclear weapons. As a 1952 British Global Strategy Paper noted, Russia, in the event of overt Soviet aggression, would 'over the following weeks be subjected to such a devastating attack upon so high a proportion of her vital centres that she would be unlikely to survive as a power capable of waging a full scale war'.[5] The Soviets, perhaps, were making similar assessments about their Western counterparts in Europe. The advent of thermonuclear weapons in 1953 - weapons up to a thousand times more powerful than those dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki - further solidified the strategic stalemate in Europe.

So successful was NATO's nuclear deterrent to any overt military assault in Europe that the massive and costly rearmament programs undertaken by the United Kingdom and the United States were drastically reduced. Western strategy shifted to the 'long haul' with planners increasingly conscious of the economic impacts of their global defence policies. Very quickly, the Cold War had morphed from a war of potential annihilation in Europe to a global struggle for economic power and political control. With the epicentre of the Cold War in Europe 'cooling' in the early 1950s, heat transferred to other areas of the globe. As fate would have it, the region of the globe destined to become one of the most significant 'hot spots' in the Cold War was just to the north of Australia.

ANZAM Planning and the 'Songkhla Position'

When Menzies looked to the north in the early 1950s, he saw a Communist juggernaut in China, a bloodied France in Indochina, and an open pathway down the Malay Peninsula to Australia's northern doorstep. Indeed, the communist victory in China in 1949 had dramatically ignited concern amongst Western nations regarding the loss of all of Asia to the Communists. By January 1950, influential American journalist Stewart Alsop had written the first draft of what would become the foundation of Western unease in Southeast Asia,

> The head pin was China. It is down already. The two pins in the second row are Burma and Indochina. If they go, the three pins in the next row, Siam, Malaya, and Indonesia, are pretty sure to topple in their turn. And if all the rest of Asia goes, the

[4] David Lowe, *Menzies and the 'Great World Struggle': Australia's Cold War, 1948-1954* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 1999), p. 157.
[5] Hiroyuki Umetsu, "The Origins of the British Commonwealth Strategic Reserve: The UK Proposal to Revitalise ANZAM and the increased Australian Defence Commitment to Malaya", *Australian Journal of Politics and History,* 50(4) (2004), p. 512.

> resulting psychological, political and economic magnetism will almost certainly drag down the four pins of the fourth row, India, Pakistan, Japan and the Philippines.[6]

The so-called 'Domino Theory' was one of the most influential analytical paradigms driving Western intervention in Southeast Asia. It reflected Southeast Asia's importance in the Cold War, as well as the general view that little reliance could be placed on Asian countries to successfully resist communism by themselves.[7] As each successive communist victory rippled southwards from the Chinese mainland, the momentum gathered in prestige and confidence was expected to lay a platform for the consumption of the next hapless victim. Like falling dominoes, the small countries of Southeast Asia were expected to topple one after the next. With the ghosts of Japanese imperialism riding in the vanguard, the possibility of this seemingly inexorable Communist tide washing up on Australia's northern shores troubled Australian politicians.

Canberra quickly recognised the dire implications of the domino theory for Australian security. Echoes of the swift Japanese march south in 1942 reinforced the idea that the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian archipelago, rather than geographical barriers, were actually stepping stones to Australia's vast northern frontier. The Minister for External Affairs, Richard Casey, put the analogy of falling dominoes into an Australian perspective when he informed Parliament that,

> If the whole of Indo-China fell to the Communists, Thailand would be gravely exposed. If Thailand were to fall, the road would be open to Malaya and Singapore. From the Malay Peninsula the Communists could dominate the northern approaches to Australia and even cut our life-lines with Europe. These grave eventualities may seem long-range – but it is not impossible that they could happen within a reasonably short period of time.[8]

For British officials, the domino theory linked events in northeast Asia directly to the security of its colonial possessions in Hong Kong, Malaya and Singapore. Malcolm MacDonald, the British Commissioner General in Southeast Asia warned London that 'if Indochina is lost, then Siam and Burma will probably go the same way shortly afterwards. That will bring the power of International Communism to the border of Malaya'.[9]

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[6] Timothy N. Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam: US Military Aid to the Royal Lao Government 1955-1975* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 8.
[7] Lowe, *Menzies and the 'Great World Struggle'*, p. 163.
[8] T.B. Millar, *Australia in Peace and War: External Relations 1788-1977* (London: C.Hurst & Company, 1978), p. 258.
[9] Stephen Hugh Lee, *Outposts of Empire: Korea, Vietnam, and the Origins of the Cold War in Asia, 1949-1954* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), p. 43.

Although Australia and the United Kingdom had their own individual motivations for concern, the net effect of accepting the domino theory focused attention on the importance of defending the Malay Peninsula. Converging national self-interests combined with powerful traditional sentiments to reinforce and further strengthen Anglo-Australian collaboration in the ANZAM (Australia, New Zealand and Malayan Area) region. As the situation in Southeast Asia continued to deteriorate throughout the early 1950s, Malaya's strategic significance came to dominate the entire Anglo-Australian defence relationship.

On 29 June 1953, the United Kingdom Minister of Defence, Field Marshal Harold Alexander, wrote a letter to Menzies asking Australia to join with the United Kingdom in forming a Commonwealth Strategic Reserve in the Far East.[10] The broad conception of Alexander's plan proposed combining the Commonwealth forces already deployed to Malaya with the Australian and New Zealand contingents serving in Korea, once the latter had been released by the United Nations Command following the signing of an armistice agreement at Panmunjom in July 1953. According to Alexander, it was 'essential to take steps to guard against any new aggression in the Far East generally, and particularly in Southeast Asia'.[11] Forming a joint Strategic Reserve, he assured Menzies, 'would effectively safeguard our Commonwealth interests' in the region during the Cold War. Alexander's invitation, however, came with one very important condition, lest Menzies decide to not commit Australian forces.[12] 'There are limits to what we can do', Alexander wrote, 'we cannot form an adequate Reserve on our own'.[13]

The limitations referred to by Alexander were many, varied and mounting. In terms of the resources required to effectively police and defend a vast overseas empire, the loss of India in 1949 had deprived the British of a large pool of manpower which had to be increasingly sourced from elsewhere if Britain's claims to global influence were to continue to carry any weight into the future.[14] This loss of manpower, combined with the dire economic circumstances which had left London virtually bankrupt in the wake of the Second World War, forced Britain to focus on encouraging its loyal dominions of Australia and New Zealand to assist in keeping the remnants of its fading empire in Southeast Asia a going

[10] Letter, UK Minister of Defence to Australian Prime Minister, dated 29 June 1953, 121 – 207/A/1, Australian War Memorial, Canberra (hereafter AWM).
[11] *Ibid*.
[12] *Ibid*.
[13] *Ibid*.
[14] For a discussion on manpower issues in the British Army at the end of the Second World War, see S.J. Ball, "A Rejected Strategy: The Army and National Service 1946-1960", *The British Army: Manpower and Society into the Twenty-First Century*, ed. H.E.W. Strachan (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000).

concern. These factors led to more emphasis being placed on concepts like 'mutual co-operation' and 'Commonwealth camaraderie'. By encouraging Australia to accept a larger responsibility for defending Commonwealth interests in Southeast Asia, Britain hoped to minimize the costs of its overseas territories in Malaya and Singapore while at the same time preserving some façade of traditional empire. Alexander's request to Menzies in 1953 reflected this new spirit of British collaboration.

Initially, Menzies hesitated in accepting Alexander's invitation. If the events of the Pacific War had taught Australian officials anything, it was that the United States was the only power in the region capable of defending Australia's vast northern coastline. Recognition of U.S. supremacy in the region however, did little to open up the corridors of the Pentagon to Australian war planners. As David Lowe has noted, the hard lesson learned in Canberra during the early 1950s was the uncooperative attitude of the Americans in Southeast Asia, 'who refused to provide any guidelines which might better define Australia's task'.[15]

In many respects, the reason for the distinctly vague attitude of the Americans stemmed from their desire to avoid a repeat of the costly and ultimately futile ground operations of the Korean War. Not foreseeing their ultimate destiny in Vietnam, the Americans developed the sabre-rattling 'New Look' policy which relied on the twin tenets of 'mobile striking power' and 'massive retaliation', while at the same time avoiding the commitment of any specific ground forces in Southeast Asia. In terms of joint defence planning, New Look's focus on nuclear threats, flexibility and a distinct aversion to any commitment of ground troops ultimately prevented Menzies from engaging in any serious defence planning with military officials from the United States in the early 1950s.

In June 1953, in parallel with Alexander's proposal for a Strategic Reserve, an ANZAM Defence Committee was established in Melbourne with Australian officials assuming the leading roles. The Committee consisted of the Australian Defence Committee (the Secretary of Defence and the three Chiefs of Staff), along with the UK and NZ Chiefs of Staff who were nominally represented by the heads of their respective Joint Service Liaison Staff in Melbourne.[16] Agreed ANZAM plans and proposals were to be submitted to the three

[15] Lowe, *Menzies and the 'Great World Struggle'*, p. 177.
[16] Industrial Mobilisation Course, Lecture by Australian Chief of Air Staff, July 1957, A2031 28/1957, NAA.

governments, each of which retained the sovereign control of its own policy and forces in the region.

The ANZAM defence machinery in Melbourne immediately occupied itself with the business of planning to defend the Malay Peninsula from the looming threat of international communism. The ANZAM Defence Committee understood the situation in stark terms - failure to prevent a communist takeover of the region would have had chilling consequences, not only for Australia's physical security but also for the delicate political and economic balance of the entire global Cold War struggle. As such, throughout all of 1954, plans to implement an effective stand against communism in Southeast Asia consumed much of the resources of the ANZAM Defence Committee.

ANZAM planning proceeded during this period from one fundamental assumption, namely that Indochina would eventually fall to the Communists. The momentum of a communist victory in Indochina was expected to very rapidly pull down Thailand, bringing a surging communist menace to Malaya's northern border. In the event of Thailand succumbing to communist influence, ANZAM planners emphasised the need to immediately seize what was called the 'Songkhla position', a narrow waist of the Malay Peninsula just north of the Thai-Malay border called the Kra Isthmus.[17]

A central backbone of thickly forested hills rising to approximately 7,000 feet dominates the majority of the Malay Peninsula.[18] The first location at which this hilly spine flattens out is just north of the Thai-Malay land border around the town of Songkhla. It also just happens to be the narrowest waist of the entire Malay Peninsula. The concept of holding the Songkhla position was not new to British military planners. In 1940-41, British war planners had selected the area around Songkhla in southern Thailand as the most appropriate site on which to make a stand against a southward surge by Imperial Japan. Although never implemented, ANZAM planners considered these Second World War plans, codenamed Irony and Ringlet, as the most appropriate models upon which to organise a new defence against any potential southward march by communist forces in Southeast Asia.

ANZAM planners developed two operational plans, codenamed 'Hermes' and 'Warrior', for the occupation and defence of the Songkhla position. Operation Hermes, the

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[17] Peter Edwards with Gregory Pemberton, *Crises and Commitments: The Politics and Diplomacy of Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948-1965* (North Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992), p. 164.
[18] Karl Hack, *Defence and Decolonisation in Southeast Asia: Britain, Malaya and Singapore 1941-1968* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001), p. 181.

more limited of the two plans, called for two infantry divisions supported by 248 aircraft and 68 naval vessels to swiftly occupy the Songkhla area and defend it unaided for at least a month.[19] The intention was to seal off Malaya against any threat posed by a communist Thailand. ANZAM planners assumed that Thailand would readily succumb to subversion and rapidly commit to positive collaboration with communist forces.[20] Hermes planned a rapid defensive reaction in case the Thai Government, in the interests of self-preservation, pledged allegiance to communism without overt resistance. The British in particular, had not forgotten the betrayal of the Second World War when Thailand's leaders negotiated with the invading army of Japan instead of actively resisting their aggressive advance. In order not to suffer the same fate as in 1942, ANZAM plans called for the immediate occupation of the Songkhla position as soon as Thailand fell to the Communists. If Chinese or North Vietnamese forces intervened to assist Thai forces, then Operation Hermes would expand into Operation Warrior. Operation Warrior called for a further four infantry divisions, a further 436 aircraft and a further 154 naval vessels.[21]

In order to prepare to occupy and defend the Songkhla position against attack, ANZAM planners considered that 'there should be in existence plans for the deployment of trained and equipped forces for the reinforcement of Malaya' as well as the construction of 'all the facilities necessary for their operational and logistics support'.[22] One of the facilities required for any eventual implementation of Operation Hermes or Operation Warrior was a large airbase in northern Malaya. Because a small RAF (Royal Air Force) airstrip already existed at Butterworth on the northwest coast, its upgrade and reconstruction was the obvious first step in preparing the necessary air defence arrangements. In addition to Butterworth, ANZAM officials planned to redevelop and upgrade two further airfields on the northeast coast at Gong Kedak and Kuantan.[23] These plans constituted the original impetus to establish a RAAF base on the northwest coast of the Malay Peninsula.

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[19] Damien Marc Fenton, "SEATO and the Defence of South East Asia 1955-1965" (Ph.D., thesis, UNSW, 2006), p. 109.
[20] UK Chiefs of Staff Committee report - 'Requirements for Airfields in Malaya', 6 January 1954, A5799 88/1954, NAA.
[21] Fenton, "SEATO and the Defence of South East Asia 1955-1965", p. 109.
[22] Strategic Planning for Commonwealth Defence – Plans, "Probable attack on Malaya", A816 14/301/394, NAA.
[23] The intention was to develop Alor Star, Gong Kedak and Kuantan airfields to make them adequate for modern jet aircraft each with one all-weather paved runway of 2,000 yards, a taxi track, and dispersed standings for 16 aircraft, a bulk fuel installation for 60,000 gallons, an elementary flying control tower and a water supply, see A1196 42/501/291, NAA.

The sheer magnitude of Operations Hermes and Warrior highlighted several deficiencies in Commonwealth planning. Of primary concern was the lack of adequate manpower. Just exactly how ANZAM nations planned to raise, equip and deploy six infantry divisions to Malaya remained unanswered. Furthermore, the huge number of additional aircraft and naval vessels required by Operation Warrior was clearly beyond the means of Australia and New Zealand, both of whom doubted the resolution of the British to send the necessary reinforcements in an emergency.[24] In purely military terms, analysis of ANZAM plans led to one simple conclusion. If Communist China intervened in any attack on northern Malaya, the support of the United States was essential. Without it, ANZAM plans merely emphasized the insufficient resources available to the Commonwealth in Southeast Asia to effectively defend the Malay Peninsula by themselves.

Growing concern over the intentions of the United States in the region began to dominate the thoughts of Menzies. Much to Menzies frustration, however, Washington continued to prove reluctant to engage in detailed military planning in Southeast Asia in the early 1950s. With seemingly few other options available, Menzies continued to focus on ANZAM plans for the defence of the Malay Peninsula. As the Western position in Southeast Asia continued to deteriorate and with little indication as to the extent to which America would eventually support South Vietnam in terms of men, money, materials and additional war risks, Menzies, on 12 October 1954, forwarded a letter to the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom confirming Australia's agreement to commit military resources to a Commonwealth Strategic Reserve in Malaya and Singapore.[25]

On 4 February 1955, Churchill chaired a meeting at 10 Downing Street, attended by Menzies and the New Zealand Prime Minister, Sidney Holland, to discuss the implementation of ANZAM plans for the defence of Malaya.[26] Although British officials continued to push for the immediate formation of a Strategic Reserve, Menzies remained steadfast in his insistence of U.S. support for the plans prior to determining any specific commitment of Australian forces. Menzies argued that ANZAM plans for the defence of Malaya could not be successful against a major overt attack by the Communist powers in the region without American assistance. Consequently, Menzies told the assembled ANZAM representatives that Australia would only support British Commonwealth plans to defend Malaya if the

[24] Fenton, "SEATO and the Defence of South East Asia 1955-1965", p. 111.
[25] Letter, Australian Prime Minister to United Kingdom High Commissioner, 12 October 1954, A816 14/301/672, National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA).
[26] Peter Edwards with Gregory Pemberton, *Crises and Commitments*, p. 167.

United States government endorsed those same plans.[27] Menzies' determination to cement Australia's 'forward defence' in Malaya in conjunction with both Commonwealth forces and the United States thus clashed with Britain's more limited focus. Undeterred, Menzies travelled directly from London to Washington with the express purpose of discussing the security of Southeast Asia with the Eisenhower administration.

Soon after arriving in Washington, Menzies set about soliciting U.S. support for ANZAM planning in Malaya. In a meeting with Admiral Arthur Radford, the Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, on 18 March 1955, Menzies outlined the Commonwealth's assessment of the situation in Southeast Asia. Should the situation deteriorate further, Menzies informed Radford, the last line of defence for Malaya against a major land attack was the Songkhla position. Because of the absolute necessity of maintaining Malaya as a base of Western influence, ANZAM countries had decided to immediately establish a Strategic Reserve on the Malay Peninsula to deter all forms of Communist aggression. Following this brief outline Menzies prodded Radford for a reaction,

> It is in the Australian view essential that an understanding should be reached as soon as possible among the ANZAM governments and the United States upon the course to be adopted in order to secure the position if Siam should turn Communist in the Cold War.[28]

While appreciating Australia's traditional association as a member of the British Commonwealth, United States authorities were very apprehensive about focusing narrowly on the defence of the Malay Peninsula. Admiral Radford agreed with the vital importance of holding Malaya but stressed to Menzies that 'the defence of Malaya should not be approached as an independent problem but rather in the context of the defence of South-East Asia generally'.[29] Radford further pointed out that the situation of an overt attack upon Malaya itself would simply not arise because should such an act of aggression appear

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[27] Prior to departing for London and Washington in February 1955 the Australian Defence Committee provided a situation report for the Prime Minister. The Committee concluded that 'if Siam turns Communist, it is … militarily essential that the … Songkhla position should be seized immediately to prevent its occupation by the Communist forces. The most important result of this action would be that, in the event of war, the ANZAM powers would have in their possession the final position from which Malaya could be defended … Failure by the ANZAM powers and the United States to approve of such an operation being carried out, should the need for it arise, would mean that Malaya could not be defended if attacked in strength and the forces deployed in the area would almost certainly be lost … before further steps are taken to commit Australian forces to Malaya, the three ANZAM governments, and subsequently the United States of America, should agree that the operation will be carried through it the need for it should arise.' This brief accurately reflects both Menzies commitment to ANZAM plans to occupy the Songkhla position and his belief in the need for the United States to support such an operation, A5954 1563/2, NAA.

[28] Notes on discussions in Washington, A5954 1563/1, NAA.

[29] *Ibid*.

probable, the United States would counter-attack Communist countries to such a devastating degree as to reduce, if not eliminate entirely, the threat to Malaya.[30] So while Radford explicitly recognised the need to defend Malaya, he stressed to Menzies the importance of not limiting Commonwealth defence planning in the region to just the Malay Peninsula.

Before returning to Australia, Menzies held further meetings with the U.S. President and the U.S. Secretary of State. In his meeting with the President, Menzies explained that although he appreciated U.S. reluctance to earmark specific forces for Southeast Asia or engage in detailed military planning for the region, his domestic position would be greatly enhanced if he could say that 'all that Australia would do would be done in cooperation with … the US'.[31] Eisenhower, although sympathetic, steadfastly refused to be drawn on the issue. In his meeting with the U.S. Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, Menzies again asked whether the United States would agree to publically pledge its support for the ANZAM plan under which Australia would commit forces to Malaya.[32] Like Eisenhower, Dulles would not be drawn into any specific endorsement of the defence of Malaya. Instead, he agreed to issue a joint statement indicating that 'the United States considers the defence of South-East Asia, of which Malaya is an integral part, to be of very great importance'.[33] No amount of subtle rejection however, could dissuade Menzies from his firm belief that the United States would support ANZAM when, not if, Indochina and Thailand eventually succumbed to communism. Despite indications of U.S. reluctance to support ANZAM plans for the defence of Malaya, Menzies left Washington with the mistaken impression that some form of agreement had been reached.

On his return to Canberra Menzies informed his Cabinet that he had secured 'general agreement that the US would cooperate in the plans for the defence of Malaya'.[34] As such, Menzies publically announced, on 1 April 1955, that Australia 'will participate in the establishment in Malaya … of a strategic reserve in which the United Kingdom and New Zealand will participate'.[35] In effect, this announcement formally approved the establishment of a RAAF base on the northwest coast of the Malay Peninsula at Butterworth. On 7 May

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[30] *Ibid*.
[31] Matthew Jones, "The Radford Bombshell: Anglo-Australian-US Relations, Nuclear Weapons and the Defence of South East Asia, 1954-57", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 27:4, p. 646.
[32] Lee, *Search for Security*, p. 131.
[33] *Ibid*., p. 131.
[34] Peter Edwards with Gregory Pemberton, *Crises and Commitments*, p. 168.
[35] Alan Renouf, *The Frightened Country* (South Melbourne: The Macmillan Company, 1979), p. 176.

1955, an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* accurately depicted the original focus of the Malayan deployment when it reported the news to the Australian public,

> If it came to war, and the Chinese armies marched south, it would be idle to talk of major ground resistance north of the Kra Isthmus. It is there, and only there, that the allied forces could hope to check the advance of the Communist masses … The defence of the Kra Isthmus in the event of war is the true role of the 'strategic reserve' of which the Australian and New Zealand forces will ultimately form a substantial part.[36]

'United Action' and the birth of SEATO

Like their British and Australian counterparts, Washington officials envisioned a chain reaction of falling dominoes in Southeast Asia following the communist victory in China in 1949. Declarations from Washington on the strategic significance of communist China's potential influence throughout the region increasingly began to describe the situation in such metaphors as a 'chain reaction', a 'cork in a bottle', and a 'finger in the dyke'.[37] 'You have a row of dominoes set up', President Eisenhower explained in April 1954, 'you knock over the first one, and … the last one … will go over very quickly. So you could have the beginning of a disintegration … the loss of Indochina, of Burma, of Thailand, of the Peninsula, and Indonesia … you are talking really about millions and millions and millions of people'.[38] The contiguous borders of Southeast Asia, the Pentagon believed, made the fall of the region to Communism inevitable once Communist forces gained control of Indochina.[39]

In the lead up to the final climactic battle between French Union Forces and the Viet Minh at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954, the United States began agitating for a combined Western effort in Indochina. On 29 March 1954, Dulles publicly called for 'United Action' by Britain, France and the United States to save Indochina from communist domination. 'I feel confident', Dulles wrote some weeks later, 'that the communists are prepared to stop wherever we are prepared to stand', however, 'that stand must be a united one to be effective'.[40] Dulles aimed to make China and the Soviet Union realise that further Communist aggression in the region would be met by a determined and unified Western

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[36] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 May 1955.
[37] Peter Lowe, *Contending with Nationalism and Communism: British Policy towards Southeast Asia, 1945-1965* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 138.
[38] Paul Ham, *Vietnam: The Australian War* (Sydney: Harper Collins, 2008), p. 42.
[39] *Ibid.*, p. 42.
[40] Lee, *Outposts of Empire*, p. 241.

response. In a personal letter on 5 April 1954, Eisenhower informed Churchill that the threat of 'United Action' would work, but that it should also not be a bluff.[41] Though large ground forces were not envisaged, any coalition must be, 'willing to join the fight if necessary'.[42] In calling for 'United Action', the United States was in fact calling for a determined stand to be made by a Western Coalition in Indochina.

Britain and Australia were both reluctant to support America's more risk-oriented approach to containing Chinese communism. If one idea dominated British thinking on Indochina in early 1954, it was the idea that negotiation with the Communists was essential. Acutely aware of the dangers of escalation, British officials believed that threatening China was far less preferable than manoeuvring for some form of political détente with Mao's regime in Beijing. This course of action conformed to the general British strategy of constraint in which the creation of a modus vivendi with the Communists, without the need to resort to costly military confrontations, assumed primary importance. British officials planned to pursue every conceivable avenue available to avoid expending valuable defence resources in areas of peripheral interest. As such, Churchill told the Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Radford, that he was simply not in a position 'to convince the people of England that they should make any investment of their limited resources to hold Indochina when a few years before they themselves had given up India.'[43]

For their part, Australian officials largely agreed with the more limited containment strategy of the British. From Menzies' point of view, it was simply not in Australia's interests to provoke a major conflict with China and the Soviet Union in Southeast Asia at a time when a political settlement to the Indochina crisis was being negotiated at a Conference in Geneva. Additionally, as a most devoted disciple of Imperial solidarity, Menzies still felt obliged to align British and Australian policy in the region. Australian intervention in Indochina without British support, Menzies told U.S. officials, was 'a completely impossible proposition for Australia to promote for it would be the first cleavage in Commonwealth unity.'[44] The determination of the British and Australian governments to negotiate a settlement to the First Indochina War acted to prevent the United States from organizing a military coalition to intervene in support of the beleaguered French Union forces. The

[41] Hack, *Defence and Decolonisation in Southeast Asia*, p. 169.
[42] *Ibid.*, p. 169.
[43] Lee, *Outposts of Empire*, p. 225.
[44] David Goldsworthy, *Losing the Blanket: Australia and the End of Britain's Empire* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002), p. 19.

Commonwealth's reluctance to act thus limited the ability of the United States to implement an aggressive military containment strategy in Vietnam in 1954.[45] Britain and Australia rejected allied unity in Southeast Asia at exactly the same time that the United States considered it invaluable.

Despite the disappointment of 'United Action', the United States and Britain continued to pursue the formation of a coalition for the defence of Southeast Asia. The Eisenhower administration principally sought the alliance as a means of making future military intervention in Indochina politically palatable to his domestic audience in the United States.[46] In pushing for the establishment of a military alliance, Eisenhower hoped to condition, in advance, both domestic public opinion and a U.S. Congress traditionally reluctant to endorse unilateral military action. If the United States was indeed fighting for the 'free world' in Southeast Asia, as Eisenhower and Dulles had so often said they were, then both Congress and the American public would need convincing that the 'free world' was prepared to contribute their fair share. Despite Washington's frustration with the failure of 'United Action', Dulles and his British counterpart cobbled together a rather motley coalition in the ashes of the French withdrawal from Indochina in 1954. Ostensibly aimed at halting the further spread of communism in Southeast Asia, the South East Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO) first met in Manila in September 1954.

In purely military terms, SEATO offered ANZAM planners little further insight into U.S. planning for the defence of Southeast Asia. Dulles confirmed this when he informed the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that SEATO had resulted in 'no material changes in the military planning of the United States'.[47] Eisenhower had not altered his unwillingness to commit ground forces to the region and there was no reason to believe that 'New Look' threats, even under the guise of SEATO, would deter further communist activity in Indochina. In fact, official U.S. intelligence assessments about the prospects for South Vietnam's survival in late 1954 and early 1955, in the very months Menzies was formalising Australia's commitment to the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve, were overwhelmingly pessimistic.[48] As Dulles remarked to the National Security Council in December 1954,

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[45] Lee, *Outposts of Empire*, p. 229.
[46] Henry W. Jr. Brands, "From ANZUS to SEATO: United States Strategic Policy towards Australia and New Zealand, 1952-54", *The International History Review*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (1987), p. 265.
[47] Gordon Greenwood & Norman Harper, eds., *Australia in World Affairs, 1956-1960* (Melbourne: F.W. Cheshire, 1963), p. 193.
[48] Alan J. Levine, *The United States and the Struggle for Southeast Asia, 1945-1975* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1995), p. 81.

Indochina was 'very vulnerable' and in the bigger scheme of things 'not really of great significance to us other than from the point of view of prestige'.[49] Even after the formation of SEATO, ANZAM military assessments of a potential communist force of the Thai-Malay boarder by 1956 remained eminently valid.

In purely political terms, SEATO did mark a transition in U.S. planning for Southeast Asia. For the first time, the United States had formally accepted responsibility for the defence of SEATO's Asian members, one of which was Thailand. SEATO also implicitly associated U.S. military prestige with the security of Laos, Cambodia and Southern Vietnam, even though these nations were prohibited from formally joining the organisation under the terms of the Geneva Agreements. Although the military situation in Southeast Asia remained unchanged, the formation of SEATO announced a major juncture in America's political engagement with the region. SEATO represented a formal manifestation of American determination to save Southeast Asia from further Communist encroachment. As soon as SEATO emerged as an effective organisation on 19 February 1955, when the last of the signatories had deposited their instruments of ratification at Manila, it assumed primary importance as the preferred conduit for American participation in the security of the region. Although Menzies did not realise it at the time, SEATO's emergence signalled the end of ANZAM planning for the defence of northern Malaya.

The Radford Bombshell[50]

On his visit to Washington in early 1955, Menzies had agreed to forward the details of ANZAM plans for the defence of the Malay Peninsula to the Pentagon. By doing so, Menzies sought to gain official support from the Eisenhower administration for the occupation of the Songkhla position in the event of a communist assault on northern Malaya. After all, ANZAM planning focused on Songkhla provided the fundamental rationale for Menzies agreeing to contribute Australian forces to the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve. Understanding that some form of tacit agreement had already been reached during Menzies' Washington visit, Australian officials remained relatively unconcerned about the outcome of the Pentagon's review. As far as they were concerned, an appropriate role for Australian

[49] *Ibid*., p. 81.
[50] For further details see Matthew Jones, "The Radford Bombshell: Anglo-Australian-US Relations, Nuclear Weapons and the Defence of South East Asia, 1954-57", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 27:4 (2005): pp. 636-662.

forces in the Cold War in Southeast Asia had now been found. Reflecting this relative calm before the storm, the ANZAM Joint Planning Committee noted in May 1955 that,

> It appears unlikely at this juncture that the United States review will result in any variation of assessed force requirements of sufficient magnitude to have any substantial effect on logistic and infrastructure requirements.[51]

These Australian assessments woefully misjudged America's resolve to persist in Indochina. Two months later, in July 1955, just as Australian forces were beginning to arrive in Penang, the U.S. dropped a bombshell on Australia's plans to permanently deploy military forces to Malaya.

In July 1955, the Australian Ambassador in Washington, Percy Spender, officially received the Pentagon's assessment of ANZAM's plans for the defence of Malaya. In it, America's top military official, the Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Arthur Radford, formally disabused Menzies and his ministers of their expectations regarding U.S. support for ANZAM planning.[52] Although ANZAM had never been particularly popular at the Pentagon, Radford's assessment of 'Hermes' and 'Warrior' was downright scathing. These ANZAM plans, Radford replied, were unrealistic and fanciful. He pointed out that ANZAM forces alone would be quite incapable of defending Malaya should Communist forces gain control of the rest of Southeast Asia.[53] The United States, Radford continued, simply could not endorse plans which envisaged the loss of so much territory. With the ink not yet dry on the SEATO treaty, Radford suggested that the Commonwealth instead support the vulnerable nations to the north of Malaya, including Thailand, a fellow member nation of SEATO.

The message for Canberra was clear. The United States was only prepared to engage in planning for the defence of Southeast Asia within the SEATO framework. Because SEATO indirectly involved the defence of Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam, Radford's message clearly demonstrated U.S. determination to stand against communism as far to the

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[51] ANZAM Joint Administrative Planning Committee out-of-session report, 19 May 1955, A5954 1460/3, NAA.
[52] A former carrier commander in World War II, Admiral Radford was a forthright apostle of air power and the 'New Look'. His views of American intervention in Indochina largely reflected those of Secretary of State Dulles. In 1954 Radford presented a policy paper on the consequences of a Communist victory in Indochina which included the prediction that the conquest of all Southeast Asia would 'inevitably follow'. Further long terms effects were predicted to include the 'gravest threats' to 'fundamental' United States security interests in the Far East and 'even to the stability and security of Europe'. Radford also envisaged the unavoidable loss of Japan should the Communists prevail in Indochina. Radford was thus extremely unlikely to personally endorse plans to withdraw to Malaya and leave the rest of Southeast Asia to the Communists without a fight, see Barbara Tuchman, *The March of Folly* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1984), p. 261.
[53] Fenton, "SEATO and the Defence of South East Asia 1955-1965", p. 119.

north of Malaya as possible. Menzies fully understood that ANZAM plans for the defence of Malaya were completely invalid without U.S. backing. The Radford bombshell instantly rendered ANZAM planning obsolete. The very foundation of Australia's commitment to Malaya lay in ruins. As one Australian official lamented,

> Radford's reply had removed all reality and purpose from our defence planning and has placed the Australian Government in a position where a decision to send an expeditionary force to South East Asia, including Malaya, would be hard to defend.[54]

Although ANZAM planning had been more or less rendered invalid, the domestic and international humiliation that would accompany a complete reversal of policy obviated any thought of cancelling Australia's military deployment to Malaya. In a Cold War in which prestige was considered a valuable national commodity, indecision and confusion were the concomitants of chaos and instability. Menzies had already publically announced and, in the face of venomous domestic opposition, continued to justify the decision to deploy Australian forces to Malaya. There was simply no politically palatable way for him to reverse course now. The political capital invested by Menzies in announcing the Malayan commitment actually became one of the major justifications for continuing with the deployment. The blow to ANZAM however, was significant. The immediate focus, instead of proudly trumpeting the merits of the Malaya deployment, became a matter of salvaging as much as possible from Australia's military presence on the Peninsula.

In the wake of Admiral Radford's reply, the ANZAM Defence Committee acknowledged that 'there is now a need to review ANZAM planning for the defence of the Malayan Area'.[55] A report by the UK Joint Planning Staff of 14 March 1956 similarly noted, 'it has become apparent that compared with SEATO, ANZAM suffers from certain limitations', one being that the United States did not agree with the ANZAM concept and therefore 'there is little chance of ANZAM alone being able to fulfil its strategic function in war'.[56] Although SEATO had no allocation of forces, no central command structure, and its political cohesion was still regarded as somewhat fragile, the organisation had the one vital ingredient that ANZAM did not; it had the full support of the United States. Consequently, SEATO was now the pre-eminent mechanism for co-ordinating Western defence in Southeast Asia against any future Communist aggression.

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[54] L.D. MacLean, *ANZIM to ANZUK – An Historical Outline of ANZAM* (Canberra: Department of Defence, 1992), p. 12.
[55] ANZAM Defence Committee notes on Defence of Malaya, A1838 TS691/3 Part 5, NAA.
[56] Report by the UK Joint Planning Staff, 14 March 1956, A816 11/301/1051, NAA.

For all its bleakness, Radford's reply offered one glimmer of hope to Menzies. Although military planning for the defence of Southeast Asia would henceforth have to be formulated within SEATO rather than ANZAM, the dispatch of Australian forces to Malaya, if regarded as a strategic reserve available for SEATO purposes, could still enable Australian forces to integrate effectively with U.S. planning for the region. By regarding Australia's commitment to Malaya as simply a base from which to operate in conjunction with U.S. forces in Southeast Asia, Menzies could still salvage something following Radford's setback. Completely at odds with the original premise underpinning the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve, and unlikely to garner enthusiastic support from British and New Zealand partners, Australia's strategic interests dictated that the focus of Australian forces in Malaya transition from ANZAM to SEATO.

On 4 April 1957, barely a month after a Canberra meeting of SEATO, Menzies tabled a statement on defence in the House of Representatives. As the immediate threat of global war became increasingly improbable, he argued, Australia's role was to integrate her limited arsenal of conventional weapons as effectively as possible in conjunction with her allies in SEATO, ANZUS[57] and ANZAM to prevent aggression in Southeast Asia.[58] SEATO, Menzies continued,

> represents the overall predominant conception, … not only the forces we can deploy ahead of war, as we now do in and around the Malayan Peninsula, but also the forces which can be quickly used in the event of war and which would thereafter be powerfully reinforced from our partly trained reserves of strength, will be constantly related to SEATO defence.[59]

[57] The ANZUS treaty between Australia, New Zealand and the United States was signed on 1 September 1951 in San Francisco, and came into force on 29 April 1952, the day after the Japanese Peace Treaty was ratified. The ANZUS Treaty can be thought of as a promise of American protection for Australia and New Zealand against, originally, a resurgent Japan. At the time of its inception, the ANZUS pact was not viewed by U.S. or Australian military officials as an instrument of closer Australian-American military co-operation. In fact officials in both the United States and Australia readily accepted Australia's responsibilities in the event of a global conflict as being primarily to assist Britain in Europe. Indeed, for America the main strategic value it placed on ANZUS in the early 1950s was in allowing Australia to meet its Commonwealth commitments in the Middle East. So although the ANZUS Treaty was the first tentative attempt to formulate a regional security guarantee with the United States, Australia's strategic posture in the early 1950s remained closely tied to its traditional British orientation. Only much later, as the military effectiveness of both ANZAM and SEATO began to fade, did ANZUS assume its dominant position; see Gregory Pemberton, *All The Way: Australia's road to Vietnam* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987), p. 13.
[58] Greenwood and Harper, *Australia in World Affairs*, p. 194.
[59] *Ibid*., p. 194.

Australian defence policy had transitioned from ANZAM to SEATO. With the RAAF base at Butterworth yet to be completed at the time of Menzies' statement, the operational focus of the base now needed to make a similar transition.

Malay Neutralism and Butterworth

Although Malayan independence was still several years away when Menzies announced the deployment of Australian forces to Malaya in April 1955, there was already a strong undercurrent of distrust and unrest among the general population concerning the presence of Commonwealth troops. Many of the principal Cold War axioms treasured by the West held little interest for the populations of Asian nations. In the month Menzies announced Australia's historic deployment of forces to Malaya, a conference of Afro-Asian countries met at Bandung, Indonesia. The Bandung Conference, sometimes referred to as the birthplace of Third World Neutralism, solidified one key sentiment among emerging Asian nationalist movements. In addition to condemning colonialism in all its manifestations as 'an evil which should be speedily brought to an end', the Bandung Conference also declared that there should be 'abstention from the use or arrangement for collective defence to serve the particular interests of any of the big powers'.[60] It was an explicit declaration by 28 African and Asian nations that their national aspirations of independence did not coincide with the dominant East/West Cold War cleavage.[61]

The Conference reflected the chasm between the foreign policy priorities of Asian nations emerging from centuries of colonialism and the stubborn bipolar mentality of Western Cold War warriors.[62] The growing tendency towards Indian and Indonesian inspired neutralism in many Southeast Asian nations viewed Cold War associations with deep suspicion. They were particularly wary that the fading European global empires were simply being replaced by a new form of imperial dominance in which their political self-determination once again suffered at the hands of the West's more pressing financial and strategic concerns. In rejecting the politics of the Cold War, the Bandung Conference signalled the intention of Asian nations to assume control of their own futures free from the pressures of direct association with either the Soviet or American political blocs. The

[60] C.S. Jha, *From Bandung to Tashkent: Glimpses of India's Foreign Policy* (London: Sangam Books, 1983), p. 71.
[61] Michael Yahuda, *The International Politics of the Asia-Pacific, 1945-1995* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 45.
[62] Anita Inder Singh, *The Limits of British Influence: South Asia and the Anglo-American Relationship, 1947-1956* (London: Pinter Publishes, 1993), p. 184.

essential thrust of the conference promoted the idea of thinking and acting independently in international affairs. The end result was that a neutral 'third way' became the template for emerging nations seeking to embrace a non-ideological, universal and inclusive post-colonial identity.

Both the message and historic nature of the Bandung Conference struck a chord with the population of Malaya. 'The independence we shall soon attain', wrote one Malay journalist in late 1955, 'will be useless if such foreign troops still remain in our country … Our political independence will have no meaning at all if that independence does not include independence in … defence'.[63] The underlying sentiment was clear. The ethnically diverse population of Malaya, seeking to establish a separate and distinctive national identity, viewed the continued presence of foreign troops on Malay territory as incompatible with full independence. Foreign troops materially and symbolically represented the partial character of independence being granted by the British in which matters of defence and foreign affairs emerged as international negotiations in post-independent Malaya rather than wholly domestic judgements. The ideal situation as far as the general population was concerned, was for no further Commonwealth forces to be stationed in Malaya.[64]

The transition from the narrow ANZAM focus on the defence of the Peninsula at Songkhla to the regional security framework of SEATO had two important consequences for neutralist sentiment in Malaya. First, the regional Cold War focus of the U.S. led SEATO alliance was utterly antagonistic to the dominant sentiments of Third World Neutralism popular among the Malay population. A global alliance of largely Western forces paternally protecting the vulnerable interests of small Asian nations in the infancy of political development too closely resembled the colonial past from which the region was just emerging. In this regard, many politicians in India, Indonesia and indeed Malaya characterised SEATO as just another instrument of Western influence. In conjunction with

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[63] *Utusan Melayu*, 15 Nov 1955, A816 19/321/35, NAA.

[64] This attitude is highlighted in a number of cables from the Australian High Commission in Kuala Lumpur back to Australia in late 1955 which canvassed coverage of the Australian troops' arrival in both the local news and political parties. For example, Cablegram 1., from Aust. High Commission KL to Min EA of 1st Oct 1955, noted local press reports that the Labour Party of Malaya, at two day annual Delegates Conference, beginning 1 October discussed a resolution that stationing of Australian troops here is 'an attempt not only to prolong colonial rule by unnecessary interfering in our internal affairs but also to use this country as a battlefield for defence of Australia'. Similarly, Cablegram 862. from Aust. High Commission KL to Mins EA, Defence, Army, PM of 14th November 1955, reported that 'a meeting of 100 delegates of Singapore UMNO Branch yesterday called for ban of entry of Australian troops into Malaya. The resolution, which was passed by a large majority after a stormy debate for two hours, and had previously been tabled at UMNO Conference on 2nd October but was withdrawn only on Rahman's opposition …'. For all cablegrams see A1209 – 1957/4283, NAA.

this continued wariness of further domination, an underlying suspicion that the protection of Western interests rather than any altruistic inspiration to act on behalf of the Asian people motivated Western concerns. SEATO's rhetoric of uniting to defend 'freedom' and the 'free world' proved difficult to accept for Asian populations sceptical of just what the 'free world' actually meant for them and their future.

The emergence of SEATO had a second major consequence for Malaya's neutralist outlook. SEATO's protection provided a certain ideological space in which neutralism could flourish. If communism was indeed threatening Malaya's northern border, then the ideologically liberal aspects of neutralism would have been crushed under the weight of some very hard Cold War choices. Remaining non-aligned in the Cold War was obviously far easier while the frontline of the conflict remained a relatively safe distance away. SEATO's very existence was predicated on America's determination to support Southern Vietnam as a bulwark against further communist expansion in Southeast Asia. By refocusing Western interests on the countries to Malaya's north, SEATO created a buffer of safety behind which a more parochial Malay neutralist voice could emerge. The Malay population was thus afforded the luxury of rejecting SEATO precisely because SEATO provided them with the necessary security to do so. SEATO thus both provoked and nourished Malayan neutralism at the same time.

It was into this seething restlessness for Malayan independence that Menzies, in April 1955, committed Australian forces for a final stand against a southward surging communist Army. As late as February 1955, the British continued to assure Menzies that, due to ongoing civil conflict and inter-racial tension, constitutional advance in Malaya was 'bound to be slow'.[65] As such, the underlying neutralist sentiments on the Peninsula, whilst troublesome, were expected to be contained within the parameters of continued British colonial rule. Much to Canberra's consternation however, constitutional change in Malaya actually progressed rapidly quite soon after the Australian military commitment was made.[66] Because Menzies main hope of salvaging something from Australia's deployment to Malaya rested upon a successful transition of strategic focus from ANZAM to SEATO, the Australian component of the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve was set on a collision course with the burgeoning spirit of independence and non-alignment among the Malay population.

[65] Hack, *Defence and Decolonisation in Southeast Asia*, p. 141.
[66] Goldsworthy, *Losing the Blanket*, p. 27.

The Malayan Dilemma

In contrast to the idealistic tenets of popular neutralism, the emerging political elite in Malaya were steeped in conservative, pro-Western values. Most senior Malayan civil servants and politicians had attended schools and universities largely patterned after the British model in outlook and curricula.[67] Indeed, the nurturing of such an elite, pro-Western ideology in the upper echelons of domestic Malay politics was largely a calculated legacy of British colonialism designed to engender Commonwealth loyalty and thus perpetuate the strategic and economic advantages of Empire. Dramatic political challenges to the status quo on the Peninsula were thus limited by British patronage of Malay elites sympathetic to the benefits of continued mutual cooperation. At the head of this political phalanx was the son of the Sultan of Kedah, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra al-Haj, or as he is more commonly known, Tunku Abdul Rahman, or simply "The Tunku".

Although propelled to power and pre-eminence on a wave of popular anti-colonialist sentiment, pragmatism and compromise dominated Tunku Abdul Rahman's political philosophy. His royal heritage, British education and fondness of Western culture, shaped an outlook that was essentially conservative and pro-Western.[68] As head of the most influential political body in Malaya, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), it was widely anticipated that the Tunku would lead the first government of Malaya when independence was eventually negotiated. Without the burden of an established bureaucratic machinery, control of Malayan foreign policy was generally expected to correspond to the Tunku's personal attitude towards international relations. The pro-Western impulses of Tunku Abdul Rahman thus provided a counterweight to the pervasive influence of Cold War non-alignment on the Peninsula. With some gentle guidance, it was hoped in both London and Canberra that

[67] J. Saravanamuttu, *The Dilemma of Independence: Two Decades of Malaysia's Foreign Policy, 1957-1977* (Penang: Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia, 1983), p. 49.

[68] Tunku Abdul Rahman was born into one of the oldest Royal families in Malaya at Alor Star, the capital of the state of Kedah, on 8 February 1903 ('Tunku' is essentially the Malay equivalent of 'Prince'). In fact, the present dynasty reaches back more than a thousand years. He was the twentieth child of Sultan Abdul Hamid Halimshah, the twenty-fourth ruler of Kedah. After graduating from the Penang Free School, Tunku Abdul Rahman travelled to England where he spent the majority of the 1920s studying history and Law at Cambridge. Driving a brand new red sports car and being a regular at fashionable restaurants and dance halls, the Tunku soon earned a reputation as an Asian playboy. His appreciation for Western culture continued on his return to Malaya. His passion for English football was instrumental in the promotion of the sport in Malaya while his love of gambling and horse racing culminated in the Tunku accepting the 1975 Melbourne Cup as part owner of *Think Big*. His royal heritage, his elite British education and his general liking for Western culture all contributed in shaping the Tunku's pro-Western political orientation.

the Tunku's personal sympathies would eventually translate into a formal association between Malaya and SEATO.

Several practical factors conditioned the Tunku's approach to defence cooperation with Commonwealth forces. For one, external defence was well beyond the almost non-existent indigenous capabilities on the Malayan Peninsula and would continue to be for decades following independence. Malaya's external defence against any potential foreign aggression depended on the continued presence of Commonwealth forces. As the Tunku admitted in 1957,

> We have at our command an army of less than one division in strength; we have no air force, not even a single plane or a single man; we have no navy, not even a single sailor and we have not even a sea-going craft.[69]

One British Air Marshal estimated that Malaya needed to develop at least eleven squadrons of aircraft of its own before it could become independent, yet it had only one Pioneer aircraft whose sole function – the British Secretary of Defence, Sir Richard Powell, often joked – was to carry the Tunku to the races.[70] This practical necessity alone emphasized the nakedness of options available to any future independent government in Malaya.

Economic considerations further reinforced this policy stance. Building a defence force involved expending enormous financial and material resources that could otherwise be utilized in constructing vital national infrastructure and promoting economic development. Outsourcing external defence to Commonwealth forces for the sole cost to the national budget of granting continued access to established military bases relieved Malayan politicians of a significant financial responsibility. As the Deputy Prime Minister, Tun Abdul Razak explained,

> As far as the Federation of Malaya is concerned we are a relatively small nation with many demands on our resources. We have to concentrate our efforts on improving the standard of living of our people and provide them with amenities and social services which are necessary for an independent and civilized country. Therefore we can only afford to maintain a small defence force and must depend for our external defence on the help of friends and allies in time of need.[71]

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[69] Saravanamuttu, *The Dilemma of Independence*, p. 24.
[70] T.N. Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 347.
[71] Saravanamuttu, *The Dilemma of Independence*, p. 21.

Every practical military and financial consideration reinforced the stark reality that the first independent government of Malaya could neither replace nor immediately dispense with Commonwealth forces.

Despite the general public's strong preference for non-alignment and neutrality, political leaders in Malaya were well aware of the physical necessity of accommodating an ongoing Commonwealth presence on the Peninsula.[72] The dilemma however, was that none of the attractions of continuing to welcome the presence of Commonwealth military forces extended to embracing the wider regional focus of SEATO. Because SEATO represented a Western inspired coalition against communist China in northeast and southeast Asia, the organisation's principal strategic impetus translated directly into domestic poison for Malay politicians.[73] In short, it was in the local Malay leaders' best interests to encourage Commonwealth forces to continue to assist with both internal and external defence without linking their presence on the Peninsula to SEATO's regional security agenda.[74]

Striking a balance between the competing agendas of the spirited nationalism characteristic of newly won independence and the pragmatic cooperation with traditional allies necessary for domestic growth and security dominated Malayan foreign policy in the

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[72] In a front page editorial in its official organ "Labour", the Labour Party of Malaya continued to attack the presence of Australian forces in Malaya with an article headed with 'Go Home Aussies', see press reports in A1838 - 3027/10/1 PART 1, NAA. In a similar attack the President of the Party Raayat of Malaya, Ahmad Boestaman, at the Party's annual meeting on 7 November 1957, warned that 'the colonialists were trying every means to stage a comeback in Malaya' and that the 'Malayan people should not only struggle against the imperialist threat towards their own country but strive to check the development of imperialism in any part of the world', see 'Political Report for the months of August and September 1957' from Australian High Commissioner KL to The Secretary, Department of External Affairs, 5 December 1957, A1838 - 3026/2/1 Part 4, NAA. These types of attacks culminated in the Chief Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, continuing to warn his compatriots of the dangers of continually condemning colonialism, 'we have seen what has happened in countries adopting anti-colonial views long after independence. These countries have suffered because in their eagerness to remove all vestiges of colonialism they have refused to accept any form of assistance' - loose reports in A1838 - 3026/2/1 Part, NAA. At the same time Rahman was forced to continue to remind Australian officials and media of the Malayan population's opposition to SEATO – in an interview with Geoffrey Tebbutt of the *Melbourne Herald* in late 1957, Rahman said that although he was not hostile to SEATO he would take no initiative in joining it unless the Malayan people showed clearly that they would like to do so - loose reports in A1838 - 3026/2/1 Part, NAA.

[73] Although the general principle of non-alignment was the most influential factor, the fact that SEATO was largely anti-Chinese contributed to its unpopular reception in Malaya. The large Chinese population on the Malaya peninsula was unlikely to support any anti-Chinese agenda, while the Malay political elite preferred not to further inflame racial tensions. The very basis of SEATO's existence was thus antagonistic to many of the important racial and political sensitivities on the Malay Peninsula.

[74] On Independence, the Government of the Federation of Malaya assumed exclusive responsibility for the conduct of operations against the Communist Terrorists and the maintenance of law and order in Malaya. The reality was however that the new Federation government still relied heavily on Commonwealth support in both these endeavours. Highlighting this dependence was a formal request for continued Commonwealth assistance in Emergency Operations from Malayan Minister for External Affairs to the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations only five days after Independence was officially celebrated on 31 August 1957; reports in A1945 162/3/19, NAA.

late 1950s. Formal Malayan assertiveness in the areas of non-alignment and neutrality had to accommodate public opinion, but only to the extent that it would not completely alienate Commonwealth partners and prompt them to prematurely withdraw their much needed military forces. So although the sources of their individual motivations differed, both Menzies and the Tunku had good reason to reach some practical accommodation on the regional SEATO aspirations of Australia's military presence in Malaya. The strategic value of the RAAF base at Butterworth depended entirely on the relative success of that negotiation.

AMDA and Malayan Independence

In the lead up to granting independence to Malaya, British and local Malay political leaders embarked on a series of discussions concerning the retention of Commonwealth forces in the country. The Australian and New Zealand governments elected to not take part in these negotiations. By doing so, their intention was to send a clear message that they would not become officially involved in any irrevocable defence obligations with the new Federation government. Australian and New Zealand forces were simply participants in a Commonwealth military operation that did not necessarily entail any bi-lateral defence responsibilities. This episode, as T.B. Millar argues, underlines the important distinction between the Australian military presence in Malaya and the post-colonial responsibilities Britain felt obliged to extend to the newly independent Malayan Government.[75] Adopting this nuanced political position allowed Menzies to continuously evaluate the merits of Australia's presence in Malaya in terms of national self-interest rather than a bi-lateral defence obligation between Australia and the new Federation of Malaya.

The downside of not formally participating in the negotiations meant that Menzies had to rely on the British to negotiate Australia's desire to re-align the strategic focus of the Strategic Reserve from the now redundant ANZAM plans for the defence of Northern Malaya to the regional security framework of SEATO. Although the British, Australian and Malayan governments all wished to maintain a Commonwealth presence on the Peninsula, their motivations for doing so were driven by vastly divergent domestic agendas. Not surprisingly then, the resulting Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreement (AMDA) reflected these

[75] Chin Kin Wah, *The Defence of Malaysia and Singapore: The Transformation of a Security System 1957-1971* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 74.

contentious sources of national self-interest. AMDA, the formal instrument governing the stationing of Commonwealth forces in the newly independent Federation of Malaya, emerged as a classic case of official ambiguity. Worded primarily to accommodate domestic opinion in both Britain and Malaya rather than conclusively outline the specific parameters of the continuing Commonwealth presence, AMDA amounted to the most definitive level of vagueness mutually acceptable to all parties. Shortly after the Federation of Malaya officially gained independence from British colonial rule on 31 August 1957, AMDA became the official instrument governing the conduct of operations at Australia's airbase at Butterworth — an agreement Canberra had neither negotiated or was a signatory to.

Article III of the AMDA treaty stated that the United Kingdom had the right to maintain a Commonwealth Strategic Reserve in Malaya 'for the fulfilment of Commonwealth and international obligations'.[76] It was an obvious reference to the Commonwealth's SEATO commitments. Yet, in a clear concession to Malayan public opinion, Article VIII declared that for operations outside Malayan territory, 'prior Malayan agreement must be obtained before United Kingdom forces could be committed to active operations.'[77] It left the door open for the Federation Government to veto SEATO operations if domestic pressure became overwhelming. Although British negotiators had secured an indirect link to SEATO in AMDA, their Malayan counterparts had managed to limit this link and make it ambiguous enough to be publicly deniable.[78] Both the British and Malayan leaders thus could emphasis the appropriate portions of the agreement to their respective domestic audiences even though, if read in full, AMDA was replete with contradiction. For their part, Australian officials had little choice but accept AMDA as an unfortunate *fait accompli*.

As far as the British were concerned, AMDA was a triumph. British access to military facilities on the Malay Peninsula was guaranteed, while the potential Malayan veto for participation in SEATO operations had very few consequences for actual British forces. The reasons were more geographical than political. The majority of Britain's contribution to the Reserve, including all of the Royal Air Force (RAF), was stationed in Singapore. As Singapore remained under British rule following Malayan Independence, these forces were therefore unaffected by the potential AMDA restrictions concerning their participation in SEATO operations. British ground forces permanently stationed in Malaya, like those of

[76] Hack, *Defence and Decolonisation in Southeast Asia*, p. 227.
[77] Chin Kin Wah, *The Defence of Malaysia and Singapore*, p. 32.
[78] Hack, *Defence and Decolonisation in Southeast Asia*, p. 223.

Australia and New Zealand, could simply be withdrawn to Singapore prior to embarking for SEATO operations to avoid the AMDA veto, which they would very likely do in any event. And for their part, British naval forces feared no restrictions from AMDA. By simply sailing into international waters for a certain period prior to SEATO operations, all British naval forces in the region, again like those of Australia and New Zealand, were entirely unaffected by the AMDA formula. In fact, the only force significantly affected by the potential SEATO veto outlined in AMDA was the RAAF at Butterworth. Its location in the north-western corner of the Federation, originally a powerful deterrent to potential invaders, became instead a major inconvenience.

For the government of the Federation of Malaya, AMDA was a lightning rod of controversy. For a population already sensitive to the presence of Commonwealth military forces, AMDA simply entrenched, publicly and formally, an overwhelming sense of enduring British colonialism. Consequently, discussion of AMDA dominated the domestic political landscape. With the processes of decolonisation and independence centre stage in Malayan affairs, opposition parties sought to extract maximum political advantage from the signing of AMDA. To do so they aimed their rhetoric squarely at the heart of the Malaya's newly won independence. AMDA, they argued, compromised Malaya's freedom of action in foreign affairs and defence planning which, in turn, unacceptably curtailed the newly independent nation's very sovereignty. To the Tunku's political opponents, AMDA represented the most expedient vehicle with which to attack the government. Indeed, AMDA and its foreign policy implications were the major focus of domestic political debate in the immediate aftermath of Malayan independence.

Tension in Malaya further escalated when members of the Tunku's party joined the chorus of protest regarding AMDA's delegation of responsibility for external defence to Commonwealth forces. A back-bencher from the Tunku's UMNO party, Tajuddin Ali, publically attacked the treaty as being 'harmful to independent Malaya'.[79] When various other public figures and trade union officials chimed in with further criticism, the groundswell of opposition to AMDA threatened to boil over. Amidst this mounting tension, Tunku Abdul Rahman placed his leadership on the line,

> If the people of this country do not want [AMDA], a simple thing can be done and that is – this is all I ask of the people of this country and of my party – to call a meeting … and pass a vote of 'no confidence' against me and my friends and

[79] Saravanamuttu, *The Dilemma of Independence*, p. 23.

> colleagues, and we can just make way for some other clever 'Dicks' to come and run this country.[80]

Although the Tunku's bluff succeeded in subduing the general discontent, the political lesson administered by the experience was significant. The Tunku's personal political career, the careers of his ministers and perhaps even the very stability and prosperity of his country, depended upon successfully managing the public's perception of Commonwealth forces in Malaya. There was now no question that they could be publically associated with SEATO. It dealt a significant blow to the military prospects of the yet to be completed Australian air base at Butterworth.

A Question of Military Efficacy

The military utility of Australia's deployment of forces to Malaya now depended largely upon their ability to contribute to the SEATO alliance. As such, Menzies and his defence planners were gravely concerned with the domestic political situation on the Peninsula. Menzies' frustration at the potential power of veto within AMDA was clearly outlined in a message to the United Kingdom in late 1956,

> In the event of a threat or an attack elsewhere in the area action would be dependent on consultation with, and presumably the agreement of Malaya. The Australia Government is of the opinion that the limitations described would make it doubtful whether the forces to be stationed in Malaya, being subject to these limitations, could any longer be considered a strategic reserve.[81]

Menzies international agitation to ameliorate the circumstances of Australia's deployment to Malaya coincided with a parallel move within the Department of Defence to sidestep the limitations of AMDA. Instead of concentrating on AMDA's restrictions, defence officials busied themselves with an entire re-think of the scope and nature of Australia's deployment of forces to the Peninsula. It was, at the very least, an indication that Australia's contribution to the Strategic Reserve in Malaya was rapidly becoming militarily ineffective and strategically unproductive.

Just prior to AMDA's formal implementation in late 1957, RAAF officials recommended several adjustments to the original plan to establish a base at Butterworth.[82]

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[80] *Ibid.*, p. 24.
[81] Letter, Australian Defence Committee to the United Kingdom, 9th November 1956, A1945 162/3/9, NAA.
[82] See various informal discussion papers, A1838 TS696/6/4/3 Part 1, NAA.

Australia's three operational flying squadrons, they proposed, should remain permanently based in Australia and rotated through Butterworth air base at three monthly intervals, leaving only a small support staff permanently deployed on the Peninsula. From a military point of view, the variations were justified by noting that the 'on paper' military contribution by the RAAF to the Reserve remained at *essentially* the same level. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Richard Casey, added his weight to the proposal. On 17 August 1957, Casey noted that, if the Butterworth deployment remained unaltered, the major part of the RAAF's operational forces would be outside Australia leaving the home reserve entirely inadequate. The cost of housing and keeping personnel in Malaya, he added for good measure, would be crippling.[83] It is instructive to note that no mention was made of the strategic and operational impacts such a proposed downgrade to the force would entail.

The political and military semantics justifying the proposed variation could not mask the simple fact that the RAAF themselves wished to substantially downgrade the original Australian military commitment to establish a RAAF base at Butterworth.[84] Advocates of the proposed reorganization justified the downgrade by noting just how out-dated the original assumptions of the deployment had become. The plan to establish an RAAF base at Butterworth, they argued, was a pre-SEATO concept that had not anticipated the potential adverse implications of Malayan Independence. It was a rare official acknowledgement of the actual origins of the deployment. In fact, it was the first formal recognition that the RAAF base at Butterworth had outlived its usefulness even prior to its completion. Inherent in the RAAF desire to alter the original commitment was the tacit acknowledgement that, from a purely military point of view, the RAAF base at Butterworth, while still only being constructed, had become a strategic anachronism.

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[83] *Ibid.*

[84] It is highly doubtful whether the RAAF had any intention of actually rotating flying squadrons through Butterworth. Relocating a squadron of Sabre fighters from Australia to Butterworth, for instance, was a major undertaking. Because the Sabre's range was limited to just over 1000 miles, the trek to Malaya, of over 6000 miles, had to be undertaken as a series of smaller flights. In February 1959, for example, No. 2 Squadron transited to Butterworth from Richmond (NSW) by flying from Richmond to Townsville, Townsville to Darwin, Darwin to Biak Island in New Guinea, from Biak to Guiuan in the Philippines, Guiuan to Labuan in Borneo and finally from Labuan to Butterworth. Additionally, because of limitations in the navigational equipment on the Sabre fighters, Canberra bomber aircraft from the RAAF base at Amberley in Queensland were required to act as path-finders for the fighters. One Canberra escort was required for every flight of four Sabre fighters. On each leg an RAAF Neptune Maritime Reconnaissance aircraft was pre-positioned to provide Search and Rescue coverage in case of an emergency and several RAAF transport aircraft were required to ferry personnel and supplies to and from each staging post. Moving just one squadron of fighters from Australia to Butterworth was, in fact, a major operation that involved the majority of the RAAF's flying units. It is highly improbable that the RAAF actually intended to undertake this operation twice every twelve weeks. Rather, the rotation proposed was more probably the first step in reducing Australia's permanent commitment to Butterworth to just one single medium range bomber squadron, A1838 TS696/6/4/3 Part 3, NAA.

Although the RAAF proposal to rotate flying squadrons through Butterworth was a natural outcome of the limitations imposed by AMDA, the plan was opposed by the Minister for Defence, Phillip McBride, and subsequently dropped. The Minister, although concerned with the extent of the RAAF contribution, considered the political implications of withdrawal paramount. McBride's primary objection to the RAAF proposal was based on the possible adverse reaction of British officials. During the past decade, Australia had continually encouraged the British to remain in strength in the region. Any withdrawal now by Australian forces undermined that stance. Additionally, the fact that the Australian Cabinet had continued to publically reiterate the strategic importance of Malaya over the past few years also proscribed any major policy reversal. Regardless of how militarily justified any proposed change to the deployment might be, protecting the credibility of the Australian Government became the top priority. Military utility could simply not trump the adverse political reaction that would inevitably accompany such a change in defence policy.

Butterworth's usefulness was now largely political rather than military; its justification was now based upon avoiding negative political consequences rather than enhancing Australia's strategic outlook. Despite the uncertainty surrounding the degree of cooperation the Malayans would offer into the future, the Minister of Defence determined that the advantages of stationing Australian forces in Malaya as part of the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve still outweighed the disadvantages 'so long as there is a reasonable chance of forces in Malaya developing into a genuine strategic reserve'.[85] As far as defence policy goes, it was a matter of full steam ahead with fingers crossed.

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After three gruelling years of construction, the RAAF base at Butterworth welcomed the first Australian flying squadron in July 1958. The medium range *Canberra* bombers of No. 2 Squadron were soon followed by the *Sabre* jet fighters of No. 3 Squadron and No. 77 Squadron in November 1958 and February 1959 respectively. On 1 April 1959, marking exactly five years to the day from Menzies' initial announcement, Sydney's *Daily Telegraph*, described Butterworth as Australia's greatest ever overseas fortress. The article noted that

[85] Australian Defence Appreciation on the Future of the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve in Relation to the Malayan Defence Agreement, July 1957, A1945 162/3/9, NAA.

with one bomber squadron and two fighter squadrons deployed to Butterworth, the greater part of the RAAF's air power was now stationed permanently on the Northwest coast of the Malay Peninsula. This compared to just one Canberra bomber squadron and one Sabre jet fighter squadron remaining on Australian soil. Very soon after the construction of Butterworth was completed and the final Australian flying units had arrived in Malaya however, the RAAF deployment faced yet another critical challenge. By the end of 1959, the chances of the RAAF in Malaya ever developing into a Strategic Reserve with a genuine regional focus disappeared almost entirely.

A Final Political Asphyxiation

In early 1959 negotiating the bilateral contours of mutual self-interest between Canberra and Kuala Lumpur over Butterworth grew even more treacherous. Since independence in 1957, the government of the Federation of Malaya had increasingly become embarrassed by public references linking Commonwealth forces based in Malaya to SEATO. In an attempt to quell domestic unrest over the issue, Malayan officials had continued to insist that British and Commonwealth troops were in Malaya for the purpose of mutual defence and that the Federation was not to being used as a base for any other military function, in particular, as a base for SEATO operations.[86] In fact, to most Malayans, including even some Parliamentarians, the Commonwealth forces were understood to be on Malayan soil solely for the purpose of assisting the Federation in its fight against the Communist Terrorists. This common misconception was carefully nurtured by official statements and perfectly suited the public agendas of both Malayan and Commonwealth officials. With a second federal election looming in Malaya in August 1959, and with opposition parties using the issue of foreign bases as a major platform with which to attack Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Prime Minister sought to downplay the issue as much as possible. Consequently, the Tunku explicitly requested aircraft from Butterworth to refrain from proceeding on SEATO missions for a brief period. At the very least, public mention of SEATO should be avoided. Unfortunately, not everyone got the message.

In early March 1959, aircraft from No.2 Squadron proceeded directly from Butterworth to Thailand in order to participate in a SEATO training exercise. No publicity accompanied their departure. At the completion of SEATO exercise 'Air Progress', No. 2

[86] Note from Aust. HC in KL to Dept. External Affairs, 27 Jan 1960, A1838 TS682/22/12 Part 1, NAA.

Squadron quietly slipped back into Butterworth and the Malayan Press and public were none the wiser. In a speech some days later at the Rotarians Club in Penang however, the Commanding Officer of No. 2 Squadron, Wing Commander Colin Steley, inadvertently ignited a political storm. As the one hour flight home from 'Air Progress' in Bangkok had just demonstrated, he informed the Penang Rotarians on 11 March 1959, his squadron of aircraft stood ready to fulfil Australia's commitment to SEATO. The comments received national press coverage. With a federal election imminent, the government of the Federation of Malaya was not amused.

The Australian Ministry of External Affairs moved quickly to contain the damage. It released a press statement two days later stating,

> Commonwealth forces in the Federation remain in this country at the request of the Federation Government to help in the present struggle against Communist terrorism and as a safeguard against any future threat to freedom. The provisions of the Defence Agreement between the United Kingdom and the Federation under which the Australian forces are stationed in this country do not involve the Federation with the affairs of SEATO.[87]

In an attempt to minimize the damage done to the Tunku's government by Wing Commander Steley's comments, Australian officials publically denied the primary strategic role of the RAAF at Butterworth. By now linking Australian forces in Malaya with the ongoing Malayan Emergency, the contents of the External Affairs press statement presaged many of the later similar assumptions about the RAAF at Butterworth.

On two further occasions remarks similar to those made by Wing Commander Steley were picked up by the national press in Malaya. Again, the Federation Government promptly issued statements declaring that Commonwealth forces in Malaya were not associated with SEATO. As outlined in AMDA, the express permission of the Federation Government was required prior to any participation by Commonwealth forces in SEATO operations or exercises and that permission, stated Malayan officials, had not been given. The public furore and subsequent political fallout being aroused by the subject, however, were beginning to take their toll on the Malayan Government. By June 1959, Malayan authorities were publically demonstrating a further hardening of their stance against SEATO in an attempt to slow opposition momentum on the issue.

[87] Department of External Affairs Press Release, 13 March 1959, A1838 TS682/22/12 Part 1, NAA.

Tunku Abdul Rahman's government was returned to power in the second federal election in Malaya in 1959, albeit with a massive swing to the strongly neutralist opposition parties.[88] It was the government's first encounter with genuine political opposition and a sobering lesson in the democratic process. For the Tunku and his ministers, the overall experience was decidedly uncomfortable. Reflecting on the opposition's success, the deputy Prime Minister, Abdul Tun Razak, nervously informed ANZAM partners that,

> The Federation Government is very much concerned that British and Commonwealth forces under the Defence Treaty should not participate in any SEATO exercises while they are stationed in the Federation as this would politically embarrass us.[89]

The Federation government wished to avoid any more political fallout from the issue. No further 'turning a blind eye' to participation in SEATO exercises by Commonwealth forces stationed in Malaya was acceptable. It was no longer satisfactory to simply attempt to avoid negative SEATO publicity. The Federation Government now explicitly insisted that Commonwealth Strategic Reserve forces in Malaya not participate in SEATO operations or exercises.

The hardening Malayan attitude went much further than any previous statement from Malayan authorities. Ironically, both the Malayan Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister were still acutely aware of the importance of Commonwealth forces remaining on the Peninsula. They were under no illusions as to their own defence capabilities and indeed, had no intentions of accelerating the development of local Malayan forces. British authorities pointed out that in order to ensure the preservation of peace in the Far East, operations 'would almost certainly be undertaken far to the north of Malaya … and it would be unrealistic to suppose that this would have no connection with SEATO strategy'.[90] For their part, Malayan officials agreed absolutely. Equally, they appreciated the practical needs of planning and training required by Commonwealth forces stationed in Malaya to adequately integrate into the larger SEATO strategy. What primarily motivated them, however, was

[88] The first federal elections in July 1955 swept Tunku Abdul Rahman into power with 51 of the 52 seats contested being won by the Tunku's Alliance Party. The Second federal election held in August 1959 saw the Alliance win 74 of the 104 seats contested in the Lower House of Parliament. Although still an overwhelming majority it was nevertheless a large swing against the ruling party. It was downward trend that had to be arrested before the next federal election in 1964.
[89] See full exchange of dialogue in A1838 TS682/22/12 Part 1, NAA.
[90] Request by UK High Commissioner in Kuala Lumpur to Federation Deputy Prime Minister, 9 January 1960, A1209 1960/128, NAA.

their first real taste of electoral opposition and their inability to effectively counter opposition rhetoric on the issue.

In February 1960, the Australian Defence Committee met to consider the new restrictions. The implications of the new Malayan policy, the Committee concluded,

> are considered to be potentially serious and if as a result participation of Australian forces in SEATO land and air exercises becomes impracticable, consideration will be necessary of the value of continuing to station Australian forces in Malaya.[91]

British military officials in the Far East put a slightly finer point on the matter by stating that,

> the whole of the Australian Air Force contribution to the reserve is in Malaya and none of these units could be used [in SEATO operations]. The effect of this in SEATO would be deplorable and might even be disastrous … As we are unlikely to conduct major operations except under SEATO this could make the stationing of Commonwealth forces in Malaya valueless. We appreciate there are considerable political difficulties. These must be overcome if our Far East Garrison is not to become in large part a white elephant.[92]

Although the peacetime utility of the RAAF base at Butterworth had by now dissolved almost completely, Menzies' was still aware that in the event of overt Communist aggression in Southeast Asia, the Malayan Government would almost certainly cooperate with the deployment and support of Western forces. Consequently, abandoning Butterworth, without an adequate alternative, meant a significant reduction in the depth of Australia's forward defence. It additionally subtracted from the military deterrent exercised by having forces on the ground in Southeast Asia and it had the potential to undermine the confidence of Australia's allies in the willingness and ability of Australian forces to fulfil their obligations in the region. These considerations were over and above the simple fact that there was still no politically palatable way for Menzies to withdraw the RAAF from Butterworth so soon after its completion.

The large swing against the Tunku's government in the second federal election in Malaya had another significant consequence for Australian officials. It introduced an added political dimension to Menzies' inability to pressure Malayan officials for greater flexibility regarding SEATO. If the Tunku's pro-Western government lost the next election on the basis of foreign military bases in Malaya, then all Commonwealth forces would almost certainly be evicted from the country by the new Federation government. There was a powerfully

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[91] Australian Defence Committee Report, February 1960, A1209 1960/128, NAA.
[92] BDCC-Far East Report, January 1960, A1838 TS682/22/12 Part 1, NAA.

mocking logic to the situation. The RAAF base at Butterworth was either destined to be militarily useless or destined to be non-existent. As the Department of External Affairs noted, it was preferable that the present Malayan Government remain sensitive to public opinion because 'our political interests seem best served by the maintenance of a Pro-Western Malayan Government *even at the cost of a Malaya base for the Strategic Reserve* [author's italics]'.[93]

For Menzies, the dilemma represented an almost impossible balancing act. On the one hand, Menzies was vitally concerned with the internal stability of Tunku Abdul Rahman's pro-Western government. On the other, Australia's presence at Butterworth was almost completely valueless if the RAAF could not actively contribute to the regional security agenda of SEATO. Pushing too hard for SEATO participation however, had the potential to bring to power a neutralist government in the Federation of Malaya, which would inevitably lead to the eviction of all Commonwealth forces from the Peninsula and a significant worsening of Australia's strategic position in Southeast Asia. Ironically, the most effective way of ensuring the continuing presence of Commonwealth forces in Malaya should they be required to operate in conjunction with SEATO in any overt conflict was to domestically dissociate those same forces from SEATO in peacetime. Taking this argument to its logical conclusion meant accepting that abandoning the RAAF base at Butterworth was eminently more preferable to endangering the political stability of the Tunku's government, the very same government now placing almost unacceptable restrictions on the bases' operations.

RAAF Participation in SEATO Exercises

Informal talks in March 1960 between Malayan officials and ANZAM representatives were held concerning the political consequences likely for the Federation Government in the event Commonwealth forces based in Malaya were directly associated with SEATO.[94] Both sides

[93] Department of External Affairs review of the political factors affecting the future of the CSR, Sept 1960, A1945 162/3/23, NAA.

[94] These talks were prompted by an approach to Federation authorities in early 1960 by British defence officials seeking permission for a small detachment of Royal Engineers to cross the Malay northern border into Thailand in order to take part in an amphibious exercise near Bangkok under SEATO auspices. British officials were actually using this situation as a catalyst to investigate the new political restrictions being imposed on Commonwealth forces with regard to SEATO participation by Malayan officials following the 1959 elections. As the UK High Commissioner in Malaya admitted, 'I judged it desirable to "come clean" about future SEATO connection knowing that if Federation Ministers later discovered we had not been entirely candid very damaging mistrust would be engendered', A579 6/1960, NAA.

agreed to two fundamental principles governing the situation. First, support for the Tunku's domestic political situation was essential. The continued existence of a stable anti-communist Malaya was of primary importance to ANZAM partners. If the Tunku's pro-Western government was to fall to radical opposition parties determined to expel foreign military forces, then ANZAM's principal aim of defending Malaya would have been completely compromised from within.

Second, it was agreed that, to the extent possible within the constraints imposed by the first condition, maximum support should be provided for the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve's participation in SEATO exercises. Malayan officials still privately acknowledged that Malaya's defence in any general war in Southeast Asia depended largely upon ANZAM forces coordinating their operations with the United States through SEATO. There was little doubt in the Tunku's mind that if Malaya's territorial integrity was seriously threatened, the population would acquiesce in any military necessity aimed at defeating that threat, including the overt participation of ANZAM forces in SEATO operations. With these two guiding principles in mind, the focus shifted to a practical amelioration of the dilemma.

After again reiterating the great difficulty he faced if Commonwealth forces departed from Malaya directly to SEATO exercises, the Tunku suggested that no such difficulty would arise if those forces instead transited via some intermediate destination.[95] The Tunku informed ANZAM authorities that he could comfortably deal with domestic opposition if Commonwealth forces withdrew from Malaya to Singapore prior to engaging in SEATO activities. An additional stopover in Singapore before returning to the Federation would also be necessary. In other words, Malayan domestic opposition would be largely muted if before, during and after participating in SEATO activities, ANZAM forces nominally withdrew from the Federation. This formula provided the basis of an informal agreement reached between ANZAM representatives and Malayan officials on 24 March 1960. RAAF aircraft from Butterworth were to withdraw from Federation territory for three days prior to participating in SEATO exercises. It was further agreed that RAAF aircraft would spend one week at an intermediate destination prior to returning.

The implications of this new policy governing the association of Butterworth and SEATO were considered potentially serious by the Australian Defence Committee. After again assessing the value of continuing to station the greater part of Australia's air power at

[95] See notes on discussions held between Federation Prime Minister and the UK High Commissioner in Wellington, January 1960, A1838 TS682/22/12 Part 1, NAA.

Butterworth, the Committee noted on 12 May 1960 that, although the 'costs and difficulties of Australian participation in SEATO exercises under the conditions proposed are considerable', they were 'not insuperable'.[96] The thin thread justifying the RAAF presence at Butterworth held. In accordance with the new regulations, Australian aircraft from Butterworth began flying to intermediate destinations throughout Southeast Asia prior to and following participation in SEATO exercises. One such flight, for example, took place in early 1961. Under the auspices of a 'goodwill' visit, Australian fighter aircraft flew to Saigon prior to participating in SEATO exercise 'Air Bull' in Bangkok. The return leg involved an additional seven day stopover back in Saigon.[97] It was the first of many such detours around Southeast Asia for RAAF squadrons at Butterworth.

Although the Defence Committee had again reassessed in favour of continuing Australia's presence at Butterworth an accurate reflection of the general satisfaction with the deployment can be gleaned from a note by the Australian Treasurer, Harold Holt, to the Minister for Defence in early 1961,

> The restrictions which are being imposed by the Malayans on the use of the Australian forces are, I think, disturbing … were we to consider now the placing of forces in that country, I think that their effectiveness under the conditions laid down would be deeply questioned.[98]

The RAAF Deploy to Ubon

In the early 1960s, the mountains and jungles of Laos became an important front in the Cold War in Southeast Asia. As SEATO members began increasingly to talk of military intervention in Indochina, the Malayan Government took pre-emptive action. In commenting on the Laotian crisis in March 1961, the Malayan Deputy Prime Minister, Tun Razak stated that,

> should there be any outbreak of war in Laos as a result of foreign intervention the Federation Government would like to reiterate its stand that it would not allow any Federation territory to be used as a base for operations.[99]

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[96] Report of Australian Defence Committee meeting, 12 May 1960, A1838 TS682/22/12 Part 1, NAA.
[97] Although Singapore was the most convenient base for Australian aircraft to transit through, it was discovered that the existing runway at Changi airfield was too short for RAAF Sabres. A new airfield was completed in Singapore in April 1961 which was earmarked as the probable stopover destination in future transit operations for RAAF aircraft participating in SEATO exercises from Butterworth.
[98] Note from Australian Treasurer to the Minister of Defence, January 1961, A5799 1A/1961, NAA.
[99] Report of Australian Defence Committee meeting, 12 May 1960, A1838 TS682/22/12 Part 1, NAA.

Tun Razak's statement, an article in *Berita Harian* reported on 19 March 1961, 'should serve to remind those countries which have troops here that they should respect Malaya's wishes in this matter. Malaya is not a member of SEATO therefore she is not willing to become a base for SEATO operations in Laos'.[100]

By the beginning of 1962, the situation in Laos had further deteriorated. An incident at Nam Tha, in north-western Laos on 6 May 1962, prompted four members of SEATO, (the United States, Britain, Australia and New Zealand), to consider stationing forces in Thailand as a demonstration of support for a fellow member of the SEATO alliance.[101] Consequently, Australia, at the invitation of the Royal Thai Government, decided to send a squadron of fighters from Butterworth to Thailand. At the end of May 1962, an RAAF contingent of eight *Sabre* aircraft from Butterworth was flown to an RAF base in Singapore. There, in order to dissociate the Australian aircraft from the Strategic Reserve in Malaya, the squadron was formally disbanded. Soon after, the eight aircraft were re-formed as No.79 Squadron. From the RAF base in Singapore, No.79 Squadron then formally deployed to Ubon airbase in Eastern Thailand as part of Australia's contribution to the coalition of SEATO forces stationed there.

Practical reasons dictated that Australia's air contingent at Ubon be maintained from Butterworth. Under the cover of a routine *Canberra* bomber training flight into Thailand, *Sabre* fighters were rotated between the RAAF base at Butterworth, Malaya and the RAAF base at Ubon, Thailand at a rate of two aircraft every two months. The political requirement to dissociate RAAF operations at Butterworth with those of the RAAF at Ubon necessitated an imaginative façade. Every two months, a *Canberra* bomber took off from Butterworth with two *Sabre* fighters as escort. At a predetermined marker, the two escort fighters peeled away from the *Canberra* bomber and proceeded to the RAAF base in Thailand. Soon after, two Australian *Sabres* from Ubon established contact with the *Canberra* from Butterworth and assumed escort duties. This trio duly returned to Butterworth following their brief 'training mission'. Although in breach of the Malayan veto on SEATO involvement, this clever ruse allowed No.79 Squadron to be maintained from Butterworth without arousing the suspicions of local politicians and journalists, who failed notice that the two fighters that took off on escort duty with the *Canberra* bomber were never the same two that returned.

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[100] *Ibid*.
[101] Leszek Buszynski, *SEATO: The Failure of an Alliance Strategy* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1983), p. 90.

The establishment of two RAAF bases in Southeast Asia at the same time, one at Butterworth under the auspices of Australia's contribution to a Commonwealth Strategic Reserve and one at Ubon as part of an American led SEATO force, and the elaborate façade required to facilitate rotating aircraft between the two accurately reflected the awkward contradictions faced by Australia in her search for an appropriate role in Cold War Southeast Asia in the 1950s.

Conclusion

Cold War anxieties rather than the on-going Malayan Emergency prompted Menzies to commit Australian forces to the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve in 1955. When quizzed by the Australian press corps on 5 April 1955 about whether Australian forces at Butterworth would participate in ongoing Malayan Emergency Operations, Lieutenant-General Henry Wells responded by assuring reporters that Australia was preparing for war in Malaya, not the chasing of terrorists.[102] In short, the ongoing Malayan Emergency was not a motivating factor in Menzies' decision to deploy Australian forces to Malaya in 1955.

Almost immediately following the decision to contribute forces to the Strategic Reserve, domestic sentiment in Malaya undermined Menzies' attempt to transition Australia's strategic focus from ANZAM to SEATO. In the first full flushes of independence, the Malayan population adopted a strongly neutralist position in the burgeoning Cold War in Southeast Asia, a luxury ironically enough afforded them by the very multilateral security framework which their non-aligned position rejected. Although the Malayan political leadership recognised the benefits of Commonwealth defence cooperation at such an early juncture in their national development, Malay's neutralist impulse imposed progressively greater constraints on the exercise of Australia's freedom of movement from Commonwealth bases on the Peninsula. Especially inconvenienced was the RAAF base at Butterworth.

Balancing the countervailing forces of pragmatic defence cooperation with Commonwealth partners and the resounding roars of domestic disapproval was the first major hurdle of the new Government of the Federation of Malaya. As opposition assertiveness on the issue continued to rouse popular dissatisfaction, the government of Tunku Abdul Rahman decided to enforce a total ban on the participation in SEATO exercises by Commonwealth

[102] Press File – ANZAM Planning for the Defence of Malaya, A5954 2195/1, NAA.

forces based in Malaya. For the RAAF at Butterworth, these awkward political circumstances found practical amelioration in a rather unique standard operating procedure. Australian aircraft operating from Butterworth were forced to travel indirectly to SEATO exercises by transiting through an intermediate country. The single act of flying squadrons of advanced fighter aircraft and medium range bombers from their Australian base in northern Malaya to a SEATO exercise in Bangkok via Singapore aptly captures the strategic predicament of the RAAF at Butterworth.

In many respects, the political and strategic vacuum engulfing the RAAF at Butterworth had a significant impact on the social and cultural dimensions of the Australian presence in Penang. Unlike RAAF Ubon, in the absence of any 'front-line' military duties in the Cold War in Southeast Asia, Australian servicemen and their families deployed to Butterworth as they would have to any other 'peace-time' posting on Australian soil. In other words, with no significant strategic or military role, the RAAF base at Butterworth became just another posting for Australian servicemen and their families. The major difference, of course, was that Penang was on the northwest coast of the Malay Peninsula rather than on the Australian mainland. Menzies' Cold War failure thus paved the way for an unprecedented opportunity for Australian servicemen and their families to live on the tropical island of Penang for two years while posted to Butterworth.

Chapter Two

Preparing the Way: Imagining an Australian Garrison in Malaya

National fears associated with the menace of the 'Yellow Peril' to 'White Australia' have cast a long shadow over Australian national life throughout the twentieth century and beyond. According to David Walker, a fear and fascination of the perceived rise of Asia from the 1880s both quickened and intensified the masculinizing imperatives of Australian national development as Federation inaugurated the new nation in 1901.[1] Drawing on a number of persistent themes in orientalist popular culture in Australia, Walker argues that constructions of 'Asia' have played a critical role in defining the limits and possibilities of Australian nationhood in the first half of the twentieth century.

Responding to Asia, it seems, has played a particularly poisonous role in the formation and maintenance of Australian national identity throughout much of the twentieth century. During the 1950s and 1960s, and despite some largely cosmetic changes to immigration policy in the post-war period, Neville Meaney has argued that Australians still viewed their nation as a 'predominately White British Australia' in direct opposition to the 'alien other' of Asia.[2] But the national fears founded upon threats to Australian geographical integrity by the old "Yellow Peril" – subsumed by the new, Cold War inspired "Red Peril" of China in the post-war period – morphed into a much different attitude towards 'Asia' when Australians actually travelled north. As Adrian Vickers has noted, the strong influence of Kipling on Australian attitudes to colonialism in Asia 'made Australians largely nationalists at home but imperialists abroad'.[3]

In practical terms, Australian military officials, with little first-hand experience of garrison duties in Malaya (other than Eight Division 2AIF's short-lived and ill-fated deployment to the Peninsula in 1941), drew heavily on British colonial 'knowledge' of Asia as they began planning to deploy a large military force to Penang. By using British colonial culture as a guiding influence, the Australian garrisons in Malaya were founded on perceptions of difference between the coloniser and the colonised, the strong and the weak,

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[1] David Walker, *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia, 1850-1939* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1999).
[2] Neville Meaney, "The end of "White Australia" and Australia's changing perceptions of Asia, 1945-1990", *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 49, no. 2 (1995), p178.
[3] Adrian Vickers, "Racism and colonialism in early Australian novels about Southeast Asia", *Asian Studies Association of Australia Review* 12, no. 1 (1988): 7-12.

the clean and the dirty, the temperate and the tropical and ultimately, the superior and the inferior.

In a number of official documents from the 1950s and 1960s, the term 'European' was used rather than the term 'Australian' when discussing Australia's new Asian garrison in Penang. By labelling themselves as European, Australian officials adhered to a long-standing practice in colonial settings in which all white-skinned people, whatever their actual origins, were referred to as 'Europeans'.[4] In circumstances which required further hierarchical ordering within the European community, the terms 'British', 'English', 'Irish', 'German' or even 'Australian' might have been employed. But if a simple designation of 'white' as a racial category was the intention, then more often than not, the common practice in colonial spaces was to simply use the term 'European'. As Australian officials and politicians began to image an Australian garrison in Penang in mid-1955, they readily adopted this standard rhetoric device. For this reason, throughout much of this chapter the term 'European' appears in references from official Australian sources. The designation of Australians as 'Europeans' both highlights and underscores the potency of racial categories as a means of ordering 'colonial' society in British Malaya in the late 1950s as well as Australia's acceptance of those same practices.

This chapter examines the processes undertaken by Australian officials to determine the conditions of service for Australian military personnel posted to Malaya as part of the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve. The first half of the chapter considers a report, composed in April and June of 1955 by senior Defence and Treasury officials, into the conditions of service for Australian servicemen in Malaya. At times throughout the chapter, the discussion of some of these 'conditions of service' spills over into the first few years of the deployment, especially in cases where the subsequent presence of soldiers and airmen in Malaya aroused further debate or resulted in minor changes to extant policy. But because much of this chapter focuses on events prior to the actual deployment of troops, it necessarily involves dealing with representations of what military and civic officials perceived Australia's role in Malaya to be, both militarily, socially and culturally. The latter half of the chapter continues this theme of representation by exploring how both the Australian Army and the RAAF characterized their new surroundings in Penang in a number of official information booklets, films and newspaper articles produced in the first decade of the Australian presence.

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[4] Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race & Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 6.

A Thoroughly Military Appreciation of Penang

Service in the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve in Malaya represented a type of service new to Australian Defence Forces. Previously, large overseas military deployments had been either under war-time conditions, as in the case of service in the two World Wars and the Korean War, or as post-war occupiers, as in the case of Australia's contribution to the British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF), sent to 'impose peace and prosperity' on Japan in the aftermath of the Pacific War.[5] In 1955, the Minister for the Army, Josiah Francis, conceded the unique nature of Australia's participation in the Strategic Reserve when he acknowledged that it was the first time that Australian military forces had been permanently located at overseas bases in peacetime.[6] In May 1956, the Treasurer, A.W. "Arthur" Fadden, also noted the exceptional circumstances of the deployment when he explained to other members of Cabinet that service in Malaya was 'service primarily of a garrison nature, by members of the permanent forces' with only the slight possibility of 'some operational duties'.[7]

As part of this new venture into 'garrison type' duties, Australian officials needed to define the relevant parameters of the force's presence in Malaya. 'An appropriate scale of benefits for members of the Strategic Reserve', the Treasurer went on to inform his Cabinet colleagues, 'would therefore appear to be something less than that applying to members who served under war-time conditions, but justifiably more than that provided for members serving solely under peace-time conditions'.[8] Australian Defence and Treasury officials further sharpened this distinction between war service and garrison duties. Operational 'war time' benefits, approved by Cabinet on 18 October 1950 following the outbreak of war in Korea, had also applied to members serving in the RAAF Transport and Bomber squadrons then operating with United Kingdom forces in Malaya. But in 1955, Defence and Treasury officials withdrew these 'war service' benefits because the role of the Strategic Reserve in Malaya was 'primarily of a garrison nature' and 'operations against the Terrorists' were only 'supplementary to these garrison duties'.[9]

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[5] To borrow from the title of Christine de Matos's work, "Imposing Peace and Prosperity: Australia, Social Justice and Labour Reform in Occupied Japan, 1945-1949" (Ph.D., thesis, University of Western Sydney, 2003).
[6] *The Age*, 20 August 1955.
[7] Cabinet Agendum 129, 18 May 1956, A5954 1463/5, NAA.
[8] *Ibid*.
[9] SS871 – 'Conditions of Service for the Australian Component of the Strategic Reserve in Malaya' of 26 July 1955, A100/1/68, NAA.

Key considerations that fell within the Treasurer's broad outline for considering the conditions of service that should apply to Australian members of Strategic Reserve included the duration of the tour of duty for members of the force, whether families would accompany Australian servicemen and just what 'garrison duties' in Malaya meant in terms of awards and honours, pay and allowances and repatriation benefits. The outcome of these considerations not only raised important questions of cost within the Treasury, but also had serious implications for the ways in which individual servicemen of the Australian Army and the RAAF would interact with the local peoples and cultures of Malaya.[10]

On 7 April 1955, the Minister of Defence, Philip McBride, acting on a recommendation by the Defence Committee, approved the formation of a team of Army, Air Force and Treasury personnel to investigate the 'conditions of service which should apply to Australian service personnel of the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve'.[11] Led by the RAAF Director of Personnel, Group Captain (GPCAPT) N.P. "Norman" Ford, the team consisted of two senior Army officers, two senior Air Force officers and representatives from the Treasury Department. As directed by the Defence Minister, the team's terms of reference entailed making 'an on the spot examination of conditions in the area' and subsequently submitting to the appropriate authorities 'recommendations on the conditions of service, including tours of duty, the position of families and pay and allowances for the Australian forces' while in Malaya.[12] The Services/Treasury team departed for Malaya on 28 April 1955 and returned to Australia with their findings on 24 May 1955. The Defence Committee received GPCAPT Ford's report on 28 June 1955, less than 2 weeks before the first advance party of Australian servicemen arrived in Butterworth on 7 July 1955.

The Services/Treasury team left for Malaya with one firm instruction from the Defence Committee. Conditions for servicemen in Malaya, the Committee noted, 'should enable members to maintain a standard of living not less than they would normally enjoy in

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[10] In the introduction to their recent work on the social and cultural dimensions of overseas U.S. bases, Maria Höhn and Seungsook Moon highlight the importance of these administrative factors in civilian-military relationships arising from the establishment of overseas military facilities. Among other things, they highlight the importance of the spatial arrangements that govern the civilian-military interaction, the specific branch of the military being deployed, the presence of families and the length of rotation as particularly crucial factors in the nature and types of interactions that develop between the military and the 'host community'; Maria Hön and Seungsook Moon, 'The Politics of Gender, Sexuality, Race and Class in the U.S. Military Empire' in *Over There: Living with the U.S. Military Empire form World War Two to the Present*, ed. Maria Hön and Seungsook Moon (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 18-19.

[11] Memorandum SS.420 – 'Conditions of Service for Australian Force Malaya – Investigating Team', 7 April 1955, A705 109/3/2422, NAA.

[12] Press Release by Minister of Defence, Sir Philip McBride, 29 April 1955, A705 109/3/2422, NAA.

Australia'.[13] In addition, the Defence Committee directed the Services/Treasury team to bear in mind any particular 'conditions and practices common to the theatre'. Although the first half of this instruction simply reinforced the Committee's acceptance of the largely peacetime nature of garrison duties in Malaya, the second half of the instruction had far more important implications for the Services/Treasury team.

The invitation by the Defence Committee to 'bear in mind any particular conditions and practices common to the theatre' clearly involved considering the more traditional codes of conduct that had previously been accepted as appropriate for representatives of a colonial power in an Asian colony of the British Empire. Adding this rather brief caveat allowed the Services/Treasury team to define the conditions of service for Australian servicemen in terms consistent with some of the more long-standing traditions of British colonial culture and administrations. By including this qualification, the Australian Defence Committee imagined a new and novel form of British coloniser in the twilight years of the British Empire in Malaya – remarkably, one that was Australian.

A defining feature of planning for the establishment of Australian garrisons in Malaya in early 1955 was the particular attention paid by the Australian Defence Committee to what they believed were the existing British views of social hierarchy in an Asian colonial context. As the Army Director of Administrative Planning (DAP) commented in July 1955, the principle consideration in determining the appropriate conditions of service in Malaya ought to ensure that the Australian community was accorded the appropriate level of social status. 'Face', the DAP wrote to the Defence Committee, 'so important in Asia, demands that status be demonstrated by the maintenance of a socially prescribed standard of living and behaviour'.[14]

Setting aside its rather crude form, this statement explains the crux of the term 'conditions and practices common to the theatre' - namely that Australian servicemen needed to position themselves appropriately within British racial and social hierarchies in Malaya. 'Unless it is acceptable for Australia and Australians to be regarded as "poor relations" and of lesser status than their UK counterparts', the DAP further explained to the Australian Defence Committee, 'it is essential for Australian personnel to have a … status not less than those from the UK'. Overseas allowances, wrote another senior Army officer, should 'be paid at a scale sufficient to ensure that members are able to maintain the same standard of

[13] Defence Committee Minute 247/54, A705 109/3/2422, NAA.
[14] Defence Committee Agendum 112/55, 11 July 1955, AWM207/C/1, AWM.

living as they maintain in Australia' or 'the standard of comparable ranks of the British Army in FARELF – whichever is the higher'.[15]

In their final report, submitted to the Defence Committee on 28 June 1955, many of the findings of the Services/Treasury team stemmed from the single assumption that Australian servicemen would be accompanied by their families while on service in Malaya. Although the Menzies' Government had yet to make a formal decision on this particular issue prior to the team leaving Australian shores, both the Defence Committee and the Services/Treasury team anticipated that Australian families would accompany their husbands on a posting to Malaya. Despite Australian servicemen being deployed to Malaya to make a final stand against a southward surging communist army from China – Radford dropped his bombshell on ANZAM planning nearly a month after the Services/Treasury team had submitted their final report – a number of factors persuaded military and treasury officials to expect Australian families to travel to Malaya with their husbands.

First, the Defence Committee had already accepted that Australian bases in Malaya should be treated, as far as possible, as normal peace-time postings. This meant that Australian servicemen should have a standard of living similar to that offered at any other military base in Australia. For married servicemen, this amounted to being accommodated in a Married Quarters (MQ) with their immediate families, just as they would be at home. Because troops in Malaya from the United Kingdom were long accustomed to being accompanied by their families, similar arrangements for Australian servicemen would align them with the standard practice then operating in theatre for other British servicemen.

Second, the decision to allow families to travel to Malaya also arose out of a desire to provide a sense of domesticity for weary Australian servicemen. In finalising their decision, the Defence Committee noted that 'the practical experience of the United Kingdom forces over many years has demonstrated the importance of uniting the married serviceman and his family'.[16] The Australian Defence Committee understood that many servicemen had only recently served a tour of duty in Korea or Japan or another remote overseas locality without their families.[17] Further separation while on a tour of duty in Malaya with the Strategic Reserve had the potential to erode morale within the force, produce high levels of

[15] Minute - DPA/AG2/BT 'Suggested Conditions of Service for ARA and RASR in Malaya' of 15 Feb 1955, A100/1/68, NAA.
[16] Notes from Defence Preparations Committee, A816 52/301/328, NAA.
[17] Cabinet Agendum No. 476 – 'Conditions of Service for the Australian Component of the Strategic Reserve in Malaya', A6059 41/441/126, NAA.

dissatisfaction and increase applications for compassionate discharge from the Services. Such a loss of experienced manpower would have had serious consequences for the overall effectiveness of the Australian Defence Force. Allowing families to accompany their husbands to Malaya largely negated these potentially crippling reactions to yet another long overseas deployment without the comforts and succour of family support.

The presence of service families in the theatre, the Defence Committee noted, also had 'a valuable effect on morale, not only of the married members, but of the force as a whole'.[18] Through the presence of wives, the Defence Committee sought to temper some of the more traditional vices associated with bored and restless troops occupying foreign soil.[19] Unrestrained, soldiers' natural tendencies to satisfy their 'unfortunate cravings' often went undeterred by what one British administrator described as the 'preservative, purifying and softening influences of every womanly connection'.[20] The 'leavening influence on the behaviour of the troops and airmen when off duty', the Defence Committee noted, would be reflected in the general attitude of the local community towards Australian forces in the area.[21]

More than any other single factor, the presence of Australian families in Malaya created the necessary domestic platform for building a genuine sense of community. In studying the significance of white women in the non-white colonies of the British Empire, Levine has noted that the presence of military wives often acted as a way of recreating western notions of home 'in a hostile and antithetical environment', which not only served as 'a means of bolstering middle-class images of feminine domesticity as a crucial part of the civilizing mission', but also functioned as a symbol of stability and permanency.[22] The presence of women, then, was envisioned to not only act as a restraint on soldierly decadence and leaven the general behaviour of all Australian servicemen, but additionally operated as a fundamental pillar of the Australian presence, marking it as both stable and permanent.

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[18] *Ibid*.
[19] The idea of U.S. military families overseas acting as a 'force multiplier' during the early phases of the Cold War as both a way of normalising the posting for GIs and also as a means to demonstrate the values of 'democracy' first hand to the host community is discussed at length in Donna Alvah, *Unofficial Ambassadors: American Military Families Overseas and the Cold War, 1946-1965* (New York: New York University Press, 2007).
[20] Levine, *Prostitution, Race & Politics*, p. 266.
[21] Cabinet Agendum No. 476 – 'Conditions of Service for the Australian Component of the Strategic Reserve in Malaya', A6059 41/441/126, NAA.
[22] *Ibid*., p. 254.

The Australian logic on the ameliorating influence of families for servicemen deployed overseas accorded with contemporary U.S. thinking. In the aftermath of the Second World War, like their British counterparts before them, U.S. military officials began to experiment with the 'normalising' effects of families for many of their combat weary GIs still deployed to overseas bases. As a counterweight to the military 'ethos of male rivalry based on competitive claims to toughness and physical prowess' enacted on either 'the battlefield or [in] the brothel', American families began to accompany their husbands on postings to both Japan and Germany from 1946 onwards.[23] Anni Baker suggests that while the problems of post-war occupation 'did not disappear overnight' with the arrival of American wives and families, most U.S. commanders did see the presence of families 'gradually restrain the worst excesses', albeit sometimes in 'very abnormal ways'.[24]

In overseas U.S. bases where families have not been permitted to accompany their husbands, such as the U.S. bases in South Korea, or in circumstances where married GIs did not constitute a large proportion of deployed forces, such as at the former U.S. naval base at Subic Bay in the Philippines, many scholars have noted the heightened tensions between the military and host societies, especially in terms of sexual politics and gender relations.[25] Susan Zeiger argues that the squalid 'camptowns' on the rim of some of these bases, especially those U.S. bases in South Korea, where 'an army of young Asian women' provide sexual and leisure services to U.S. troops, have become 'the primary site of interaction between American soldiers and local people'.[26] Australian authorities clearly wished to avoid this type of experience in Malaya.

Having accepted the benefits of a familial presence, Australian military authorities took advantage of this added domestic stability to justify a tour of duty for Australian troops in Malaya of between two to two and a half years. Without the benefits of a full family life, a tour of duty of over two years for married servicemen would not have been deemed practicable. The Defence Committee assumed that without the presence of families, the maximum tour of duty possible for married servicemen amounted to just one year.[27] In arriving at the decision to grant permission for Australian families to accompany their

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[23] Hön and Moon, *Over There*, p. 18.
[24] Anni P. Baker, *American Soldiers Overseas: The Global Military Presence* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2004), p. 46.
[25] Susan Zeiger, *Entangling Alliances: Foreign War Brides and American Soldiers in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University, 2010); Maria Hön and Seungsook Moon (editors), *Over There: Living with the U.S. Military Empire form World War Two to the Present* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).
[26] Zeiger, *Entangling Alliances*, p. 204.
[27] Brief for CGS – DCA 112/1955, 13 July 1955, AWM 207/C/1, AWM.

husbands on posting to Malaya, both the Defence Committee and the Services/Treasury team noted that, in order to have a ready supply of trained personnel available for each successive rotation, a 'one year tour of duty would entail a considerable additional manpower commitment in both Army and RAAF'.[28] In addition, a shorter tour of duty involved added logistics and movement concerns as well as disrupting many of the training and administrative programs of home-based forces in Australia that would still be observing the longer two to three year posting cycle.

During the first few years of actual service for Australians in Malaya, some senior Army and RAAF officials came to question the efficacy of a two to two and a half year tour of duty. After two years at Butterworth, several Commanding Officers (COs) reported that the 'morale of married accompanied personnel' was very high and presented no significant problems.[29] Indeed, the CO of No.114 MCRU commented on the high number of married personnel making enquiries 'about a possible extension of tour' in Malaya.[30] Many such enquiries by married servicemen however, were denied on the grounds that the continuing contentment of Australian wives in Malaya was an issue. On 21 January 1960, Group Capitan (GPCAPT) G.A. "Glen" Cooper of No.78 Wing Headquarters, reported that over the previous two months there had been a slight increase in the number of domestic problems 'due to boredom on the part of the wives because of the small amount of work or other activities which they undertake'.[31] In view of these cases, Cooper contributed to the ongoing debate regarding tours of duty by stating that, 'it is considered that two years should be the maximum length of tour' for married men in Malaya.

Concern, similar to that shown for the 'bored housewives', extended to considerations regarding the duration of the tour of duty expected of unmarried servicemen in Malaya. In the same monthly report in which GPCAPT Cooper aired his views, the CO of No.114 Mobile Control and Reporting Unit (MCRU) described the state of the majority of single members of the unit as 'becoming bored with conditions in Malaya'.[32] He recommended giving serious consideration to shortening the length of their tour of duty.[33] Whilst married servicemen, it was imagined, with their comfortable home and surrounded by a community of other married members, would enjoy time off work in a manner very similar to that in any

[28] Defence Committee Minute 247/54, 13 July 1955, AWM 207/C/1, AWM.
[29] No.2SQN Minute 3/5/AIR (7A), 22 January 1960, A1196 1/501/781, NAA.
[30] Monthly Report on Activities of No.114MCRU, October 1958, A12187 3/11/AIR Part 1, NAA.
[31] Monthly Report on Activities – No.78 Wing, January 1960, A12187 3/11/AIR Part 1, NAA.
[32] Monthly Report on Activities of No.114MCRU, October 1958, A12187 3/11/AIR Part 1, NAA.
[33] *Ibid*.

Australian suburb, single servicemen instead faced a much more disagreeable set of options. In 1956, according to the Provost Martial at Butterworth, Squadron Leader (SQNLDR) J.M. O'Neill, the choice faced by single servicemen in Malaya was between either boredom and social inactivity or fraternising with local recreations such as cabarets and theatres where, 'his companion of the opposite sex' would 'be wholly Asian'.[34]

The official Services/Treasury team report understood the matter in similar terms. The team claimed that the isolation of single airmen was 'due to the fact that he has no civilian counterpart amongst the European community in Malaya and he is separated from the womenfolk of his own race'.[35] This lack of suitable 'European' women in the predominantly masculine environment of the Australian garrison in Penang prompted a separate debate regarding the appropriate length of time that single members of the Australian Army and the RAAF should spend serving in Malaya. Clearly, for the sake of their physical and emotional well-being, Defence officials wished to implement strategies which helped single Australian servicemen in Malaya avoid both boredom and fraternising with companions of the opposite sex who were 'wholly Asian'. The crux of the question remained, of course, just what strategies should be implemented to enable single servicemen to avoid such unwholesome temptations and survive a two year tour of duty.

In the end, the final decision on whether to align the duration of the tours of duty for both single and married men at between two to two and a half years revolved largely around the issue of the sensual temptations of the East for single servicemen. This debate drew heavily on long-standing colonial images of the East as a cesspit of tropical sensuality, at the same time both carnal and coercive. Attempts to negate the lure of these temptations focussed on encouraging single Australian men to be physically active. Every provision should be made, advised SQNLDR O'Neill, 'for members to engage in physical activity' and organised sport.[36]

In a contest between the sweat and physical exertions of organised sport and the sensual attractions of the East, however, the latter inevitably held far more appeal for young, single Australian servicemen in Penang. 'Off-base Asiatic temptations', noted the CO of

[34] Report to the Director General Personnel of 30 October 1956 by Provost Marshal, Squadron Leader J.M. O'Neill, A1196 29/501/340 Part 1,NAA.
[35] Report of the Combined Service/Treasury team on conditions of service for Australian Service Personnel of the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve, 28 June 1955, A5954 1463/6, NAA.
[36] Report to the Director General Personnel of 30 October 1956 by Provost Marshal, Squadron Leader J.M. O'Neill, A1196 29/501/340 Part 1,NAA.

No.2 SQN, Wing Commander (WGCDR) C.W. "Colin" Steley, in late 1959, in spite of all the sport organised by the unit to nullify their appeal, seemed to capture the attention of the younger, single members of the squadron after about eighteen months in the area.[37] In light of this experience, Steley argued, 'the maximum length of tour for single personnel should not exceed eighteen months and the desirable duration would be fifteen months'.[38]

For all the insight gained by experience, the original decision made the Defence Committee and the Services/Treasury team remained unchanged. In their deliberations in early 1955, the Defence Committee had already considered and subsequently rejected the temptation to differentiate between single men and married men with regard to the length of their tours of duty in Malaya. One of the primary reasons justifying this decision involved avoiding any possibility of eroding the morale of the Australian community in Penang by driving an even larger wedge between the overseas experiences of these already distinct groups of servicemen.

When balanced against the negative aspects of single men serving a full two year tour of duty in Malaya, this concession to the overall morale of the force triumphed, even though it was rather glumly noted that 'such conditions might well result in a high rate of marriages with Asiatics'.[39] Australian officials, it seemed, fully appreciated the unevenness of the contest in Malaya between 'off-base Asiatic temptations' and just about anything they could offer young, single Australian servicemen in comparison. In the end, the tour of duty for all Australian servicemen remained 'a two year tour … but that to give flexibility to the relief and replacement programme, the tour should be defined as two to two and a half years'.[40]

In another concession to the pull of the bars and clubs on Penang Island, Defence officials also conceded that appropriate social entertainments needed to be provided for troops and airmen in at least some attempt to further lessen the attractions of local city nightlife. In practice, this entailed constructing a social cordon sanitaire around the Australian troops and airmen by establishing an exclusive club for their use. As the Services/Treasury team noted in their report, 'because the European in Malaya represents a very small minority of the total population, he has found it necessary to make special

[37] No.2SQN Minute 3/5/AIR (7A), 22 January 1960, A1196 1/501/781, NAA.
[38] *Ibid*.
[39] Memorandum from Department of Air to Minister of Defence, 3 August 1955, A4940 C1445, NAA.
[40] Memo SS871 – 'Conditions of Service for the Australian Component of the Strategic Reserve in Malaya' of 26 July 1955, A100/1/68, NAA, Melbourne.

arrangements to meet his social and recreational needs … and as a means of counteracting these unusual conditions, excellent clubs have been formed'.[41]

The immediate problem facing Australian authorities, however, was the lack of an appropriate club catering for lower ranked 'European' servicemen. At the time of the Services/Treasury team visit, both the Penang Swimming Club and the Penang Club were restricted to 'British' (including Australian) officers only. This left the Penang Golf Club, Penang Turf Club or the Penang Sports Club as the only clubs offering membership to Australian troops and airmen.

While the Services/Treasury team encouraged membership of these existing clubs in order to ensure 'that an adequate number of Australian personnel are able to take full part in the normal social life of the civilian community by being members of the appropriate European Clubs', they also proposed building a social club on Penang Island which catered exclusively to Australian servicemen. Cheap meals, cheap alcohol and overnight accommodation - the veritable triumvirate of military sociability – were offered as a foil against exposure to the sexual laxity of the tropics. Establishing a club for Australian troops in Georgetown, noted Lieutenant E.J. Patterson in December 1955, 'would to a very great degree keep the troops from frequenting the unsavoury Cabarets etc., and at the same time reduce offences against discipline'.[42] Of course, in the end, the provision of cheap alcohol and overnight accommodation in the heart of Georgetown proved as effective as organised sport in lessening the frequency of single Australian servicemen sampling the exotic temptations on offer in Penang.

On 1 February 1956, Colonel F.W. "Frank" Speed, the senior Australian Army officer in Malaya, officially opened the aptly named 'Garrison Club' at 1 Light Street, Penang, in a building leased for the purpose from a well-known local Chinese family.[43] Facilities included a bar, ladies lounge, dining room, billiards, table tennis and overnight accommodation at a charge of $1 per bed per night. When the initial two year lease came to an end in late 1957, the Secretary of the Department of Air wrote to the Treasury seeking approval for a further two year extension with the following justification:

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[41] Report of the Combined Service/Treasury team, 28 June 1955.

[42] Informal Report to QMG, Australian Army by Lt. E.J. Patterson, 12 December 1955, MT1131/1 A12/1/259, NAA.

[43] The idea for a recreation centre in Georgetown again drew on the Australian experience in Japan. Indeed the Garrison Club in Penang was modelled after Empire House in Tokyo, which was also designed to provide a recreation centre for Australian troops to 'let their hair down' in a controlled environment. See 'Transcript of Oral History Recording – Brigadier James Graham Ochiltree, OBE (Ret'd)', Sound Collection - S00369, AWM.

> The club is assisting greatly in the maintenance of morale and discipline by providing an alternative to native haunts and less reputable places of entertainment. Its presence has achieved economies both in manpower and money by helping to keep the incidence of VD to a minimum and it is highly regarded by both the civil and military police.[44]

Of course, on a two to two and a half year posting to Penang, frequenting the Garrison Club and experiencing the lure of 'off-base Asiatic temptations' were not mutually exclusive pursuits for most young, single Australian servicemen.

Employing Local Civilians

For centuries, one common measure of European status in the East involved the number of domestic servants kept by individuals. By employing a large retinue of servants, an Englishman could mimic the privileged households and lifestyles of persons of far greater rank and fortune back home. Although senior officials of the British East India Company routinely employed dozens of servants, even the average merchant could reconstitute himself on a grander scale in the East through the employment of a large number of locals to assist with domestic chores.

In the early twentieth century, domestic servants sustained the kind of life-style for the British in Malaya that few of their middle-class compatriots continued to enjoy at home. Traditionally, a European household in Malaya engaged both a cook and 'boy' to perform the household duties, an *ayah* or *amah* to care for any children, a *syce* or chauffer, and lower down the order, a gardener or *kebun*, a *dhobi* or laundryman and finally a *tukan ayer* to take care of water and sanitary necessities. All of these servants, according to Shennan, were employed at 'no more than $150 to $180 a month, less than an average monthly budget for food and drink'.[45]

Although many of these domestic servants came from distinct racial groups, the mixed labouring world of the household did little to bridge the social distance between Europeans and their Asian employees. When George Peet moved into a boarding house in the early 1920s, he recalled being the only boarder who knew his room-boy's name, all the

[44] Memorandum from the Secretary, Department of Air to Assistant Secretary, Department of the Treasury, 8 October 1957, MT1131/1 A12/1/259, NAA.
[45] Margaret Shennan, *Out in the Midday Sun: The British in Malaya, 1880-1960* (London: John Murray, 2000), p. 115.

other men just shouted 'Boy'.[46] In a similar manner, many Europeans throughout much of the colonial period often simply referred to their cooks as 'cookie' rather than be bothered to know and use his or her actual name.[47]

In early 1955, the Australian Services/Treasury team noted that 'all married Europeans, civilian and Service, with their families in Singapore and Malaya employ domestic servants'.[48] By their own account, the team gave special attention to the customs of the UK services with regard to this particular aspect of living in Malaya. 'All British Army, RAF and civilian cost of living assessments include amounts for domestic servants', the report noted. The normal British household in Malaya, the report continued, employed a cook, a boy, a wash amah who maintains the house and does the washing and ironing and a part-time kaboon or gardener.

Australian officials justified the employment of servants because of both 'the enervating climate in Malaya', which necessitated extra assistance in the performance of manual labour tasks, as well as by accepting the traditional customs of the British in Malaya. The report of the Services/Treasury team noted that because, in Malaya, 'the European does not do any form of manual labour', the provision of local labour to attend to the vigorous tropical growth in gardens was absolutely essential.[49] The Treasury Department took note of the Services/Treasury team's advice and wrote that 'in view of the accepted principle that, in Malaya, Europeans do not engage in outdoor labour pursuits such as gardening, reasonable maintenance of gardens in residences both on and off station may be undertaken by indigenous station labour under direction of the Unit Commander'.[50] In a brief for the Chief of General Staff, one Australian Army Brigadier put it rather more bluntly when he wrote that, in Singapore and Malaya, 'the white man does not labour in gardens'.[51] Consequently, part-time gardeners were allocated to each married quarter in Penang in order to prevent Australian men and women from breaking the long-standing tradition which prohibited 'Europeans' from performing manual labour in Malaya.

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[46] George L. Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2009), p. 62.
[47] Jean Falconer, *Woodsmoke and Temple Flowers: Memories of Malaya* (Edinburgh: The Pentland Press Limited, 1992), p.18.
[48] Report of the Combined Service/Treasury team, 28 June 1955.
[49] *Ibid*.
[50] Minute 492 – "Conditions of Service for the Australian Component of the Strategic Reserve", 19 August 1955, A816 52/301/328A, NAA.
[51] Brief for CGS – DCA 112/1955, 13 July 1955, AWM 207/C/1, AWM.

On the recommendation of the Services/Treasury team, the scale adopted by the Army and the RAAF for the employment of domestic servants by married personnel provided for one servant for all troops and airmen, two servants for all officers up to the rank of Group Capitan/Colonel and three domestic servants for all officers of the ranks of Air Commodore/Brigadier and above. These domestic servants were over and above the part-time gardener allocated to each married quarters. So irrespective of the particular make-up of a family unit - whether a married couple had five children under the age of ten or none at all - the approved scale for allotting domestic servants mirrored the conventional hierarchies of military rank. By providing officers with more domestic servants than troops and airmen, and senior officers more domestic servants than their more junior counterparts, this scale acknowledged the long-standing equivalency between social status and the employment of servants for members of British communities in the East.

In terms of the actual method of employing and paying for domestic servants for Australian servicemen, the Services/Treasury team recommended following the example set by British forces in Malaya. Instead of providing an allowance directly to each serviceman to employ their own retinue of servants, domestic servants for British personnel were employed and paid for by Unit Commanders and then allocated to each serviceman according to the official scale. The Services/Treasury team advised adopting this same method for Australian servicemen for two reasons.

First, by using this method, 'in a country where it is both a necessity and an established custom for the European', Australian families would have no excuse for not utilizing the services of domestic servants.[52] Second, the Services/Treasury team feared that if a cash allowance was provided for the employment of domestic servants, most Australian families would simply avoid doing so and use the cash for something else. If this eventuality were permitted, British servicemen would have domestic servants employed within their homes while the majority of Australian servicemen would not. This stark contrast may well have marked out Australians as the 'poor cousins' of their British counterparts and eroded the solidarity of the 'European' community in Malaya, two outcomes which Australian officials clearly wished to avoid.

In addition to employing domestic servants for families, Unit Commanders also utilized local labour to fill a number of other positions on Australian military bases in

[52] Report of the Combined Service/Treasury team, 28 June 1955.

Malaya. In purely economic and practical terms, employing locals, whose costs and wages were so much lower than an Australian equivalent, made perfect sense. The chief concern driving this discrepancy, however, was not financial but instead drew again on the traditional theme of 'European' prestige. Indeed, some positions, like those of gardeners, cleaners, kitchen hands, waiters and drivers, were always intended to be filled by local labour for reasons of status and tradition.

Additionally, at the RAAF base at Butterworth, the actual number of these basic labour positions totalled more than would usually be found at an equivalent base back in Australia. A report on the 'Deployment and Task of Base Squadron RAAF Butterworth' in April 1958 noted that 'climate conditions, local customs and the status of Europeans in the community have dictated that more domestic musterings than would be usual' in Australia were required at the RAAF base at Butterworth. The reason for the discrepancy not only drew on notions of colonial prestige, but as is explored in the next chapter, also took into account the perceived limited physical and mental capabilities of local labour in comparison to the those of 'Europeans'.

Housing, Medical, Dental, Education and Other Allowances

From the point of view of the Department of Defence, the three most important factors regarding the conditions of service for Australian personnel in Malaya included the duration of each serviceman's tour of duty, the decision as to whether to allow families to accompany servicemen and an adherence to the general principle that all other conditions of service for Australians compared favourably to those enjoyed by British servicemen in Malaya. Nested within these decisions were further ancillary choices regarding the allocation of housing, the level of medical care to be provided to the families of servicemen, the provision of primary and secondary educational facilities for the children of servicemen and finally, the compensation, if any, required to allow Australian servicemen to lead a lifestyle similar to that lived back at home in Australia. Many of the answers to these questions flowed quite logically by again drawing on the example set by British forces in the area. The difficulty, where one existed, usually lay in the logistics of providing a particular amenity or service in a country in which Australian Defence authorities were loath to accept the quality or standards of any local facilities.

The British Army and Royal Air Force (RAF) both maintained substantial presences in Malaya at the time of the Australian arrival. In many cases, these British forces, or at least a substantial portion of them, remained in place even after the Australian forces had arrived. In terms of housing, this meant that there was not only a very small pool of available married quarters for Australian authorities to draw upon in Penang but that any extant local housing that did meet the appropriate standards expected by Australian servicemen instantly attracted serious competition for its lease.

To counteract these forces in the local housing market, the Services/Treasury team recommended two solutions which were subsequently adopted by the Defence Committee. First, approval was given for Australian servicemen to negotiate their own leases with local agents. Within the limited availability of local stock, servicemen decided for themselves the type and location of private houses they wished to rent and occupy. Financial upper limits on these private hirings were based on a maximum rental of $450 per month for officers and $350 per month for airmen, of which all servicemen simply payed the normal scale of 15% of their pay. While this measure somewhat alleviated the shortage by allowing members the discretion to accept houses in certain locations, and of a certain type, that service authorities would have been officially required to refuse, it was only ever considered a short term solution.

The second method of solving the housing shortage recommended by the Services/Treasury team involved engaging local contractors to construct specially built housing estates for the families of Australian officers, soldiers and airmen. This scheme not only acknowledged the permanent shortage of housing of a level considered appropriate for Australian service families but also allowed for the geographical segregation of 'Europeans' from the chaotic, crowded and unhygienic spaces of the East – a common practice throughout the history of British colonialism in the region. Under the broad terms of the scheme outlined by the Services/Treasury team, a local contractor would provide the necessary capital for the housing project subject to a firm commitment from Australian Defence officials for an initial lease of three-years, with half of the three-year rental payable in advance.[53]

The location of any future purpose-built housing estates for Australian servicemen and their families also occupied the minds of the members of the Services/Treasury team. Initial plans to build married quarters at Butterworth for members of the RAAF met with

[53] Notes of Hiring of Married Quarters in Malaya, 10 December 1955, MT1131/1 – A259/54/132, NAA.

instant disapproval by the team in favour of a plan to accommodate the majority of both Army and RAAF families on Penang Island. Although accommodation built at Butterworth would have been much closer to the base than accommodation on the island, Butterworth suffered from an unfortunate association of being too authentically 'Eastern'.

In 1955, Australian officials considered Butterworth a small 'Asian' town rife with all the chaos, dirt and fecundity that marked it out as the antithesis of civilization. In a demi-official letter to GPCAPT P.G. "Percy" Lings on 6 December 1957, GPCAPT D.W. "Deryck" Kingwell noted the thinking of RAAF officials at the time. After discussing the future location of Australian housing with Personnel Branch, Kingwell wrote to Lings that, 'we were informed by C.A.A. (A.M.P) that he had been a member of the original committee which visited Butterworth for the initial planning … and was of the strong opinion that Butterworth, although suitable for Asian accommodation, was not nearly as suitable for whites as Penang'.[54] In later years, housing estates for RAAF families were built near the Butterworth base, but not until opinions regarding Butterworth's suitability for 'Europeans' had changed considerably from those of the original Services/Treasury team.

The presence of Australian families in Malaya alongside their serving husbands also raised questions regarding the provision of medical and dental services to Australian families. In addition, the provision of educational facilities to meet the needs of Australian children also remained unresolved. When the Services/Treasury team reported its recommendations in June 1955, it simply proposed making arrangements for the provision of medical and dental services for Australian families by utilizing the existing British military hospitals already in the area. In a similar manner, the team suggested that children of Australian servicemen be educated at one of the British Army or RAF schools in the area. In the end, both of these arrangements endured for only the first few years. The general principal, however, that Australian families be provided, at no cost to individual servicemen, free medical and dental treatment as well as the provision of educational facilities for their children while posted to Malaya was an entrenched condition of service from the very beginning. Both the medical and educational aspects of Butterworth are examined in later chapters.

In addition to medical and dental, the Services/Treasury team recommended a series of allowances payable for everything from the high cost of food in Malaya and Singapore to

[54] Report of the Combined Service/Treasury team, 28 June 1955.

the extra costs associated with transport and public utilities. As usual, gradations for rank and marital status applied. In addition to these allowances, an initial clothing allowance was granted to servicemen and their families to allow them to buy outfits appropriate to 'the local conditions in Malaya, particularly the humidity and racial factors'.[55] The Services/Treasury team later clarified their use of the term 'racial factors'. The clothing allowance was payable for servicemen to purchase 'a wardrobe suitable to the climate' in Malaya, as well as 'of sufficient quantity and quality to keep up appearances'.[56]

The final allowance approved by the Services/Treasury team provided servicemen with two free travel warrants per year for travel to approved recreation centres within Malaya and Singapore as a way of providing respite from the enfeebling tropical climate. This particular allowance drew on a centuries old practice in which much of the administrative and bureaucratic machinery of the British in India took refuge from the hot summer months by withdrawing to one of the 'hill stations' of the Raj.[57] Indeed, whether it was the intention of the Services/Treasury team or not, many Australian servicemen and their families did visit the nearby Malayan 'hill station' at the Cameron Highlands, although almost certainly none were motivated by a concern to escape the 'enfeebling effects' of the tropics.[58]

The initial conditions of service, as first proposed by the Services/Treasury team in 1955 and further entrenched in the first few years of deployment, continued to govern the lives of Australian servicemen for much of the three decade Australian presence in Malaya. The employment of domestic servants, gardeners, local workers around the base, free medical and dental services as well as a number of generous allowances continued well into the 1980s for RAAF servicemen and their families posted to Butterworth.[59] While conceptions of their

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[55] Minute A10/10/380 (A1) of 16 October 1957, A10/1/380, NAA, Melbourne.
[56] Minute M/3/8 of 6 July 1957, A10/1/380, NAA, Melbourne.
[57] See Dane Kennedy, *The Magic Mountain: Hill Stations and the British Raj* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996).
[58] A number of questionnaire participants recall visits to the Cameron Highlands while posted to Penang but no-one mentions any concern about the effect of the tropical environment on their health. 'The Cameron Highlands just north of Kuala Lumpur', wrote one Australian SGT from the mid-1970s, 'is one of the most beautiful places I have ever been to. No wonder all of the ex-English rubber planters have retired there'. Typically, Australians recalled the beauty of the Cameron Highlands rather than its health benefits.
[59] One Australian pilot, who was posted to Butterworth in the late 1980s, wrote the following in his questionnaire response regarding the allowances received by Australian servicemen while posted to Butterworth - 'In January1987, Dept. of Defence cut the previous good living allowances for RAAF Personnel living in Malaysia just after the last lot of people were posted in for 18 months. By tracing what people actually received as pay in Malaysia, "they" decided that we didn't need the allowances because cash was being directed to bank accounts in Australia. This was underhanded and it hurt many serving personnel whose families had needed two incomes back home, many of the troops suffered hardship as they had relied on the allowances to pay a mortgage etc. There was nothing we could do about it. Whilst I was not badly affected financially, this was a factor in my resignation'.

intent and justification may have changed over the years, the initial conditions of service, as recommended by the Services/Treasury team, remained largely unchanged.

Malaya Bound

On 16 March 1958, an Australian airman, Leading Aircraftsman (LAC) Hollingsworth, wrote a handwritten letter to the Australian High Commissioner in Kuala Lumpur requesting information on the costs of living in Penang. Hollingsworth expected to be posted to Butterworth by the end of the year and was most anxious to obtain information regarding any possible difficulties that may face him, his wife and two small children while they lived in Malaya. 'I am mainly interested in cost of living as it would affect an average Australian family of four … any information regarding climate, population, schools and churches would be very much appreciated'.[60] Hollingsworth previously had sought information from the Malayan Trade Commissioner in Sydney, who had generously provided him with a small booklet on Malaya. Not only do Hollingsworth's attempts to gain information from these two sources indicate a general dearth of knowledge regarding life and conditions in Penang amongst Australian servicemen, but it also is noteworthy that he thought that the best place to source such information was from outside the Department of Defence.

Like LAC Hollingsworth, most Australian families proceeding to Malaya in the late 1950s and early 1960s had little experience in overseas travel and almost none had first-hand knowledge of Southeast Asia.[61] In an effort to dispel the strangeness of the foreign environment in Malaya through education, RAAF officials directed that airmen and their families 'should have available to them, before they leave Australia, as much information as possible concerning local conditions in Malaya'.[62] Senior members of the Australian Army harboured similar sentiments concerning an information package for outbound troops. The Minister for the Army, Josiah Francis, announced in August 1955 that 'every member of the Australian Component of the British Commonwealth Far East Strategic Reserve would be

[60] Letter from LAC Hollingsworth to Australian High Commissioner in Kuala Lumpur, 18 March 1958, A12187 3/5/AIR Part 2, NAA.
[61] Of the 74 questionnaire participants who served in Penang between 1955 and 1965, over 78% reported that they possessed little to no knowledge of Malay prior to their posting.
[62] Loose Minute – "Deployment of RAAF Personnel to Butterworth – Local Conditions, Malaya", dated 12 March 1958, A12187 3/5/AIR Part 2, NAA.

issued with an information handbook designed to provide general knowledge and background of the people, customs and country of Malaya'.[63]

Malaya Bound, an information handbook complied by the Australian Army Educational Corps in August 1955, was the first such attempt at providing a ready source of information for troops, airmen and officers anticipating a posting to Malaya.[64] In the introduction, the authors of *Malaya Bound* stated that the overall purpose of the publication sought 'to gather between two covers the answers to at least the obvious questions which would arise in the mind of the Australian serviceman who found himself "Malaya Bound"'.[65] During the late 1950s, Australian military officials distributed thousands of copies of the booklet to Australian servicemen proceeding on deployment to Malaya.

In keeping with the outlook of Australians as members of the 'European' race occupying a British colonial territory, the authors sourced much of the material contained in *Malaya Bound* from older books and pamphlets produced for British servicemen in the Far East. Included amongst the titles drawn upon by the Australian Army Educational Corps was a pamphlet from the British War Office on life and conditions in the Far East titled "Far East Theatre". Another pamphlet, produced by the Royal Empire Society, titled "Notes on Conditions in the Federation in Malaya" as well as other booklets such as "Your Health in the Far East Air Force Command", prepared in 1953 by the Headquarters Far East Air Force (HQ FEAF), were also consulted. Some of the information in these works drew upon constructions of British servicemen and the 'natives of the Far East' which dated back to the earliest days of British settlement in the East. With little actual experience in Malaya themselves, the Australian authors of *Malaya Bound* unquestioningly accepted and reprinted much of the information contained within these works.

According to the Australian Minister for the Army, *Malaya Bound* provided readers with general information on 'the principle Do's and Don'ts concerning the political, social and racial customs of the country'.[66] A small section on geography and climate included descriptions of local flora and fauna, the differences in the coastal and jungle areas of Malaya as well as annual figures on rainfall and temperature. As was usual on such topics as climate, the racially-loaded issue of health in the tropics did not go unmentioned.

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[63] Press Statement by the Minister for the Army, 31 August 1955, MT1131/1 A262/1/492, NAA.
[64] *Malaya Bound: Information Handbook, compiled by Australian Army Educational Corps, August 1955, Australian National Library*.
[65] *Ibid.*
[66] *Ibid*., p. 31.

The climate was, *Malaya Bound* declared, healthy for Europeans though prolonged residence, over a period of years, 'produces mental fatigue as well as bodily tiredness'.[67] As *Malaya Bound* went on to further explain, continued exposure to the 'hot, sticky climate' of the Far East often 'shows itself as a lack of energy, a disinclination to start doing things, and sometimes irritability and impatience' in Europeans more used to the benefits of a temperate climate.[68] Although a fear of Australian servicemen being contaminated with the 'laziness and mental deficiencies of natives' through continued exposure to the tropical climate remained a concern, *Malaya Bound* assured its readers that, as long as sensible precautions were undertaken, life in the tropics 'need cause no alarm'.[69]

For Army personnel anticipating operational duties connected with the ongoing Malayan Emergency, the authors of *Malaya Bound* included detailed information on conditions in the jungle as well as general tips on how to avoid dangerous entanglements with local flora and fauna. Citing information from British soldier and author Frederick Spencer Chapman's popular 1948 recollections of his wartime experiences —*The Jungle is Neutral* — advice covered a broad range of topics including how to turn palm leaves into 'useful buckets' and how to navigate through the jungle without a compass or map.[70] The great danger of soldiering in the jungle, according to *Malaya Bound* was 'Jungle Fear', a fear that arose from either becoming demoralized by all the dangers and hazards associated with the jungle or from becoming depressed 'from the teeming life of the jungle, and the apparent insignificance of the humans who venture into it'.[71] Alongside such other interesting facts as 'tigers seem to avoid white men', the authors of *Malaya Bound* also reassured Australian soldiers that, in the Malayan jungle, 'beasts fear you more than you fear them, probably'.[72]

Under the subtitle 'Peoples of Malaya', the authors of *Malaya Bound* described the various Asian communities of the Peninsula by simply repeating many of the stereotypes long held by British residents in the region. This tendency to de-individualize each racial category rested upon the tenacious myth of Asia as a land populated by homogeneous and undifferentiated communities of 'natives'. The Malays were described as 'nature's gentlemen' and 'one of the most courteous peoples of the world'.[73] Furthermore, they were

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[67] *Ibid*.
[68] *Ibid*.
[69] *Ibid*.
[70] See Frederick Spencer Chapman, *The Jungle is Neutral (London: Chatto and Windus, 1948).*
[71] *Malaya Bound*, p. 32.
[72] *Ibid.*
[73] *Ibid*., p. 6.

‘easy-going by nature, valuing their leisure more than prosperity gained by drudgery … they set great store by their family life, and are shy and modest with strangers … and have a quiet pride which demands respect’.[74]

Portraits of Malays in *Malaya Bound* contrasted with the ‘energy and brains’ of the Chinese, whose influence in the commercial life of Malaya and Singapore largely accounted for ‘the pre-war prosperity of the country’, and was set to ‘undoubtedly play a great part in the future’.[75] The Indian population was caricatured as workers on rubber plantations, caretakers and businessmen without further commenting on any perceived racial qualities that they may or may not have possessed.[76] Finally, ‘in addition to Malays, Chinese, and Indians, there are Arab communities, Eurasians and large numbers of Europeans, mainly British and Dutch, all living and working in Malaya’.[77] This separation of Eurasians and Europeans into two distinct racial groups continued in two subsequent tables denoting the various sizes of each community.

Attempts to differentiate between the various communities of Penang were almost always followed by further generalisations about ‘members of the Eastern races’, ‘Asians’, or ‘natives’. Most of these assertions firmly counselled Australian servicemen and their families about the various precautions necessary when interacting, or rather, trying to avoid, the local peoples. ‘It must be remembered’, *Malaya Bound* warned,

> that in the tropics you may live in areas which are surrounded by the native population, and may be in contact with natives when sight-seeing, etc. Natives have very limited ideas or knowledge of sanitation, and the rules of cleanliness are very frequently neglected. You must, therefore, pay particular attention to your own personal cleanliness.[78]

Where interactions with local people inevitably did occur, the instructional booklet provided advice on how Australian servicemen and their families should approach such potential encounters.[79] ‘Do not clap a Malay or Chinese on the back in the mistaken idea that

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[74] *Ibid*.
[75] *Ibid*.
[76] *Ibid*.
[77] *Ibid*.
[78] *Ibid*., p. 27.
[79] Attempts to dissuade servicemen from interacting with the local ‘Asian’ environment echoed the Australian experience with BCOF. Writing about another Australian Army publication, *Know Japan*, Robin Gerster noted that ‘The men of BCOF were to “know” Japan by having nothing to do with its people’: Gerster, *Travels in Atomic Sunshine*, p. 11. Vera Mackie also comments on the exhortations to avoid contact with local Japanese in *Know Japan*. Mackie notes that ‘unofficial dealings with the Japanese must be kept to a minimum’: Vera Mackie, “Gender and the Rhetoric of Occupation” in *Occupying the “Other”: Australia and Military*

you are showing friendliness', the booklet explained, 'they do not like being touched'.[80] Likewise, *Malaya Bound* cautioned, women in the East resented familiarity as it clashed with their 'code of respectability'. 'Never shout at or strike an Asian', *Malaya Bound* informed Australian servicemen and their families, because 'any display of violence lowers your standing in his eyes … also it will have no effect … he will be embarrassed at your display of ill-breeding, but not impressed'.[81] Above all, cautioned *Malaya Bound*, 'the quality that all Eastern races admire is quiet dignity and friendliness without familiarity'.[82] With this and other advice on 'Eastern rules and etiquette', Australian servicemen were told that the 'golden rule is to be friendly and well-mannered … remembering that you will always be under observation as a representative of a race for whom the East has always had a liking and respect'.[83]

Criticism of *Malaya Bound* resonated with incredulity and light-hearted mockery. Under the sub-title 'Memo Canberra: Kipling is Dead', an article by Patricia Williams, *the Sun* correspondent in Singapore, who no doubt possessed a wealth of contemporary knowledge concerning the social situation in Malaya and Singapore, noted that 'The picture painted [in Malaya Bound] might have done in Kipling's day, but now … oh dear no!'[84] On 7 September 1955, John Hetherington's column, "Collins Street Calling", in *The Age*, wrote that it was 'hardly surprising' that 'a 60-page booklet of advice to Australian troops bound for Malaya … dashed off by an army officer in two weeks, as a spare time job … is raising more laughs in Malaya than Bob Hope raised here' in a recent tour.[85] Most journalists, both Australian and Malayan, condemned the advice offered to Australians in *Malaya Bound* as out-dated and backward. In almost all cases, articles pointed to the warnings against over-familiarity with Asians, the need for troops to make sure they take a midday siesta in the exhausting tropical climate and even the bizarre information that 'under no circumstance' would a Malay approach a dog 'whose coat is wet', as evidence of a complete lack of understanding about Malaya and Singapore on the part of Australian Defence officials.

Other commentators treated the contents of *Malaya Bound* with even more contempt. Long-time Asia correspondent Peter Russo of The Argus, noted that the advice to 'be careful

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Occupations from Japan to Iraq, eds. Christine de Matos & Robin Gerster (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholarly Publishing: 2009), p. 94.

[80] *Malaya Bound*, p. 25.

[81] *Ibid*.

[82] *Ibid*., p. 26.

[83] *Ibid*.

[84] *The Sun*, 1 September 1955, "Memo Canberra: Kipling is Dead".

[85] *The Age*, 7 September 1955, "Collins Street Calling".

not to slap Chinese or Malays on the back' as 'they don't like to be touched' originated in the sixteenth century when Matteo Ricci, a Jesuit Missionary, returned to Europe after a long period of work in the Far East and was therefore advice that was over three hundred years old.[86] Russo then suggested that perhaps, in line with the 'old world' picture of Malaya painted in *Malaya Bound*, senior diplomats 'wearing a ceremonial headdress of eagle feathers … could then distribute beads and alarm clocks among the Malayans as a token of our good will and assure them the Great White Father at Canberra is keeping a paternal eye on his jungle children'.[87] Russo's final lament contained a biting jibe at those senior Defence officials shaping Australia's engagement with Malaya. 'Malaya is chortling happily over Canberra's booklet of advice to Australian troops bound for our "front line"', mostly because 'good-humoured Asians concede that the older generation of Australians formulating the policy' just simply did 'not know any better'.[88]

In an effort to deflect some of this criticism over the publication and distribution of *Malaya Bound*, one member of Menzies' Government, W.C. 'William' Haworth, suggested producing another booklet for Australian troops being sent to Malaya and Singapore.[89] This new booklet, added the Minister for the Army, Josiah Francis, would provide Australian servicemen with facts, figures and general information about Australia to help them become 'honorary ambassadors' while in Malaya.[90] The Minister further explained that the new booklet 'will give information about the Australian Constitution and political system, Australia's industries, social services and educational system, and about Australian life generally'.

Armed with all this valuable information, Haworth believed that Australian servicemen could then take the opportunity 'to dispel from the minds of the people of Southeast Asia the idea that the unfortunate phrase "White Australia" was intended to act against Asians on a colour-line basis'.[91] Despite the Australian Government's rhetoric of the time regarding racism and immigration restriction, no booklet aimed at educating service

[86] *The Argus*, 6 September 1955, "Laugh with Malaya – while we're still able".
[87] *Ibid*.
[88] *Ibid*.
[89] *The Sun*, 8 September 1955, "Ambassadors in Khaki".
[90] *The Argus*, 8 September 1955, "M-Force troops will become Ambassadors".
[91] *The Sun*, 8 September 1955, "Ambassadors in Khaki".

personnel on the White Australia Policy and its defence for an Asian audience was forthcoming.[92]

Malaya on Film

By the end of the 1950s, after nearly five years of experience residing on the Malay Peninsula, the initial clumsy racial depictions of *Malaya Bound* gave way to more paternalistic understandings of the Australian military presence in Penang patterned on the traditional colonial conceit of providing assistance to backward 'natives' who would otherwise be incapable of progress in the modern world. In the early 1960s, two promotional films were produced which attempted to convey to Australian viewers the exact nature of the Australian deployment. In 1961, the Australian Commonwealth Film Unit produced a short film for the Department of Air entitled *This is Butterworth* which focused entirely on the RAAF presence.[93] At about the same time, the Australian Army Public Relations Film Unit released *Malaya Posting*, a short film aimed at providing an insight into life in Malaya for the Australian Army battalion garrisoned near Malacca.[94] Each film has a running-time of just over seventeen minutes and both portrayed the Australian presence in Malaya, not as the uninvited forward defensive position against a surging Communist tide that it was originally intended to be, but rather as a magnanimous gesture of concern for the region and its people on the part of the Australian government.

Malaya Posting introduced Malaya by stating that,

> In the Southeast corner of Asia, tapering down in a long finger towards Australia, lies the interesting and exotic Federation of Malaya and the Oriental Island of Singapore … Malaya, with its multiracial society, is an unusual posting for the men of the Australian, British and New Zealand armies who serve in the British Commonwealth Far East Strategic Reserve.[95]

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[92] On 7 October 1955, The Argus reported that one of Malaya's foremost political leaders, Dr Toh Chin Chye, chairman of the People's Action Party, explained that Asians were 'very sensitive about the White Australia policy … Asians cannot believe it is a purely economic measure to protect Australian living standards … to us it is a colour law, nothing else … in our eyes Australia does not regard Asians as equals, and that is what hurts'. Australian government reactions to this opinion can be found in: Neville Meaney, "The end of "White Australia" and Australia's changing perceptions of Asia, 1945-1990", *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 49, no. 2 (1995), p. 178; Sean Brawley, "The Old and New Guard – a factor in the liberalisation of Australia's restrictive immigration policy", *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 48, no. 2 (1989): 155–162; Meg Gurry and Gwenda Tavan, "Too soft and long-haired?: The Department of External Affairs and the White Australia policy, 1946–1966", *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 58, no. 1 (2004): 127–142.
[93] *This is Butterworth*, 1961, Item# 26140, NFSA.
[94] *Malaya Posting*, Master Set of Army Training Films, Item No. 192, A7665, NAA.
[95] *Ibid.*

The producers of *Malaya Posting* dedicated over half of the seventeen minutes of the film to showing how the Australian Army battalion at Malacca trained in the jungle and marched on the parade ground. When depictions of local Malayans did occur, they mostly reinforced colonial messages of native backwardness and ignorance. As one such example, the film continually highlighted the role women played in the manual labour force of Malaya. 'Women in the paddy fields hand cut the rice', stated the narrator with a hint of surprise.[96] At other times, local women were depicted panning for tin in mines, carrying heavy loads on heads or shoulders or performing some other form of manual labour. These images not only jarred with the accepted conceptions of middle-class feminine domesticity in western societies, but, through these depictions of working women in Malaya, the film clearly sought to illustrate the distance between women in Malayan society and modern conceptions of 'European' women.

A similar message underpins the Commonwealth Film Unit's production about the RAAF at Butterworth. The first images of *This is Butterworth* show three Australian *Sabre* jet fighters flying over the newly re-built RAAF base at Butterworth. After a brief pause on a sign with the title and crest of the 'RAAF Base Butterworth', the camera introduces the local environment by panning to two elderly Malay men travelling past the base in an old wooden cart being slowly pulled along the road by two bullocks. As these images resolve, the voice-over explains that 'the Royal Australian Air Force Base at Butterworth, Malaya, is an important part of the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve and was established by agreement between the British, Australian and Malayan Governments'.[97] Although the Malayan government played no role in reaching the decision to establish Australia's forward defensive position in Malaya, and in fact was not even consulted on the issue, the deceit of their participation in the decision neatly combines with the juxtaposition of Australia's advanced military jets against the slow moving Malays and their bullocks to create an impression of Australian military forces providing an important service for the otherwise helpless people of the Peninsula.

Throughout the next seventeen minutes of *This is Butterworth*, further depictions of Malayans continue to reinforce this same message. Although all types of motor transport are available in Penang, recounts the narrator, 'with the Malays, the bicycle is the favourite'.[98]

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[96] *Ibid*.
[97] *This is Butterworth*.
[98] *Ibid*.

Another scene highlights the contrast between well-dressed 'Air Force wives' and local women as they shop in the bazaars and stalls of Georgetown's main street by showing two Australian women following a local Malay woman balancing a large package on her head. The narrator confirms that 'trishaws are popular with visitors and locals alike but for that awkward bundle there is nothing like the head'.[99]

A clear distinction is made between the sophisticated comportment of 'European' women and the foreign, backward ways of life which they encounter in Malaya. When the same two Australian women stop to buy a hat from a local street stall, the encounter again draws heavily upon colonial stereotypes of Asians as childlike and ill disciplined. After picking up a sun-hat, almost in tandem, the two well-dressed Australian women shake both their heads and their fingers at the very young shop-keeper dressed only in shorts and a singlet. The narrator again explains to the audience that the worldly-wise Australian women had been right to bargain with the young shop-keeper 'because after all, a sun-hat for a dollar is fair enough'.[100]

By constructing the Australian community at Butterworth as representatives of modern civilisation, the producers of the film clearly wished to depict the local Malayan populations as the binary opposite. As such, in a society fashioned around racial hierarchy, the Commonwealth Film Unit's production *This is Butterworth* imagined the Australian community's niche in Malaya in largely colonial terms. As if to book-end the earlier images of the Malay men being pulled along in their cart by bullocks, the final scene of *This is Butterworth* puts a further exclamation mark on the clear distinction between the sophisticated nature of the Australian role at Butterworth and the much more primitive position of the local peoples. A shirtless, aging Malay farmer looks skyward as an Australian *Sabre* jet fighter flies overhead. The narrator neatly summarizes: 'the farmers carry out their allotted tasks in peace … they know that the high speed jets manoeuvring thousands of feet above them mean security'.[101] The knowledge, feelings and abilities of this one Malay farmer serve to portray an entire people as somehow less at home in the modern world than their 'enlightened' Australian protectors.

Representations of local Asian people in Penang as childlike and in need of guidance appeared in articles in the RAAF News well into the mid-1960s. Perhaps one of the most

[99] *Ibid*.
[100] *Ibid*.
[101] *Ibid*.

glaring examples of such depictions occurred in the January-February 1964 edition of the RAAF newspaper, almost nine years after the large Australian military community first established a presence in Penang.[102] Under the title "Fun with a 'Bone-Dome'", the article chronicled the responses of the local population when asked by the Australian public relations photographer how they would use a discarded fibre-glass flying helmet. 'Visitors to the East', the article begins, 'are usually impressed by the ingenuity of the local population when it comes to improvisation, and their ability to make use of something that most of us would discard without a second thought'.[103] With the 'us' and 'them' clearly established, the article recorded the responses of locals through a series of photographs and captions.

Pictures in the 'bone-dome' article included an image of two 'young Chinese women' using the helmet as a 'new-fangled shopping basket' as well as one of 'a pretty Chinese lass' who thought the helmet made 'a perfect bed for her two newly-born kittens'.[104] Another young local boy was shown using the helmet to assist him in having a 'shower under the village tap', while a teenage girl was depicted washing clothes by hand in the helmet with the added comment that 'in a country where a tin bowl and bar soap plus elbow grease are used to produce some of the cleanest washing you are likely to see, this helmet makes a handy wash bowl for the "smalls"'.[105] And in a most unfortunate coupling, at the centre of these depictions of locals putting the discarded 'bone-dome' to use is a photograph of a monkey playing with the same helmet at the Botanical Gardens on Penang Island. Even if the Australian author of the story innocuously included the monkey photograph among those of locals 'utilizing' the same helmet, the effect for readers of the RAAF News back in Australia would clearly have reinforced the old Social Darwinist informed colonial panorama of Asia and its people as backward, childlike and less developed than their western mentors.

Conclusion

As Ann Laura Stoler has noted, studies of colonial discourses have often commented on the theme of 'racialized Others' where the colonial power compared and equated local communities with children, 'a representation that conveniently provided a moral justification for imperial policies of tutelage, discipline and specific paternalistic and materialistic

[102] *RAAF News*, January-February 1964, 'Fun with a Bone-Dome', p. 5.
[103] *Ibid*.
[104] *Ibid*.
[105] *Ibid*.

strategies of custodial control'.[106] From 1955 to the early 1960s, Australian military officers perceived their role in Malaya and their place within local society predominately through the traditional Orientalist constructs of British colonialism. Buoyed by the confidence of their natural position as representatives of the 'European' race, Australian military officials emphasised the importance of social status and metaphors of pre-eminence in organising and structuring the Australian presence in Malaya. Early attempts at imagining an Australian garrison in Penang stumbled through centuries old stereotypes of both 'European' superiority and 'Asiatic' subservience. The clumsy racial portrayals of *Malaya Bound* reveal not only the depths of ignorance amongst Australian military officials during the mid-1950s, but additionally highlight that the impact prevailing colonial attitudes would have had on building genuine engagement with local communities.

The Services/Treasury team accepted the need to follow the customs and traditions of British personnel in Malaya as both a guard against Australians being considered 'poor cousins' of their service colleagues from other Commonwealth countries of the Strategic Reserve as well as the equally important need to distinguish themselves from the local Asian masses. These two imperatives combined to see the Australian community in Penang be granted conditions of service that included such colonial niceties as the provision of domestic servants to help ease the effects of the 'enervating' tropical climate on 'Europeans' and the systematic dissuasion of 'off-base Asiatic temptations' for single members of the force to name but a few. Many of these practices stemmed not from financial or practical considerations but rather instead drew on colonial ideologies and traditions dating back centuries.

[106] Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 150.

Chapter Three

First Arrivals: Building an Australian Garrison in Penang

Prior to the start of the Second World War, the existing airstrip at Butterworth formed part of an extremely modest Royal Air Force (RAF) presence in northern Malaya. First constructed in the 1930s as just one of a number of 'up-country' airfields on the mainland of Malaya, the Butterworth airfield provided a refuelling base for the few squadrons of aircraft that the RAF had based at the Tengah and Seletar airfields on Singapore Island.[1] By the time Menzies sought to establish Australia's forward defensive position in northern Malaya in the mid-1950s, the existing airstrip at Butterworth was obsolete. Re-constructing the airbase to the standards required of contemporary military aircraft involved not only reinforcing and lengthening the existing runway to accommodate the heavier loads of larger jet aircraft but also involved building all the ancillary facilities, hangars, taxiways and hardstands required to house a modern air force. Soon after Menzies announced Australia's contribution to the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve in Malaya, Australian Defence officials tasked No.2 Airfield Construction Squadron (No.2 ACS) with building a modern air-base at Butterworth.

Following on from the bumbling efforts of *Malaya Bound* and the very colonial outlook of the Services/Treasury team, this chapter examines the actual arrival in Penang of large numbers of Australian troops and airmen. The period in question, roughly the latter half of the 1950s and the first few years of the 1960s, covers building the airstrip at Butterworth by the RAAF as well as the period during which an Australian Army Battalion occupied Minden Barracks on Penang Island. In contrast to later years, the make-up of the Australian military presence in Penang during these initial few years differed from that which followed. The Australian forces in question, a RAAF airfield construction squadron at Butterworth and an Australian Army Battalion on Penang Island, included much larger numbers of young and single servicemen than would be the case in later years.

Given the make-up of the Australian garrison in these early years, situations arose which inevitably bought many of the young, single and often restless Australian servicemen into contact with the local peoples and cultures of Penang. While some of these encounters were overwhelmingly positive, others proved crushingly negative. With the Federation of

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[1] David Lee, *Eastward: A History of the Royal Air Force in the Far East, 1945-1972* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1984).

Malaya gaining independence from the British on 31 August 1957, Australian officials sought clarity on issues regarding the legal framework which governed the conduct of Australian servicemen and their families while posted to Malaya. As the colonial provisions of formal British rule ended, Australian diplomats and their Malayan counterparts developed arrangements governing the status of the Australian forces in Malaya. The second half of this chapter explores the development of these legal arrangements in light of several high profile criminal charges brought against Australian servicemen.

Building Butterworth

On 7 July 1955, under the command of Flying Officer (FLGOFF) D.W. Jacobs, an advance party consisting of thirty-one Australian service personnel arrived at the RAF station at Butterworth to begin preparations for rebuilding the base into Australia's largest 'Cold War' garrison. The next day, the Commanding Officer of RAF Butterworth, WGCDR A.G. Wilson, officially welcomed this first detachment of No.2 ACS.[2] During the next two weeks, the advance party busied themselves with preparations for the arrival of the main body of the squadron. After settling into a temporary campsite on the Butterworth base built for them by the RAF, FLGOFF Jacobs arranged for a regular supply of local stores and took delivery of a small portion of the squadron's plant and vehicles. As the first of the Australian servicemen who would call Butterworth home, the advance party set about clearing the way for the impending arrival of the main body of their squadron colleagues.

On 11 August 1955, another thirty-eight personnel of the squadron arrived on a chartered Qantas DC4 from Townsville. Two days later, the Commanding Officer of No.2 ACS, WGCDR P.G. "Percy" Lings, arrived and officially assumed command of the RAAF construction squadron in Butterworth. At the same time as preparatory work continued on the squadron's domestic accommodations, workshops and other installations, a small fleet of freighters, sailing from Townsville to Penang, uplifted the bulk of the squadron's equipment, stores and heavy plant. By the end of August, tractor spares and kitchen equipment had arrived via the *S.S. Hallvard*, a consignment of general stores had arrived on the *S.S. Braeside* and an assortment of earthmoving equipment had been unloaded at the Penang docks from the *S.S. Thorstrand*. The biggest shipment from Australia, however, arrived on 20 August 1955 when over 7000 tonnes of equipment, including 159 vehicles and 2807 cases of tools,

[2] No.2 ACS Unit History Sheet, 8 July 1956, A11353 – 9/1/AIR Part 2, NAA.

generators and machinery, were unloaded at the Penang docks from the *S.S. Tyalla*.[3] Finally, on 12 September 1955, the main party of No.2 ACS, comprising 9 officers and 265 airmen, arrived in Penang aboard the *New Australia*.

Following the arrival at Butterworth of the main contingent of the construction squadron, the unit's strength stood at 16 officers and 318 airmen. For the remainder of the squadron's next three years at Butterworth these numbers remained relatively fixed, peaking at 23 officers and 360 airmen in April 1956, after which numbers gradually drew down to 25 officers and 294 airmen in late 1957 as the project neared completion. Replacement rates in the officer corps over the tour of duty at Butterworth for No.2 ACS were largely negligible; often there was not more than one officer posting per month if there was any movement at all. In contrast, the average movement of airmen being posted in and out of the unit hovered at approximately ten per month. Based on these figures, a reasonable estimate of the total number of Australian servicemen having been posted to Butterworth from mid-1955 to mid-1958 would be approximately 40 officers and 500 airmen.

With its full complement of personnel and equipment in place, the squadron commenced excavation work for the southern extension of the existing north-south runway at Butterworth. Because much of the area surrounding the existing runway consisted of marshy swamp, the squadron began excavating and removing mud and topsoil vegetation to a depth of about 15 feet.[4] By the end of the project, excavation and drainage works relating to the swampy surroundings of the existing airstrip amounted to approximately 38% of the entire project of re-building the airbase.[5]

In order to replace this vast layer of mud with soil and crushed rock, the squadron established a quarry at Bukit Guar Ipoh, approximately 18 kilometres from the Butterworth base. An article in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, printed under the heading "Australia's Airstrip Builders are Moving a Malayan Hill", noted that Australia's RAAF 'bulldozer pilots' in Malaya were blasting, crushing and transporting over 150,000 tons of granite and red loam from Bukit Guar Ipoh to Butterworth to spread out as the new foundations of the airbase.[6] In

[3] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 July 1955.
[4] David Wilson, *Always First: The RAAF Airfield Construction Squadrons 1942-1974* (Canberra: Air Power Studies Centre, 1998), p. 114.
[5] *Bising*, unofficial gazette of No.2 Airfield Construction Squadron, June 1958, Troopship Collection, AWM, p. 21.
[6] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 November 1955.

less than two years, the 150-foot high hill at Bukit Guar Ipoh had been demolished, crushed and relocated to fill the swampy marshlands of Butterworth.

In order to complete the airbase by the programmed mid-1958 deadline, the RAAF construction squadron sustained a hectic work schedule. For two and a half years, and in trying conditions, the men of No.2 ACS worked their heavy equipment around the clock. 'There was a deadline for the completion of the strip', recalled one Australian airman, and 'it meant that much of the work was done with three shifts over twenty four hours … at every level the effort was single-minded and constant'.[7] The tropical conditions in Malaya also influenced some aspects of the work schedule. With afternoon rainstorms regularly damaging freshly poured concrete, section officials in charge of building the runway instigated a midnight start in order to dodge the heavy afternoon downpours.[8] In spite of its reputation as a tropical island paradise, the tour of duty for members of No.2 ACS consisted of arduous work in difficult conditions, all driven by a tight project schedule.

The single-minded effort to complete the airstrip left little time for any military formalities. 'There were no parades and I never saw anybody marching', wrote one questionnaire respondent.[9] 'There was little dress regulation', he continued, definitely 'no saluting', and 'generally the only time anybody wore a shirt or hat was as protection from the sun - but many of us did not cover up as much as we should have'.[10] A short amateur film taken of the base's construction largely confirms this description of the working conditions for members of No.2 ACS. It depicts Australian airmen working outdoors in the tropical sun of Malaya without shirts, hats or any other form of protective clothing.[11] The film not only portrays conditions as hard, but, by dispensing with all military formalities, there is also a strong undercurrent of pioneering spirit animating the activities of No.2 ACS at Butterworth.

For many No.2 ACS personnel, the tropical working conditions in Malaya proved particularly difficult. Although one of the first reports on the effects of the tropical climatic noted that 'even under fairly strenuous conditions' the climate in Malaya is 'quite compatible to outside work', later observations painted a somewhat different picture. In the final 'souvenir issue' of *Bising*, the squadron's unofficial gazette, there are abundant references to being constantly damp, wet and uncomfortable, either through sweating in the tropical heat or

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[7] *Questionnaire Response*, LAC, No.2 ACS, December 1956 – October 1958.
[8] *Bising*, June 1958, p. 7.
[9] *Questionnaire Response*, LAC, No.2 ACS, December 1956 – October 1958.
[10] *Ibid*.
[11] "2 ACS at Malaya (moving picture), 16mm", Box #12, NAA, Sydney.

by being drenched by tropical rainstorms. One of the more talented wordsmiths in the squadron reflected upon how he thought No.2 ACS might remember its time in Malaya once it had returned to the more temperate climates of Australia. He suggested: 'we thought of all the seasons, and 'ow strange at first they'd seem, after spendin' 'alf a lifetime, in perpetual ruddy steam'.[12]

After nearly three years in the making, the newly re-built airstrip at Butterworth began to welcome British and Australian aircraft in early 1958. At a cost of nearly £3 million, the *Sydney Morning Herald* labelled the base 'the biggest engineering task Australia has undertaken overseas'.[13] Preferring instead to extol the military virtues of the new airbase, Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* described Butterworth as the 'greatest overseas fortress … ever built in peacetime' by Australian personnel.[14] For his part, WGCDR Lings, choose instead to limit his reflections to comparisons with other airfield construction projects undertaken by Australian servicemen. In his final message to the squadron, Lings noted that the reconstruction of the Butterworth base was 'the largest and most successful ever to be undertaken by an A.C.S.'.[15] The base, he continued, was an 'everlasting monument of which every member of the Squadron can rightly be very proud'. Although one of Britain's *Valiant* or 'V' bombers landed on the newly rebuilt north-south runway at Butterworth on 20 March 1958, the first large jet bomber ever to do so, the runway officially became 'available for operational use on 23 May 1958 – one month ahead of schedule'.[16]

Life at Butterworth for No.2 ACS

Soon after the main body of No.2 ACS personnel arrived at the Penang docks on the *New Australia*, the Department of Air released details of the travel itineraries for the families of servicemen waiting to join their husbands at Butterworth. Instead of the lengthy sea journey experienced by the bulk of squadron personnel, families flew to Penang on a specially chartered Qantas DC4 aircraft. On 26 October 1955, about six weeks after the *New Australia* had docked at the Penang wharves on 12 September, husbands, press correspondents,

[12] *Ibid*., p. 10.
[13] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 January 1959.
[14] *Daily Telegraph*, 1 April 1959.
[15] *Bising*, June 1958, p. 1.
[16] Wilson, *Always First*, p. 117.

hundreds of interested squadron colleagues and an assortment of locals gathered to greet the arrival of the first Australian families in Malaya.

For some of the some of the younger couples eager to be reunited, even this short separation of six weeks proved simply too much. Describing the scene for his Melbourne readers, John Veitch, a reporter with *The Argus*, wrote, that 'a pretty Sydney girl rushed down the steps of an airliner at Butterworth Royal Air Force station today, flung herself into the arms of a fair-haired boy in RAAF uniform and gave him the longest kiss ever timed in Malaya'.[17] The couple in question, Alwyn and Pamela Middis, had been married only eight weeks earlier. Pamela was only one of 17 wives and 23 children to join their RAAF husbands that day. 'I'm going to love Malaya', Pamela told John Veitch. 'Today', she continued, 'I'm the happiest girl in the world'.[18] Although not all reunions matched the intensity and passion as that of the Middis family, a steady procession of wives and children continued to disembark from Qantas DC4s at Butterworth over the next few months. By early 1956, nine flights had landed carrying a total of just over ninety Australian families to Butterworth.

A combination of factors forced the families of No.2 ACS to accept privately acquired accommodation in Penang rather than move into service Married Quarters (MQs). First, the RAAF, with no experience housing any type of force in Penang, had no service MQs to offer the newly arrived Australian families. Having just arrived in Penang themselves, RAAF housing officers had little knowledge of local conditions and were thus not in a position to acquire stock from the local market. Second, the very limited number of RAF married quarters at Butterworth remained largely occupied by RAF personnel. Consequently, most Australian families were forced to accept whatever private accommodation was available on Penang Island.

Because travel between Penang Island and the base at Butterworth involved crossing the narrow waterway separating the island from the mainland on the local ferry, families on Penang Island tended to be isolated, both physically and socially, from the activities and amenities of the Butterworth base. Dependents and serving members living on Penang Island, for example, received medical care from Army doctors working at the local British Army Barracks on the island, while non-accompanied serving RAAF members and single men living in the temporary accommodation camp on the mainland instead utilized the

[17] *The Argus*, 27 October 1955.
[18] *Ibid*.

Butterworth base sick quarters. Although many of the practical and administrative limitations of this isolation were overcome by locating a small administrative RAAF staff on the island, locating families on Penang Island nevertheless contributed to the creation of a social divide between married and non-married members of No.2 ACS.

Daily routines and social interaction differed for serving members of No.2 ACS, depending on whether they were married and their family had accompanied them to Malaya, or whether they were single or an unaccompanied married member of the unit. For their part, married members travelled to work via the ferry together, with RAAF buses waiting on each side of the ferry terminal to take them from home to the ferry and then from the ferry terminal to their respective worksites. After work, married members returned home the same way to a family, usually a home-cooked meal from a domestic servant, and according to an anonymous article written in the squadron's monthly gazette in May 1957, to a bored wife with nothing to do other than 'make herself look pretty for when the old man comes home from work'.[19]

The same anonymous writer, clearly a single airman or an unaccompanied married airman, ruminated further on the luxury of life in Penang for married members of No.2 ACS. 'They sit on their verandahs', he continued, 'with electric fans blowin' cold air down their necks, sippin' beer from the frig, tellin' the gardener what to do – like bloomin' plantation owners'.[20] While the jovial nature of the writing is consistent with a diffident rather combative attitude, the comments nevertheless indicate a genuine perception of difference between the experience of a posting to Butterworth for married members living with their families on Penang Island and other members of the squadron living in the temporary accommodation camp on the base at Butterworth. From their perspective, conditions of service in Penang more readily allowed married members of the squadron to assume the colonial guise than their unmarried or unaccompanied counterparts.

Single and non-accompanied married members of No.2 ACS faced a number of difficulties not shared by their accompanied married counterparts while posted to Butterworth. Because service and social life intermingled so intimately for members whose cohort of friends and work colleagues overlapped almost completely, escaping the stresses and pressures of work for single men proved difficult. Time spent with fellow workmates in stressful and arduous working conditions was often followed by an equal amount of time at

[19] *Bising*, May 1957, p. 8.
[20] *Ibid*., p. 8.

the camp bar with much the same group. Our bar at Butterworth, remembered an LAC with No.2 ACS, 'was primitive but we didn't care … it was the centre of much activity: darts, billiards, cards, rough singing and endless debates'.[21] 'It was conveniently placed', he continued, 'between the toilet (home to two-up) and the mess (good for afterhours snacks)'.[22]

The benefits of military camaraderie, however, did not completely offset some of the negative aspects of a posting to Butterworth with No.2 ACS. The stressful working conditions, the strict routine, the foreign landscape beyond the base fence and a distinct lack of social variety led some airmen to feel constrained and withdrawn. High rates of alcohol consumption only contributed to these feelings of isolation, and in many cases led to feelings of despair and depression. Early editions of *Bising* contain a broad range of comments regarding a lack of meaningful social stimulation for single members. Comments ranged from the fact that service with No.2 ACS at Butterworth provided a prime opportunity 'to go around the twist', to an even more dire assessment from a rather distressed Warrant Officer (WOFF) who recommended a 'free issue of appropriate lengths of rope and shower-room razor blades to members on next pay parade'.[23]

Confirming the serious nature of these musings in the unit's monthly gazette, several servicemen with No.2 ACS presented at morning sick parades with 'frank psychiatric problems' over the course of the squadron's three years at Butterworth. In September 1956, one member lacerated his wrist in a gesture of suicide while under the influence of alcohol, resulting in his immediate repatriation to Australia. Despite the gravity of the case, Australian medical officers explained the situation by classifying this airman as 'an inadequate type'.[24] Another airman from No.2 ACS received a similar diagnosis when repatriated back to Australia in January 1957. The medical officer in question diagnosed the patient as 'suffering from a depressive state in an inadequate personality'.[25] Single men unable to cope with stressful working conditions or social dislocations, without recourse to the usual support networks of home and family, could expect very little support for serious mental illnesses arising from their particular circumstances of hard work, isolation and boredom in Butterworth.

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[21] *Questionnaire Response*, LAC, No.2 ACS, December 1956 – October 1958.
[22] *Ibid*.
[23] *Bising*, October 1956, p. 2.
[24] Monthly Medical Reports and Medical Aspects – No.2 ACS Malaya, September 1956, A705 – 132/2/960 Part 1, NAA.
[25] *Ibid*.

The wives of men serving in No.2 ACS experienced similar hardships to the single men of the squadron. For many, the excitement of stepping off the plane to join their husbands in an exotic foreign land constituted the highpoint of their overseas adventure. Often, initial expectations on the part of wives regarding their experiences in Malaya clashed with the rather limited opportunities for independent expression and meaningful employment available to 'dependent' women. Indeed, the wives of members serving with No.2 ACS singlehandedly carried many of the family burdens of social dislocation and disorientation without any of the structure or sense of purpose that came from a daily working routine in a RAAF airfield construction squadron.

Many facets of middle-class women in the 1950s - the wife, the mother, the housekeeper – focused on a division of authority and responsibility along the lines of masculine breadwinner and feminine homemaker. Although these gender roles reflected popular conceptions of feminine identity, they additionally defined the constrained orbits in which women ought to seek personal fulfilment, namely through the creation of an idyllic home environment. Betty Friedman punctured some of these mythical dreams of domesticity in *The Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963, when she identified 'the problem with no name', later identified as 'the suburban neurosis' or simply 'the malaise of women staring out the window with their hands in the kitchen sink'.[26] For the wives of Australian servicemen living on Penang Island, these domestic motifs took on extra complexity with the forced introduction of household servants. With the hiring of *amahs* to perform domestic chores, a major part of contemporary conceptions of womanhood for Australian women joining their husbands in Malaya vanished. And although one sphere of feminine identity contracted, no others were created or expanded at Butterworth to compensate for this loss.

Emerging from predominantly working class upbringings, none of the wives of No.2 ACS had previously experienced the luxury of domestic help. This often translated into feelings of discomfort and unease within the home - an area traditionally coveted as a sanctuary of privacy and family intimacy. Complicating this inexperience with regard to the daily routines and treatment of domestic servants, a lack of financial resources often further confined Australian women to the immediate domestic sphere. In other words, in the absence of meaningful philanthropic projects, trips to interesting travel destinations or even just regular local shopping expeditions, many Australian women remained confined within a

[26] John Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties: Private Sentiment and Political Culture in Menzies' Australia* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2000), p. 42.

crowded domestic sphere filled with servants and part-time gardeners. All of this added up to a daily existence of indolence and idleness for most Australian wives.

The No.2 ACS monthly medical report for December 1957 acknowledged the circumstances faced by Australian women in Penang in the late 1950s. The report noted that although the 'morale of the squadron is quite high … now that the end of the project is in sight … one cannot say that the morale of the wives is as high as that of the men. Boredom is probably the main factor involved'.[27] For some wives isolation and boredom in Penang placed them in positions where unfortunate choices eventuated, jeopardizing not only their emotional well-being, but also their reputations and the reputations of their families. As the Commanding Officer of No.2 ACS recalled some years after the Butterworth tour of duty had ended, there were 'a few mis-demeaning young wives [and we had to] … send them back to Australia, which was not a very pleasant thing to do'.[28]

In the latter years of the Australian military presence in Penang, formal social structures developed within the Australian community in Malaya which dulled some of the sharper edges of the isolation and boredom that had been experienced by so many of the Australian wives in these first few years.[29] But as the official record above suggests, for this first wave of Australian women in Penang, the collective experience of confronting the stark realities of social dislocation often created feelings of isolation, confusion and anxiety. Although this issue never completely disappeared from the domestic landscape for Australian women posted to Butterworth with their husbands, the pioneering wives of No.2 ACS experienced the harshest introduction to life in Penang.

The Australian Army in Penang

In addition to re-building the airbase at Butterworth for the RAAF, Australia's contribution to the Strategic Reserve consisted of significant ground forces. An Australian Army battalion, together with a number of minor units, including a battery of field artillery, a troop of Army engineers and a range of other specialist staff, joined together with other Commonwealth

[27] Monthly Medical Reports and Medical Aspects – No.2 ACS Malaya, December 1957.
[28] Wilson, *Always First*, p. 115.
[29] Drawing upon research from the Australian Red Cross Society archives as well as questionnaire responses, these issues are discussed in detail in later chapters that deal specifically with the experience of Australian women in Penang.

contributions of the British Far East Land Forces (FARELF) to form and support the 28 Commonwealth Independent Infantry Brigade Group.

The original intention to deploy the Australian Army component of the Brigade Group to Selarang Barracks in Singapore proved untenable due to political opposition, and an alternate plan eventuated which instead focused on constructing a purpose-built cantonment for the Australian Army battalion at Terendak, near Malacca.[30] At the same time as plans to build new barracks at Terendak developed, the Australian government formally approved Minden Barracks on Penang Island as the temporary site for the Australian Army contribution to the Strategic Reserve. On 1 September 1955, members of an advance party, under the command of Major T.R. "Tom" Warren, arrived in Singapore to co-ordinate the arrival of Australian ground forces with British FARELF headquarters. This small Australian liaison party later became formally known as the Headquarters Australian Army Force, FARELF, and remained based in Singapore until Australian Land Forces were eventually withdrawn from Malaysia and Singapore in the mid-1970s.[31]

Initially, the exact role of this headquarters in the overall organisation of the Australian force in Malaya remained unclear. In particular, the precise command relationship between this headquarters in Singapore and the Commanding Officer of the Australian battalion in Penang appeared confusing with the two senior officers of each unit holding the same rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. To resolve the issue, a new appointment at the headquarters in Singapore, entitled 'Commander Australian Army Force', was established at the rank of Colonel. On 25 October 1955, Colonel F.W. "Frank" Speed arrived in Singapore and formally took command of the Australian Army headquarters of the Strategic Reserve.

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[30] The Australian Commissioner in Singapore, A.S. "Alan" Watt, wrote a personal letter to the Minister for External Affairs, R.G. "Richard" Casey, on 3 June 1955, regarding the exact nature of the political difficulties of Australian troops being stationed in Singapore: 'I have at times asked myself the question', wrote the Commissioner, 'why Australia should be singled out for criticism, as distinct from New Zealand. I think it is probably due to the influence of several factors. Firstly, the sending of NZ forces to Malaya is not a contentious matter in New Zealand. The policy of the Australian opposition, however, has of course been publicised up here and stimulates any local opposition which may exist. Secondly, NZ is so small and the ground forces she is sending are so few, that it would be rather artificial to suggest that NZ wants to dominate this area in any political sense. Thirdly, there is the constant undercurrent of the phrase 'White Australia' which always haunts us in the Far East', A5954 1466/3, NAA.

[31] In 1971, under the guise of the Five Power Defence Agreement (FPDA), the British Commonwealth Far Eastern Strategic Reserve (BCFESR) 28 Commonwealth Brigade reformed as the ANZUK Brigade. The Australian contribution to the Strategic Reserve relocated from Terendak to Singapore in the newly formed ANZUK force. In 1975, both the Australian and British governments decided to withdraw all ground forces from Singapore and Malaysia.

In the same week as Colonel Speed arrived in Singapore, two destroyers of the Royal Australian Navy escorted the Cunard Liner *Georgic*, carrying the Second Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment (2RAR), under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel J. G. "Jim" Ochiltree, to Swettenham Pier in Penang harbour. On hand to welcome the troops were the General Officer Commanding Malaya, the Australian High Commissioner from Singapore and an assortment of other high ranking British and Australian defence officials stationed around the Peninsula.[32] In addition to 2RAR, the *Georgic* carried to Malaya the 105 Field Battery of the Royal Australian Artillery (RAA), 4 Troop of the Royal Australian Engineers (RAE) and smaller detachments of personnel from the Royal Australian Army Medical Corps (RAAMC), the Royal Australian Army Dental Corps (RAADC), the 101 Wireless Regiment, and members of the Australian Army Canteens Service. By the end of 1955, the Australian Army Force in Malaya and Singapore consisted of 101 Officers and 1321 Other Ranks (ORs), the majority of whom were concentrated, at least for the next six years, on and around Penang Island.[33]

Of the Australian Army officers, just over half were married and most of these formally requested married accommodation in Penang. Among the ORs, only 328 were married and of these, only 224 officially requested married accommodation for their two-year tour of duty in Malaya.[34] Although this meant that the overwhelming majority of the Australian Army component of the Strategic Reserve were either single men (1036) or unaccompanied married men (108), the 278 members of the Australian Army that did request housing for themselves and their families in Penang presented battalion headquarters with a significant dilemma.

The relatively short period between April 1955 – when the Australian government announced the deployment of forces to Malaya – and October 1955 – when the force arrived in Penang – left very little time for senior defence officials to adequately find accommodation to house the battalion in what was essentially an otherwise settled urban environment. In fact, for the first two years after the Australian Army arrived in Penang, the issue of adequately accommodating married members of the battalion continued to be the major problem facing Defence officials.

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[32] Kate Sanderson, *Past Particles in Penang: Last Years in British Malaya* (Hillcrest: Miriam Vigar, 2007), p. 149.
[33] Australian Army Force, FARELF, Monthly Report No. 1/56, AWM95 - Australian Army Commanders' Diaries, Headquarters Units, AWM (hereafter AWM95 – AACD, AWM).
[34] Australian Army Force, FARELF, Monthly Report No. 1/56, AWM95 – AACD, AWM.

Public interest in the treatment of troops of the 'Malaya Force', as one Sydney newspaper referred to it, meant that the issue of accommodation remained a topical point for journalists following the progress of Australian forces in Malaya. In a press release on 19 August 1955, the Minister for the Army, Josiah Francis, attempted to explain the difficulties being faced by military officials. Although 'there was not an abundance of European style dwellings' in Malaya, the Minister rather grimly noted, 'the Army hoped to obtain a reasonable number of houses in the near future, some from the British Army and others from private landlords'.[35] And although housing remained a 'high priority' for the Army in Malaya, the Minister continued, 'no families would be moved until satisfactory accommodation was available for them'.[36]

The RAAF presence in Penang further exacerbated the housing shortage faced by the Australian Army. Having arrived in Penang about one month before the Army, No.2 ACS had not only occupied all the available accommodation which met the normal defence scale, but additionally, many RAAF officers and airmen had accepted houses below the established scale. As Colonel Speed wrote to Major-General R.G. "Reggie" Pollard, the Quartermaster-General (QMG) of the Australian Army, on 18 November 1955,

> some embarrassment has been caused by the activities of the RAAF in Penang. They set up a hirings team some weeks before the arrival of the Army advance party, divorced entirely from the RAF and Army hirings services and headed by a Wing Commander, to concentrate on finding and hiring accommodation.[37]

The RAAF housing team, according to Colonel Speed's report, worked within the upper economic limits set by the Defence Committee and paid more than the generally accepted rental rates for houses in the area, as assessed by the War Department Land Agent. In addition they were prepared to accept lower standards of accommodation, including a number of hirings with 'Asian type latrines'. Much to the chagrin of the Army, however, the RAAF housing team quickly met their housing requirement in Penang of 74 houses, further compounding the frustration and embarrassment of Army officials.

The quick reaction of the RAAF housing team not only left Army officials with few accommodation options in Penang, it additionally raised the question, in both the eyes of the Australian public and the families of Army servicemen, as to why RAAF families were

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[35] Press Release by Minister for the Army of 19 August 1955, MT1131 – A259/1/280, NAA, Melbourne.
[36] *Ibid*.
[37] Report by Colonel Speed, Australian Army Force, FARELF, to QMG of 18 November 1955, MT1131/1 A259/1/280, NAA, Melbourne.

permitted to accompany their husbands to Malaya but Army families were not. Facing mounting pressure to find a solution to the acute housing shortage for Army personnel in Penang, the new Minister for the Army, Sir Eric Harrison, announced, on 5 December 1955, his decision to dispatch Major-General Pollard to Malaya to review the situation.[38] 'The Australian Forces have now been in Malaya for almost two months', Harrison said, 'and I have decided that they should receive a visit from a member of the Military Board for the purpose of seeing how they have settled in'.[39]

Following his two week visit to Malaya from 6 to 21 December 1955, Major-General Pollard reported back to the Minister that, 'first and foremost' the overwhelming majority of complaints from Australian troops focused on dissatisfaction and worry regarding 'the shortage of married accommodation'.[40] The voices of married members, it seemed, who made up only about twenty per-cent of the whole Army force in Malaya, were by far the loudest. And by the end of 1955, their complaints had gained the attention of senior Army officers.

On 23 December 1955, two days after Pollard's return, the Minister announced that an agreement had been reached between the Australian Army and Malayan Realty Ltd for the construction of a new housing estate, built specifically for families of Army servicemen, on the island of Penang.[41] The one-hundred 'European style' houses of the estate would cater for the families of twenty officers and eighty other ranks. In an agreement foreshadowed by the Services/Treasury team report, Malayan Realty would provide the capital funds required for the housing project on the basis of an initial lease of three years to the Australian Army, with half of the total rent paid in advance.[42] This housing estate at Tanjong Tokong became just the first of several largely self-contained 'little Australia' military cantonments in Malaya for Australian servicemen and their families.[43]

In addition to building housing estates for Australian families, the Minister for the Army approved the lease of a building to use as a transit centre for up to 45 families of troops

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[38] Press Release by Minister for the Army of 5 December 1955, MT1131 – A259/1/280, NAA, Melbourne.
[39] *Ibid*.
[40] Report by Quartermaster-General on Tour of Inspection of Australian Forces, Malaya, 6-21 December 1955, MT1131 – A259/1/280, NAA, Melbourne.
[41] Press Release by Minister for the Army of 23December 1955, MT1131 – A259/1/280, NAA, Melbourne.
[42] Notes on Hiring of Married Quarters in Malaya, dated 10 December 1955, MT1131/1 – A259/54/132, NAA, Melbourne.
[43] The term first appears on the public record in a documentary by Jeffery James on the experience of RAAF at Butterworth for Sydney radio station 2SM in the early 1970s. Whether it had been used earlier is unclear. See *Sky High*, Item #582284, National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra, (hereafter NFSA).

either 'marching in' or 'marching out' of Penang.[44] The building, known as the Australian Hostel, eventually passed into the hands of the RAAF when the Army relocated to Malacca in October 1961 and became one of the major focal points of social life on the Island for RAAF families in Penang. The RAAF also took advantage of the Tanjong Tokong housing estate to house RAAF families after the Army had moved to Terendak in the early 1960s.

While waiting for the completion of the 'little Australia' housing estate at Tanjong Tokong, scheduled for June 1956, Army officials continued to pursue other private hiring opportunities in Penang. With houses becoming available only haphazardly, and in relatively small numbers, it became necessary to devise a priority system to determine the order in which to 'call forward' Army families from Australia waiting to join their husbands in Malaya. As promulgated in 2RAR Routine Orders in November 1955, a points schedule determined the position of each member of the unit requiring housing in Malaya.[45] As housing became available, those families of unit members at the top of the list were 'called forward' first. Two points were allocated for each year of marriage, five points for each child under the age of 16-years, and one point for each month of involuntary separation. In addition to these points, further points were allocated on compassionate grounds by a committee of all ranks convened to review the particular circumstances of individual cases.

Although the promulgation of the priority list attempted to provide some clarification for married members of Army units posted to Penang, it did little to quell the frustrations of those troops at the bottom of the list. As the Australian Army Headquarters noted in early 1956, morale within the whole force was adversely affected by 'the misconceptions in the minds of almost all troops leaving Australia regarding the period which would elapse before married accommodation would be available to those requiring it'.[46] Complete amelioration of the problem came only in late November 1956 when the last of the houses built for the Army at Tanjong Tokong were handed over by the contractor.[47] With receipt of those houses, all married personnel who had arrived in Penang in October 1955 and had elected to bring their families were finally provided accommodation. By February 1957, the Australian Army Force Headquarters began reporting that the morale of the force in Malaya had improved and was now at a 'high level'.[48]

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[44] Loose Notes on the accommodation of families in Malaya, A663 030/1/715, NAA.
[45] 2RAR, Routine Orders, 18 November 1955, AWM95 – AACD, AWM.
[46] Australian Army Force, FARELF, Monthly Report No. 1/56, AWM95 – AACD, AWM.
[47] Australian Army Force, FARELF, Monthly Report No. 11/56, AWM95 – AACD, AWM.
[48] Australian Army Force, FARELF, Monthly Report No. 1/57, AWM95 – AACD, AWM.

During the six years the Australian Army spent at Minden Barracks before relocating to Terendak, Australia's three extant Army Battalions - 1RAR, 2RAR and 3RAR - experienced a two year tour of duty in Penang. On 25 September 1957, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel J.F. "John" White, the main body of 3RAR and 100 Field Battery RAA embarked on the *New Australia* at Sydney bound for Malaya and the relief of 2RAR and 105 Field Battery RAA.[49] Two years later, in October 1959, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel W.J. "Bill" Morrow, 1RAR with 101 Field Battery RAA in support, took over from 3RAR and 100 Field Battery RAA before relocating to Malacca towards the end of their tour of duty in Malaya in late 1961.

In pure military terms, the Australian battalions took part in a number of operations directed towards the final phases of the Malayan Emergency while stationed in Penang.[50] According to one monthly report, 2RAR and 105 Field Battery were responsible for an area of approximately 300 square miles containing 'a loosely knit Communist Terrorist organisation of above 40 members'.[51] The natural elusiveness of guerrilla activities, as well as the relatively unaggressive policy adopted by the Communist Terrorists (CTs) at the time, greatly reduced any chance of contact with enemy forces. Discussions among Australian troops not only led to references of 'looking for a needle in a haystack' but often added the disconcerting fact that the 'needle' seemed to be moving about.[52]

On the occasions that contact with CTs did eventuate, the results themselves often proved mixed. An operation involving 'practically' the whole of 2RAR in June 1957, for example, yielded the rather disappointing result of one CT killed and another wounded for five Australian casualties, included three deaths.[53] Although not all operations produced such disappointing results, successes were usually measured within the same framework of small skirmishes and single-figure casualties.

Involvement in Emergency operations also had significant implications for married members of the battalion. In order to effectively administer such a vast area, the battalion permanently deployed, in company strength, to smaller operational camps throughout the

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[49] 100 Field Battery Monthly Report, October 1957, AWM95 – AACD, AWM.
[50] For details on operations by Australian forces during the Malayan Emergency see Malcolm Postgate, *Operation Firedog: Air Support in the Malayan Emergency 1948-1960* (London: HMSO, 1992); Robert Jackson, *The Malayan Emergency & Indonesian Confrontation: The Commonwealth's Wars 1948-1966* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2008).
[51] Australian Army Force, FARELF, Monthly Report No. 2/56, AWM95 – AACD, AWM.
[52] *Ibid*.
[53] Australian Army Force, FARELF, Monthly Report No. 7/57, AWM95 – AACD, AWM.

region. While battalion HQ remained stationed in Penang, companies deployed to campsites at Kuala Kangsar, Sungei Siput, Lintang and Lasah. With Australian Army officers and soldiers permanently stationed at one of these operational camps, their families often remained alone in married accommodation on Penang Island. In addition to periods of leave at Christmas, battalion HQ withdrew only one company at a time from their operational camps for a month of leave, re-fitting and re-training in Penang.[54] But for the much longer periods during which each company remained deployed to their operational camps, most husbands considered themselves lucky to be home in Penang for more than four days a month. In effect, most married members of the battalion lived permanently away from their wives, who themselves remained alone in unfamiliar and lonely Penang.

In her memoire, *Malayan Adventure: An Australian Army Family in Malaya during the Emergency*, Beth Johnson notes just some of the effects of husbands being absent for such long periods.[55] While Lieutenant Len Johnson, Beth's husband, was stationed in Penang with 3RAR from September 1957 to September 1959, he was permanently deployed to an operational camp in Sungei Siput in the state of Perak. Beth, like many other married women accompanying their husbands to Malaya, remained by herself on Penang Island. With little official assistance and almost no immediate family support, the shared experience of separation often produced emotional and practical bonds among the wives of Army personnel left on Penang Island. At Tanjong Tokong, recalled Beth,

> I was able to find the same quick bonding with women friends that soldiers experience in new postings where they have to rely on each other. We became dependent on each other in many circumstances, from the illnesses of our children to the loneliness of isolation in a strange country.[56]

'For most of us', Beth continued later in her recollections, 'the ability to entertain in a rather grand style, with amahs and cooks laid on, was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and luckily some people were clear sighted enough to appreciate the need for memorable events to distract us from the loneliness of women deprived of male company'.[57]

Not every woman displayed the fortitude of Beth Johnson and her circle of demure mothers separated for such long periods from their husbands in Penang. Without doubt, those

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[54] Australian Army Force, FARELF, Monthly Report No. 3/56, AWM95 – AACD, AWM.
[55] See Len and Beth Johnson, *Malayan Adventure: An Australian Army Family in Malaya during the Emergency* (Brisbane: Longleat House Publishing, 2008).
[56] *Ibid*., p. 10.
[57] *Ibid*., p. 229.

that fared the worst were the young brides of servicemen without children - often girlfriends or fiancés who had married in haste in order to take advantage of the opportunity to experience overseas travel. In early 1957, for example, the ages of the twenty Army wives resident at the Australian Hostel ranged from 16½ years to 23 years, with an average age of 19 years.[58] Only four of these women had children. 'The officers' wives all seemed to be happily married', wrote Johnson, 'but there was always gossip about some of the other ranks' wives playing up, and it was always on the cards that they could be sent home'.[59] One unhappy situation occurred because 'some women were extremely young with too much time on their hands and no close relatives to curb their behaviour: consequently they began to ask Asian men home'.[60] Beth's story ends with an unhappy group of four young wives being put on a flight back to Australia for their misadventures.

With the ending of the Malayan Emergency in 1960, the requirement to disperse the companies of the Australian battalion to operational camps became less of a concern. And then, soon after the Emergency had ended, the Australian battalion in Malaya relocated to the newly-built Terendak Barracks near Malacca for a much more settled life of simple 'garrison duties'. The social and cultural dimensions of this large Australian Army presence in Malacca till the early 1970s, however, is beyond the scope of this work.

Although the main Australian Army force moved south in early 1960, the Australian Army continued to maintain a small presence at Butterworth for most of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. In May 1965, the 110th Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was formed in Australia and immediately relocated to the RAAF base at Butterworth. The unit remained at Butterworth until June 1969. From the early 1970s onwards, the Army presence at Butterworth continued with the permanent deployment of an Australian Army Rifle Company to provide perimeter defence for the base. In a scheme similar to that proposed by the RAAF in the late 1950s for rotating flying squadrons through Butterworth, each Australian Army Rifle Company rotated through Butterworth for a three month interval before being replaced by another Rifle Company. The wives and children of these soldiers remained at home in Australia.

[58] Australian Army Force, FARELF, Monthly Report No. 5/57, AWM95 – AACD, AWM.
[59] Len and Beth Johnson, *Malayan Adventure*, p. 151.
[60] *Ibid*.

Law, Crime & Punishment for Australians in Malaya

Status of Forces Agreements (SOFAs), according to Mark Gillem, largely reflect both the relative balance of power between the two countries involved as well as the degree to which the host country values or needs the other's presence.[61] Unlike many SOFAs governing U.S. forces around the globe, which not only guard the 'rights and privileges' of American soldiers stationed abroad, but instead, according to Maria Hön and Seungsook Moon, have undermined the national sovereignty of 'host' countries and contain an inherent contradiction of America's supposed liberal imperialism, Australian forces in Malaya, by their own account, always considered themselves to be 'guests'.[62]

Like the SOFAs between the United States and the many Asian countries which host their forces, the legal arrangements governing Australian servicemen and their families in Malaya also encapsulated the relative strengths and weaknesses of the political relationship between Australia and Malaya. Although the Federation of Malaya clearly valued the Australian military presence, it was not prepared to totally relinquish civil or criminal jurisdiction over Australian servicemen and their families in Malaya. Further, Australian authorities were in no position to demand, let alone enforce, the same *carte blanche* SOFA that the U.S. demands of many of its host countries. Consequently, the resulting arrangements governing the conduct of Australians in Penang became a mixture of both local and military justice.

During the first few years of the Australian military presence in Malaya, legal procedures for dealing with offences committed by Australian servicemen and their dependents came under the rubric of British colonial justice. But following the granting of independence to the Federation of Malaya on 31 August 1957, the Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreement (AMDA) became the principle legal instrument governing the status of forces arrangements for Australian military personnel in the newly formed Federation. Although the Australian government took no part in the negotiations leading up to AMDA, and indeed were not signatories to the Agreement, Australian forces in Malaya derived their legal status in the country solely as members of the British forces of the Strategic Reserve under the AMDA arrangements.

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[61] Mark L. Gillem, *America Town: Building the Outposts of Empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. 27.
[62] Maria Hön and Seungsook Moon, 'The Politics of Gender, Sexuality, Race and Class in the U.S. Military Empire' in *Over There: Living with the U.S. Military Empire form World War Two to the Present,* ed. Maria Hön and Seungsook Moon (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 15.

Within AMDA, the general formulae governing the jurisdiction of Australian forces provided for a mix of Malayan civilian courts and Australian military courts for prosecuting criminal offences. Malayan authorities retained the right to exercise jurisdiction over Australian servicemen with respect to offences committed within the Federation of Malaya and punishable by the laws of the Federation, while Australian service authorities reserved the right to exercise, within the Federation of Malaya, the criminal and disciplinary jurisdiction conferred upon them by the laws of Australia.[63] In practical terms, Federation authorities limited their focus to dealing with criminal offences which involved the Malayan public and resulted in significant injury or death as well as offences related to the significant loss of public property. Australian military authorities complemented this by exercising authority over offences of a minor nature and serious offences in which only Australian servicemen or Australian property was involved.

This understanding, while adequately covering Australian servicemen, excluded the dependents of servicemen and public servants accompanying the force. But because most dependents of Australian servicemen were women and young children, and serious offences of any kind within this cohort were likely to be rare, Malayan Police and Australian service authorities reached a practical understanding based on the same principles as those governing the status of Australian servicemen.[64] When incidents involving Australian civilians or dependents did occur, local police usually contacted Australian service police in the first instance to discuss the appropriate means of dealing with the particular circumstance.

Although strictly speaking, Australian dependents and civilians were beyond the legal jurisdiction of service authorities, they were subject to a range of administrative measures, such as moral suasion, withdrawal of privileges and, in more serious cases, repatriation to Australia, which generally provided military authorities with enough clout to effectively deal with minor infractions. In more serious cases, Australian dependents and civilians were subject to prosecution through local criminal courts.

Soon after the adoption of AMDA, Australian consular officials began to consider the issue of political and practical assistance to Australian servicemen or their dependents who were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment in Malayan goals. The general thinking at the time assumed that Australian prisoners would, after an initial period of the sentence had been served in Malaya, be transferred back to an Australian goal to serve out the remainder of the

[63] See Section 1 of Annex 3 to the Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreement, A1945 162/2/5, NAA.
[64] See notes on Malayan Visiting Forces Act, A1838 1522/7/40, NAA.

sentence. This led to some detailed enquiries by the Australian High Commissioner in Kuala Lumpur, Tom Critchley, who noted that it was generally the practice of the United Kingdom to allow its military prisoners convicted of offences overseas to serve their entire sentences in the goals of the country in which the offence had been committed.[65] Indeed, when the Australian forces arrived in Malaya in 1955, several United Kingdom service personnel were already serving long sentences in goals in Kuala Lumpur, Taiping and Changi. These 'European' prisoners, noted Critchley, usually received 'favoured' treatment while serving their sentences, including the provision of a 'special' diet appropriate to 'European' standards and an exemption from manual labour.[66] In any case, it was not long before Australian officials acquired first-hand experience of the practical workings of justice in Malaya.

On 7 June 1957, Army Sergeant (SGT) Raymond Morris Nevin of the Royal Australian Artillery, stationed at Minden Barracks on Penang Island, escorted several prisoners from Butterworth to Kuala Lumpur.[67] Taking advantage of the chance to visit a friend in the capital, SGT Nevin completed his assigned duties and took leave to meet Ernest Alvin Henry at a bar on Batu Road where the two drank heavily for the remainder of the day. In the early hours of 8 June, instead of retiring for the night at Ernest Henry's house, an 'emotional and agitated' SGT Nevin broke into the home of the Malayan Minister for Agriculture, Inche Abdul Aziz bin Ishak.

When confronted by the Minister's household staff, the Australian soldier kept insisting they 'get out' of his house. After wandering around the house for several minutes, SGT Nevin came across the 20-month-old daughter of the Minister, picked her up and refused to comply with requests by the baby's amah, Anna Mathews, to hand the baby over to her. SGT Nevin still had the baby in his arms when Inspector Baharuddin bin Mohamed Nazir and Corporal Mohamed Nor of the local police arrived. Inspector Baharuddin later testified that SGT Nevin told him that 'this is my house and this is my child' and that if the police refused to leave immediately he would 'throw the baby to the ground'.[68]

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[65] Memo No. 1274 of 15 August 1957 to The Secretary, Department of External Affairs from Australian Commission, Kuala Lumpur, A1838 TS696/6/4/1 Part 1, NAA.
[66] *Ibid*.
[67] Details of case were printed in both, *The Straits Times*, 2 July 1957 and Australia's *The Sunday Times*, 4 August 1957.
[68] *The Straits Times*, 2 July 1957.

On 3 August 1957, the President of the Kuala Lumpur Sessions Court, Mr G. C. Byrnes, delivered a judgement of guilty in the two charges brought against SGT Nevin. In handing down his verdict, the judge stated that,

> The accused, an Australian soldier, came from Butterworth, where he is stationed, in charge of certain prisoners who were being conveyed to a military corrective establishment at Kinrara. Having completed these duties, he spent his leisure time consuming a very considerable amount of spirits and subsequently committed the offences with which he now stands charged.[69]

After finding SGT Nevin guilty of the charge of having used criminal force to break into the Minister's house, the judge sentenced the Australian soldier to three months imprisonment and fined him two hundred dollars. As a result of his previously unblemished service record, SGT Nevin was not discharged from the Army as a result of his sentence and instead was allowed to complete the remainder of his six-year engagement - along with an additional three months to account for his ineffectual service while in a Malayan prison.[70]

In the week before the Kuala Lumpur Sessions court handed down its verdict in the case against SGT Nevin, another Australian soldier, Gunner W.J. Wilson, a 24-year old in the 105 Field Battery (RAA) stationed at Butterworth, became the centre of a second high profile criminal case involving Australian servicemen in Malaya. On the night of 29 July 1957, Gunner Wilson offered to drive a nineteen year old Indian school girl home after passing her in his car at the Chip Joo Estate, Bukit Tambun, in Province Wellesley. Later in court, Wilson pleaded guilty to then fracturing the girl's skull with a hammer before dragging her out of the car and raping her.[71] Gunner Wilson's counsel, Mr Meek, pleaded with the court for mercy by outlining Wilson's remorse and the financial restitution made by Wilson to the victim. In summing up, Mr Meek added,

> The facts of this case must necessarily horrify any rational and civilised person … but Wilson is a man over-sexed due to repressions experienced in service life. His case was one in which there was a total loss of self-control.[72]

In sentencing, Justice I.C.C. "Ivo" Rigby also noted the brutality of the crime. 'Anybody who has read the depositions in this case', Rigby summarised, 'cannot fail to be appalled by

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[69] Memo No. 1245 of 5 August 1957 to The Secretary, Department of External Affairs from Australian Commission, Kuala Lumpur, A1838 TS696/6/4/1 Part 1, NAA.
[70] Memo No. 1274 of 15 August 1957 to The Secretary, Department of External Affairs from Australian Commission, Kuala Lumpur, A1838 TS696/6/4/1 Part 1, NAA.
[71] *The Straits Echo*, 13 December 1957, "Digger Pleads Guilty to Rape, Gets 5 Years".
[72] *The Straits Times*, 13 December 1957, "Soldier's five year's jail for rape".

the extent of the ferocity with which you committed this lustful offence … I consider that I have indeed tempered justice with mercy when I sentence you, as I do, to five years' imprisonment'.[73]

The brutality and sexual nature of Wilson's crimes left the Australian High Commissioner in Kuala Lumpur with little opportunity to advance a case for Australian servicemen prosecuted in Malaya to be returned home for part of their sentence. In the absence of any existing agreement with the Malayans, wrote Critchley in early 1958, both the Australian High Commission and the Australian Army 'do not feel that this is a good case to raise as a special issue with a view to Wilson serving part of his term in Australia'.[74] With no further intervention, the Australian High Commission left both Nevin and Wilson to complete their sentences in Malayan goals. For his part, following the completion of his sentence and discharge from the Army, the Australian High Commission made the appropriate arrangements for Gunner Wilson's repatriation back to Australia.

In contrast to the two cases above, in 1956, a serious accusation of sexual assault, allegedly committed by one member of No.2 ACS on the young daughter of another RAAF airman of the same unit, saw justice administered via an in-house Australian court marital at the RAAF base at Butterworth. Although the exact details of the case remain confidential due to the victim's age, in terms of dealing with serious crimes committed by Australian personnel while posted to Penang the case does provide a significant contrast to the circumstances of both SGT Nevin and Gunner Wilson. Because the case involved only Australian individuals, justice was administered by Australian military authorities.

Taken together, these three cases illustrate that what mattered most in determining the appropriate jurisdiction for dealing with incidents involving Australian servicemen and their families in Malaya was not the gravity of the crime or its impact on the prestige of the Australian force as a whole, but rather whether the case involved significant local interests. Above all, the different administrative and legal avenues taken in these three cases highlight the *modus operandi* agreed to between local Malayan civil authorities and Australian military officials in defining the parameters, both formal and informal, of their respective jurisdiction.[75] This co-operation between two very different legal establishments allowed a

[73] *The Straits Echo,* 13 December 1957, "Digger Pleads Guilty to Rape, Gets 5 Years".
[74] Loose Notes on Malayan Defence Agreement, Status of Forces – Jurisdiction over Dependants, A1945 162/2/3, NAA.
[75] Prosecuting cases of theft and other petty crimes committed by Australian servicemen on local civilians was often determined on a case by case basis, depending on such factors as publicity, expediency, the exact details of

more common-sense approach to dealing with criminal offences involving Australian military personnel and their families in Penang.

The Few Bad Apples of the Next Three Decades

The three criminal cases referred to above were isolated incidents. The record of both the Army in Penang till 1961 and the RAAF at Butterworth till the late 1980s shows no further instances of such serious crimes. There is, however, some indication that, from time to time, a small section of the Australian contingent engaged in publically unacceptable forms of petty and loutish behaviour within the local communities of Penang. In a number of cases, such behaviour was informed, usually in combination with the consumption of alcohol, by the racist outlook of the perpetrator.

Commenting on the squadron's tour of duty at Butterworth, the Commanding Officer of No.2 ACS, WGCDR Lings, noted that only on the odd occasion did 'the stupid behaviour of one or two no-hopers' harm the good name of the squadron. One example of the 'no-hopers' referred to by the Commanding Officer was that of Leading Aircraftsman (LAC) Michael Davidson, who WGCDR Lings described on 21 October 1957 as 'a bad advertisement for Australia and … of the RAAF in Malaya, … he is abusive to Asians, and was earlier under suspicion with another airman for throwing eggs at Mosques … during a Muslim religious period'.[76] In fact, this pattern of a small number of isolated incidents occasionally marring the overall reputation of the Australian community in Penang through coarse and ill-mannered behaviour largely typifies the experience of the RAAF in Malaya.

In January 1960, the Commanding Officer of 1RAR, Lieutenant-Colonel W.J. "Bill" Barrow, wrote a warning in the unit's Routine Orders concerning how soldiers interacted with the local civilian population. 'There have been cases in Malaya', the order began,

> where soldiers have molested or interfered in some way with civilians, either by action or word. Whilst such actions may have been carried out in fun they have NOT always been accepted in the way intended … in future such actions by troops will be treated as serious offences, both by civil and military authorities.[77]

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the crime and the individual or individuals involved. On 6 August 1957, for example, two RAAF members of No.2 ACS were charged with the theft of some jewellery from a Chinese woman, Wang Ah Lan, for which they were found guilty by the Province Wellesley Circuit Magistrate. In other similar cases, internal RAAF discipline and/or repatriation sufficed to quickly deal with the situation.

[76] Report by Commanding Officer, 21 October 1957, A11353 – 3/10/AIR Part 1, NAA.

[77] 1RAR Routine Orders, 8 January 1960, AWM95 – AACD, AWM.

Reports included such activities as troops taking out local fishing vessels for unauthorised sailing expeditions and whole units bathing naked at local beaches during social gatherings. Combined with the usual late-night, drunken, boorish goings-on common to large bodies of troops on foreign soil, these types of interactions between Australian servicemen and local civilians prompted the Commanding Officer of 1RAR to add the following note to his warning about loutish behaviour by Australian troops: 'As we are guests in this country we cannot afford to upset its people'.[78]

Instances of rude and uncouth behaviour by a small minority, usually in conjunction with large quantities of alcohol, continued to occur at infrequent intervals during the three decade presence of the RAAF at Butterworth. On 14 February 1975, for example, service police were called to help a corporal (CPL) from No.3 Squadron find his way home after he had spent the afternoon drinking at the RAAF Centre on Penang Island.[79] On the day in question, CPL Murray began drinking at a section work party at approximately 1430, skipped dinner and instead went directly to the RAAF Centre at about 1900 to continue drinking. Sometime after 2300 hours, trouble began which ended in the corporal being placed under arrest for assaulting RAAF service police, who were, at that time, attempting to help him home. At the Penang Ferry Terminal, on the journey back to the military police section at Butterworth, CPL Murray, in an extremely intoxicated state, then began verbally abusing some local bystanders, including pleas to 'give me a smoke you gook bastards'.[80] Clearly alcohol played a significant factor in the majority of these types of cases.

Into the late 1970s, after more than twenty years of maintaining an RAAF presence in the area, Australian military commanders still found it necessary to educate some sections of the Australian community on the attitudes and behaviours appropriate for interacting with the local Asian communities. One Officer Commanding, Air Commodore John Jacobs, recalled his experience thus,

> Nevertheless, there were occasions when we had to defuse tension between Australians and Asians, often a reflection of the racist attitude of some of our people. I once had occasion to lecture our officers and SNCOs on the expected behaviour of Australians in a foreign country. We certainly had no cause to continue the old British colonial policy of treating the locals as inferiors just because we were 'white' and earned more money … When I mention 'behaviour' I am referring mainly to

[78] *Ibid*.
[79] Court Martial Proceedings of [MURRAY Donald Neil (Corporal): Service Number - A110595: Unit - 3rd Squadron Butterworth, Royal Australian Air Force: Date of Court Martial - 20 and 21 March 1975], A471 #93574, NAA.
[80] *Ibid*.

> unruliness as a result of over-indulgence of alcohol, common enough and tolerated in Australia, but offensive to nationals in another country.[81]

The principle theme that emerges from all of these reports and reflections is that a general, low-level boorish, and for the most part racist, attitude towards local Asian people by some members of the Australian military community persisted throughout the thirty-three year Australian presence in Penang.

In addition to instances of incivility and loutishness, a number of Court Martials for other offences were conducted at the RAAF base at Butterworth over the course of the three decade Australian presence in Penang. For the most part, these cases revolved around instances of minor fraud involving individuals claiming reimbursement for false travel claims. In particular, a crack-down in the first six months of 1975 began a rather busy period for prosecuting this type of offence. Three RAAF Warrant Officers and a Flight Lieutenant were each charged with submitting false petrol receipts in order to claim reimbursement for using their own private vehicles to take trips from Butterworth to Singapore, trips it should be noted, that none of the individuals in questions actually took. Although far from endemic, similar incidents occurred throughout the duration of the RAAF's occupation of the Butterworth base, including a smattering of individual RAAF servicemen who falsely attempted to claim reimbursement for travel to places as far away as Bangkok. Rather than successfully defrauding the Commonwealth, most instead found themselves receiving a reprimand at the hands of a RAAF Court Martial.

Sprinkled among these cases of petty fraud were several cases of minor assaults by RAAF airmen on other RAAF airmen, again usually after having consuming vast quantities of alcohol. On 7 January 1977, to take a typical example, an Australian Warrant Officer, Cecil Malcolm Godwin of No.478 Squadron, received a severe reprimand after being found guilty of striking another Australian airman at the Yacht Club at about 1830 hours on 6 November 1976.[82] Both men involved in the drunken brawl admitted to having drunk vast quantities of alcohol since midday, the victim estimating that he alone had consumed 'about twenty-two stubbies of beer'.[83]

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[81] John Jacobs, *Up and Away: Memoirs of a Pilot in the Royal Australian Air Force, 1950-1981* (Canberra: Air Power Studies Centre, 1999), p. 180.
[82] Court Martial Proceedings of [GODWIN Cecil Malcolm (Warrant Officer): Service Number - A24877: Unit - No 478 (Maintenance) Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force: Date of Court Martial - 7 January 1977], A471 #94317, NAA.
[83] *Ibid*.

In another more serious case, but again typical of the infrequent incidents of serious assault between RAAF airmen that appeared once every few years, a RAAF Sergeant was Court Martialled in April 1979, and subsequently found guilty of assault occasioning bodily harm. The SGT was awarded a forfeiture of three months seniority and a severe reprimand after punching another RAAF airman in the face. The damage resulting from the punch was exacerbated by the fact that the drunken pugilist in question was holding a beer glass in his hand at the time of the punch which saw the victim finish the evening with thirty-two stitches in his face.[84] Again, both airman had been drinking all day after earlier attending a christening at the RAAF Centre in Penang, and both were so drunk that by the next day neither could remember exactly just what initially sparked the argument that eventually led to the assault.

While instances such as these may provide a certain glimpse into the culture of alcohol abuse among certain sections of the Australian military community in Penang, it must be emphasised again that they were by no means common. In fact, the one thing that does emerge from the long-term official record regarding crime and punishment among RAAF personnel at Butterworth is a general absence of systematic criminal conduct by members of the Australian military community. For all the vices and virtues that did characterise the Australian deployment to Butterworth, almost all of the criminal conduct usually associated with large military forces garrisoning a foreign territory - such as black market-type operations, instances of sexual assault, cases of serious assault and the destruction of property, usually while drinking, - appears almost entirely absent.[85]

Before leaving this issue, two other points regarding crime and punishment require some mention. The issue of Australian airmen taking drugs is only ever mentioned briefly in

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[84] Court Martial Proceedings of [SERGEANT William Stuart (Sergeant): Service Number - A46384: Unit - Base Squadron Butterworth, Royal Australian Air Force: Date of Court Martial - 26 April 1979], A471 #94317, NAA.

[85] In writing about the Allied occupation of Japan, Gerster notes that 'sex had been immediately established as the dominant form of human currency between Occupier and Occupied when the incoming Americans availed themselves of a short-lived system of 'Recreation and Amusement Stations' or 'RAAs'; Gerster, *Travels in Atomic Sunshine*, p. 48. In terms of the Australian experience in post-war Japan, Allen S. Carter has written a firsthand account which details the atrocities committed by Australian troops against Japanese civilians, including robberies, violence and particularly the rape of women, see Allen S. Carter, *Time of Fallen Blossoms* (Sydney: Cassell, 1950). The practice of post-war sexual exploitation in overseas U.S. bases is well documented in a number of studies – Seungsook Moon, "Camptown Prostitution and the Imperial SOFA: Abuse and Violence against Transnational Camptown Women in South Korea" in Maria Höhn and Seungsook Moon eds., *Over There: Living with the U.S. Military Empire from World War Two to the Present* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 337; Kozue Akibayashi and Suzuyo Takazato, "Okinawa: Women's Struggle for Demilitarization" in *The Bases of Empire: The Global Struggle against U.S. Military* Posts, ed. Catharine Lutz (New York: New York University Press, 2009), p. 243.

the archival record. In passing judgement in the Court Martial cited above in April 1979, the presiding officer noted that the Sergeant in question had been charged on a previous posting to Malaysia in 1971 for the use of marijuana after 'falling in with the wrong crowd'.[86] Clearly the charge for marijuana use had little effect on the long-term prospects of the sergeant in question as he had since been promoted and sent back to Malaya for a second posting. Similar notes of minor dalliances with illegal substances appear very infrequently in the official record.

In terms of drug use and the interaction of RAAF Service Police and local authorities, the wife of an Australian chaplain, posted to Butterworth in the late 1980s, recounted the following story in her questionnaire response for this study. 'During our 2nd year', the Australian woman remembered,

> the Service Police had to send home, very hurriedly, 5 students from the RAAF High School, who were selling pot to other students in the school. In Malaysia where the Australians Barlow & Chambers had not long been hanged in 1986, how dangerous was that? They had them out of school and on their way to Australia within hours … The Malaysian police questioned why the S.P.s didn't contact them before sending the children home; you would have to be kidding![87]

While the overall lack of documentary evidence on this particular issue does not definitively disqualify the notion that some drug use within the Australian military community did occur in Malaya, it nevertheless does indicate the limited extent of the issue.

The second issue involves one of the great anathemas in Australian military history. Acknowledgements of homosexuality, in any capacity, rarely appear in either the formal or indeed even informal reckonings of Australian servicemen.[88] A glimpse into why this might be the case occurred in a District Court Martial in early 1961, in which two members of 1RAR were charged with 'disgraceful conduct of an indecent kind'.[89] The particulars of the

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[86] Court Martial Proceedings of [SERGEANT William Stuart (Sergeant): Service Number - A46384: Unit - Base Squadron Butterworth, Royal Australian Air Force: Date of Court Martial - 26 April 1979], A471 #94317, NAA.

[87] *Questionnaire Response*: Wife, January 1986 – January 1988.

[88] In *Atomic Sunshine*, Gerster notes: 'The subterranean homosexual cultures of the Australian Occupation of Japan, including relations within BCOF itself and between the Occupationnaires and the Japanese, have yet to be thoroughly excavated and examined. No veterans I spoke with disclosed any such activity. If homosexual relations did occur, they insist they took place outside the Australian cohort'. Gerster, *Atomic Sunshine*, p. 107; In *Gender, Power and Military Occupation*, de Matos and Ward similarly note the clandestine nature of homosexual activity in the Australian military. 'It is difficult to ascertain how widespread homosexual activities were in BCOF occupied Japan as, just as in the Australian protectorate of Papua New Guinea, 'silence was preferred to scandal, departure of an offender favoured rather than the unpleasant revelations' - de Matos and Ward, *Gender, Power, and Military Occupations*, p. 38.

[89] Annex A to 1RAR RO85/61 of 1RAR Routine Orders, 31 March 1961, AWM95 – AACD, AWM.

charge noted that, at Taiping on 20 November 1960, the two men, 'with indecent intent, entered an unoccupied barrack room and lay together on a bed'.[90] Although both pleaded not guilty to the charge, the Commander of 28 Commonwealth Infantry Brigade Group, Brigadier F.G. "Frank" Hassett found the pair guilty and sentenced them 'to be discharged with ignominy from Her Majesty's Service'.[91] The two men were returned to Australia for that very purpose shortly after. With such examples as to the fate of any servicemen even suspected of homosexual activity, the issue appears certain to remain hidden behind traditional stigmas of official disgust and disapproval.

Conclusion

Soon after Menzies' public announcement, on 1 April 1955, regarding the Australian contribution to the Strategic Reserve, Australian military personnel began arriving in Malaya. Members of No.2 ACS immediately set about re-constructing the airbase that would be home to the majority of Australian airpower for the next three decades. The Australian Army contribution to the Strategic Reserve, one infantry battalion and a small contingent of supporting artillery, logistics and administrative units, also arrived in Penang in late 1955, staying until new barracks were built and ready to occupy at Terendak, near Malacca in late 1961. In all, these units represented an Australian presence of just under two-thousand servicemen and just over three-hundred Australian families in and around Penang in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

When compared with later years, the initial period of Australia's deployment to the Strategic Reserve included a high proportion of young, single Australian soldiers and airmen. As these large numbers of unencumbered, energetic young men explored the foreign surroundings of Malaya, interactions with the local civilian population became inevitable. Although most individuals adhered to the high standards of behaviours expected of them as ambassadors of Australia, some did not. One product of these interactions was the codification of the legal status of Australian servicemen and their families while serving in Malaya. For crimes involving only Australian individuals and Australian property, including crimes of a significant nature, the ad hoc arrangements reached between Australian Defence officials and local enforcement agencies allowed prosecution to proceed through solely

[90] *Ibid*.
[91] *Ibid*.

Australian channels. For all other crimes, Malayan authorities reserved the right to exercise full jurisdiction over both Australian servicemen and their families.

Compared to the overwhelming political, strategic and economic influence wielded by the United States in their post-war dealings with countries 'hosting' their military forces in the Asia/Pacific region, the relative lack of political and economic clout available to Australian politicians in Malaya necessitated a more co-operative approach than that often taken by their American counterparts, not to mention their British colonial predecessors. Whether this 'legal' vulnerability influenced the daily attitudes and behaviours of individual Australians posted to Butterworth is debatable. What is more certain, however, is that, unlike the 'extraterritoriality' of contemporary American experience or that of the previous British colonial experience, the legal framework governing Australian servicemen in Malaya both reflected and contributed to a certain sense of partnership and parity in which the RAAF presence in Penang existed within, rather than outside, the legal framework governing local society. This is itself a significant departure from both the previous British colonial experience in Asia and the post-war American experience in the Asia/Pacific region.

Chapter Four

Encountering the Other: Constructing an Australian Identity in Penang

Each and every overseas military base engenders its own specific official and private patterns of economic activity, sexual contact and social and cultural interaction. Much of this heady mix of person to person exchange stems from the physical creation of new urban environments as large bodies of foreign troops go about their allotted military tasks. As a direct result of the implicit comparisons invited by overseas experience, one characteristic of every-day life within the hybrid spaces created on and around foreign military bases is an inevitable confrontation with difference.

In effect, the establishment of large overseas military bases provides an opportunity for serving members and their families to experience first-hand, and over an extended period, the societies and cultures of the host communities. New insights formed from this experience often confront, in both positive and negative ways, pre-conceived notions of the alien and the strange. Frequently, exposure to such stark ideological challenges leads not simply to a further hardening or complete dismissal of long-held prejudices, but rather to a complex recasting and reimaging of preconceived notions in ways that incorporate the new realities of first-hand contact and critique.[1]

The construction of a sense of community, Dane Kennedy suggests, 'is an act of imagination, requiring the formulation of those qualities that distinguish between "us" and "them"'.[2] In the Australian context, historiographical debate concerning the formation and evolution of an Australian national identity has broadly constructed the issue in terms of both 'British Race Patriotism' and the 'Asian Mirror'.[3] As Greg Lockhart and Mads Clausen have recently noted, central to the development of Australian nationalism was a 'British chauvinism' deeply concerned with defining certain cultural competencies and national

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[1] As two such examples, in *The First Strange Place: Race and Sex in World War II Hawaii* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1992) Beth Bailey and David Farber explore how American soldiers, sailors and marines confronted difference in Hawaii on their way to the battlefronts of the Pacific in the Second World War and how this contact reshaped their perceptions of both themselves and the Pacific region. Similarly, Robin Gerster, in *Travels in Atomic Sunshine* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2008) focuses on the impact of cultural contact and its legacies as Australian forces occupied Japan in the aftermath of the Second World War.

[2] Dane Kennedy, *The Magic Mountain: Hill Stations and the British Raj* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), p. 227.

[3] Mads Clausen, "The Vortex is Here: Asia and Australian Post-Imperial Nationhood" (Ph.D., thesis, University of Copenhagen, 2009), p. 120.

civilities through a language of racial difference animated primarily by Australia's 'close geographic proximity to Asia'.[4] In other words, attempts to define Australia's self-image since Federation have largely worked to reveal how strong anti-Asian sentiments have influenced and shaped the localized nature of Australian 'Britishness'.[5]

Throughout much of the twentieth century, the endeavours of Australian servicemen on foreign shores have played a significant role in the production of national identity. One of the first pieces of work to launch this tradition, *In Your Hands*, published in the aftermath of the First World War by Australia's prolific official war historian, Charles Edwin Woodrow Bean, exclaimed that, 'If you think about it, the big thing in the war for Australia was the discovery of the character of Australian men'.[6] Even before the operational debacle at Gallipoli had tested the 'mettle of the men', Bean wrote that, on arriving in Egypt, the Australians were surprised to discover how childish 'the little pink-cheeked lads' from England looked, especially 'when compared with the huge men of the Australian regiments'.[7] The Australians, according to Bean, 'had not realised that the physique of their force was anything greater than the average, until the contrast forced it upon them and upon everyone else in Egypt'.[8] The crux of this connection is not so much whether Bean was discovering, constructing or mythologizing this character and identity, but rather the opportunity war provided Bean to differentiate Australian servicemen as a group from the peoples and cultures of other nations.

Contact with the alien, the foreign, or as Said has so influentially described it, the 'other', has often been accompanied by an automatic process of self-reflexion. As Ian Ousby has observed, in order to define the experience of being abroad, travel often 'forces us to measure the unfamiliar by reference to the familiar', and in most instances, concepts of 'home' and 'self' become the most useful yardsticks with which to undertake such a

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[4] See Greg Lockhart, "Absenting Asia" in *Australia's Asia: From Yellow Peril to Asian Century*, eds. David Walker & Agnieszka Sobocinska (Crawley: UWA Publishing, 2012); Mads Clausen, "Donald Horne finds Asia", in *Australia's Asia: From Yellow Peril to Asian Century*, eds. David Walker & Agnieszka Sobocinska (Crawley: UWA Publishing, 2012).
[5] See also - Catriona Elder, *Being Australian: Narratives of national identity* (Crows Nest, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin, 2007); Stuart Ward, *Australia and the British Embrace: The Demise of the Imperial Ideal* (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 2001); James Curran and Stuart Ward, *The Un-Known Nation: Australia After Empire* (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 2010).
[6] K.S. Inglis, *C.E.W. Bean: Australian Historian* (St Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1970), p. 19.
[7] John Lang, ed., *ANZAC Remembered: Selected writings of K.S. Inglis* (Melbourne: The History Department, The University of Melbourne, 1998), p. 21.
[8] *Ibid*., p21.

measurement.[9] Or as Zac Niringiye has rather eloquently summarised, in just about every encounter with the other, 'you have a fresh encounter with yourself'.[10]

When Australian servicemen arrived on the shores of Malaya in 1955 for their 'tour of duty', these notions of travel, discovery and identity played out on a stage which included protagonists from a number of distinct ethnic groups and cultures. The 'otherness' of the Orient compelled Australians to consider themselves principally in terms of race. In this respect, Australians delineated between themselves and 'Asiatics', as official documents often referred to them, by identifying themselves as 'European'. In addition to these encounters, Australians also found themselves face to face with servicemen from the United Kingdom. In this encounter, Australians similarly reflected on difference, but instead of race, the parameters in question focused almost exclusively on issues of culture.

This chapter utilizes several examples from the late 1950s and early 1960s to explore the ways in which Australians set about constructing a unique identity for themselves in Malaya. Differences between the Australian community and local Asian communities are explored by considering how Australian officials and servicemen borrowed from existing British colonial narratives to make sense of their new surroundings in Penang. Then, by examining several encounters between Australian servicemen and their counterparts from the United Kingdom, the more subtle cultural distinctions between the Australian 'us' and British 'them' are explored and their wider consequences for the Australian way of life at Butterworth are considered.

Early Encounters, Early Estrangement

For centuries, western images of the Orient as an oasis of tropical abundance clashed with personal experiences founded upon dirt, disease, decay and death.[11] The wife of an Australian serviceman posted to Butterworth in the late 1950s reflected upon this dichotomy when she described her first impressions of Penang in a letter home to her mother on 22 November 1957:

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[9] Kennedy, *The Magic Mountain*, p. 39.
[10] Mark L. Gillem, *America Town: Building the Outposts of Empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. 30.
[11] Hans Pols, "Notes from Batavia, the Europeans' Graveyard: The Nineteenth Century Debate on Acclimatization in the Dutch East Indies", *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 67, no.1 (2012): p. 120.

> The whole of Penang is far more beautiful than any country I have ever seen … very green and lush … The people – mainly Indian Tamils (very black), Malays and Chinese – are all very happy and very lazy … and the stench of the bazaar is absolutely indescribable – the most horrible smell imaginable.[12]

As Australians arrived in Malaya in the mid-1950s, they drew on a number of inherited British colonial narratives to make sense of the foreign landscapes that they encountered. These complex, inconsistent and indeed often contradictory narratives focused not only on the local peoples and cultures of Penang but additionally included accounts of dirt, infection and disease as well as assessments of the effect of the 'tropical' climate on the health of 'white' Europeans. Like the experiences of their British counterparts in Malaya, accepting these colonial narratives often led to policies and behaviours of isolation and exclusion.

Throughout much of the twentieth century, depictions of Australia as clean, developed and modern often 'took place against a tableau' of Asia as overcrowded, filthy and chaotic.[13] Indeed, according to Lachlan Strahan, many Australians in the late 1950s still saw their country 'as an isolated white outpost on the southern rim' of 'a dirty, diseased and coloured Asia'.[14] These sensibilities, even before any Australian servicemen had set foot in Penang, gave rise to constant reminders of the dangerous environment that awaited Australian servicemen in Malaya. In terms of potential hazards, infection and disease loomed as one of the most immediate concerns for both individuals and defence officials. Consequently, measures to combat this aspect of Asia's hostile environment for Australian servicemen and their families began even before Australian units had reached the Peninsula.

While on board the *New Australia*, soldiers and airmen attended lectures on the various tropical diseases prevalent in northern Malaya. Medical staff warned that scrub typhus, malaria, hepatitis, diarrhoeal diseases and various skin diseases were all widespread and communicable. By strictly observing 'some basic sanitary practices', however, medical staff assured their audiences that all of these diseases 'were entirely preventable'.[15] In a clear reference to the attitudes and behaviours of the local inhabitants of Penang, officials stressed

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[12] Len and Beth Johnson, *Malayan Adventure: An Australian Army Family in Malaya during the Emergency* (Brisbane: Longleat House Publishing, 2008), p. 52.
[13] See Greg Watters, "Contaminated by China", in *Australia's Asia: From Yellow Peril to Asian Century*, eds. David Walker & Agnieszka Sobocinska (Crawley: UWA Publishing, 2012); Kane Collins, "Imagining the golden race", in *Australia's Asia: From Yellow Peril to Asian Century*, eds. David Walker & Agnieszka Sobocinska (Crawley: UWA Publishing, 2012).
[14] Lachlan M. Strahan, "An Oriental Scourge: Australia and the Asian Flu Epidemic of 1957", *Australian Historical Studies*, 26, no. 103 (1994): p. 199.
[15] Medical Instructions in Annex 1 to Appendix A of Part 1, 3RAR Administrative Instruction 1/57, AWM95 – AACD, AWM.

the need for the 'highest possible order' of personal hygiene and discipline in order to prevent the occurrence and spread of these diseases among the Australian community.

Soldiers and airmen were instructed to incorporate a range of prophylactic measures designed to prevent and check outbreaks of infection into almost every aspect of their daily lives. Doses of the anti-malarial drug *paludrine* were taken prior to arrival in Malaya and for the remainder of a tour of duty. For soldiers, given that they spent much of their operational time in the jungle, the regular taking of *paludrine* was strictly policed by battalion officials.[16] But even with the use of suppressive drugs, cases of malaria were a regular occurrence in the late 1950s. One report in 1958 noted that, over the previous 12 months and despite Australian personnel taking malarial suppressive drugs, medical staff had encountered 23 cases of malaria at the RAAF base at Butterworth, including 9 airmen of No.2 ACS.[17]

In addition to anti-malarial drugs, Australian commanders carried out 'Free from Infection' (FFI) inspections of soldiers and airmen for skin diseases. Further, to combat scrub typhus, Army units conducted fortnightly parades during which all operational clothing was treated with a particularly potent mite repellent.[18] Thus, in the early years of the Australian presence in Penang, reminders of the threat posed by the foreign environment of Malaya to the physical health of servicemen became an almost permanent fixture of daily life.

Coming to terms with the physical environment in Malaya also affected the daily lives of Australian families. An outbreak of diphtheria in Penang in early 1956 prompted the Commanding Officer of 2RAR to draw attention to the necessity for all Australian children either intending to come to Malaya or then present in the country to be fully immunised against all possible infections.[19] Further, the potential threat of cholera necessitated a number of practical adjustments around the home. In order to prevent an outbreak of cholera in the early years of the Australian presence in Penang, health authorities advised boiling all water before use, even if only for brushing teeth.

Consuming local products, especially food and drinks brought from local street hawkers as well as locally grown fruits such as paw paws, water melons and mangoes

[16] Australian Army Force, FARELF, Monthly Report No. 4/58, AWM95 – AACD, AWM.
[17] Minute 1801/16/MED (1A), 14 March 1958, A705 132/2/960 Part 1, NAA.
[18] Medical Instructions in Annex 1 to Appendix A of Part 1, 3RAR Administrative Instruction 1/57.
[19] 2RAR Routine Orders, 14 April 1956, AWM95 – AACD, AWM.

required caution.[20] All vegetables and fruits, if eaten raw, required a thirty-minute soak in a strong solution of 5 teaspoons of *Milton* sterilizing fluid per gallon of water.[21] Australian officials further recommended avoiding fresh meat from the local markets. Taken together, most of these inconveniences became seamlessly integrated into daily life, but their very existence provided a constant reminder of the physical hazards posed by the environment of Malaya to Australian servicemen and their families while in Penang.

Alongside infection and disease, Australians faced a number of challenges associated with the 'tropical climate' in Malaya. But unlike the largely practical approach taken to dealing with infection and disease, perceptions of the effect of the tropical climate on Australian servicemen were tinged with British colonial narratives reaching back centuries. Indeed, anxieties concerning the effects of hot and humid conditions on 'white men' have been traced back to some of the earliest British encounters with tropical climates.[22] According to Collingham, during the eighteenth century it was generally considered that 'the transplantation of a European constitution into a tropical environment sent it into a state of dis-equilibrium, leaving it vulnerable to the vicious diseases found in these areas'.[23] Writing much later in 1899, one medical specialist in Malaya similarly argued that the deterioration of health in the colonies was the result of climate and high temperature: 'Under the physical strain which this involves, the most vigorous system soon grows languid, and run down; and morale and mental efficiency pursue on less rapid a descent towards decay'.[24]

This medical reckoning suited the accepted racial hierarchies of the day by offering a practical explanation for the inherent superiority of 'European' intellect and vigour. In other words, by remaining too long in a tropical climate, Europeans risked descending into the same mental and physical stupors that they associated with 'local natives'. Although, by the late nineteenth century, medical understandings of micro biotic agents had begun to replace other more rudimentary explanations such as 'miasmas' and atmospheric vapours, most medical scientists maintained that, by affecting the metabolic rate of Europeans unaccustomed to the heat and humidity of the tropics, climate continued to play a conditional

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[20] After an outbreak of Cholera in late 1972 in Singapore, Australian authorities republished most of standard cautions concerning water, vegetables and fruit. Minute 515-F3-1 from HQANZUK Spt Gp, 3 Aug 1972, AHQ751 Part 1 – ANZUK AIR Headquarters – Medical Policy, AWM.
[21] Len and Beth Johnson, *Malayan Adventure*, p. 65.
[22] Kennedy, *The Magic* Mountain, p. 19.
[23] E. M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experience of the Raj, c.1800-1947* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), *Imperial Bodies*, p. 25.
[24] Lenore Manderson, *Sickness and the State: Health and Illness in Colonial Malaya: 1870-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 74.

role in disease transmission.[25] As such, well into the early twentieth century, physical and mental degeneration were still regarded as inevitable consequences of prolonged residence in the tropics for Europeans.

By working to highlight the vulnerability of 'Europeans' to disease, degeneration and death, tropical medicine has 'always implied colonial relations of some sort'.[26] The idea that there was a limit on 'the possibility of permanent and healthy European settlement' in tropical climates led many to argue that long-term residence in tropical zones was both 'impossible and inadvisable'.[27] In the Australian context, many of these medical reckonings influenced discussions about the settlement of northern Australia. In arguing for the 'drawing of a colour line' across northern Australia in the early twentieth century, a small number of advocates went so far as to oppose the adoption of the White Australia Policy because 'the prohibition on non-white immigrants would stifle the development' of the empty northern third of the continent, 'thereby jeopardising Australia's economic prospects, subverting the legitimacy of its territorial claims and leaving the country open to foreign condemnation, even invasion'.[28] The White Australia Policy, these critics argued, was out of place in the tropics since the white race itself was out of place in the tropical zone of northern Australia.[29]

Much of the historiography on both tropical medicine in Australia and the suitability of 'white men' settling in the northern third of the continent mark these debates out as belonging to the early twentieth century.[30] In looking at some of the ways in which ideologies of race and gender applied to white women and children in north Queensland, Henningham goes so far as to suggest that 'the conventional wisdom that a white man could not work in the tropics and remain healthy had been successfully challenged by the early twentieth century'.[31] But as Australians entered the 'colonial' landscape of northern Malaya in the late 1950s, interest in the effects of the tropical conditions on servicemen continued to

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[25] *Ibid*., p. 73.
[26] Alison Bashford, "'Is White Australia possible?' Race, colonialism and tropical medicine", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 23, no. 2 (2000): p. 251.
[27] Bashford, "'Is White Australia possible?'", p. 251; Pols, "Notes from Batavia: the Europeans' Graveyard", p. 120.
[28] Russell McGregor, "Drawing the Local Colour Line: White Australia and the Tropical North", *The Journal of Pacific History*, 47, no. 3 (2012): p. 329.
[29] *Ibid*.
[30] Richard Eves, "Unsettling settler colonialism: Debates over climate and colonization in New Guinea, 1875-1914", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28, no. 2 (2005): p. 304-330; David Walker, "Climate, civilisation and character in Australia, 1880-1940", *Australian Cultural History*, no. 16 (1997): p.77-95; Alexander Cameron-Smith, "Raphael Cilento's empire: diet, health and government between Australia and the colonial Pacific", *Journal of Australian Studies*, 38, no. 1 (2014): p. 103-118.
[31] Nikki Henningham, "'Hats off, Gentlemen, to Our Australian Mothers!' Representations of White Femininity in North Queensland in the Early Twentieth Century", *Australian Historical Studies*, 32, no.117 (2001): p. 311.

animate a number of discussions among Australian medical personnel accompanying the force.

For their part, Australian medical staff kept a standing watch on the effect of the tropical conditions faced by the first Army and RAAF units in Malaya. In the first few months of the deployment, many members of No.2 ACS suffered from various aliments which were often indirectly attributed to some consequence of the 'tropical conditions'.[32] By the end of the squadron's first year in Malaya, however, a monthly medical report noted a considerable decline in the numbers of Australian servicemen presenting at medical parades for such 'tropical' aliments. Improvements in the general health of the squadron during the latter half of 1956, the report stated, could be attributed to three factors, namely, improved working conditions, acclimatisation, as well as the fact that 'men considered unsuited to tropical conditions had been returned to Australia'.[33] It is evident, the report continued, that 'provided a man is in reasonably good health prior to leaving Australia, he will withstand the rigors of the tropics at Butterworth very well'.[34]

There were other explanations for the improved health of the squadron after a particularly arduous settling in period. In the No.2 ACS Unit History Sheet for August 1956, the Commanding Officer provided at least one other possible reason for the improved well-being of squadron personnel: 'The general health of the Squadron members improved during the month and this may be attributed to the fact that extra Asian labour has been employed to do the heavy labouring'.[35] This practice echoed similar policies in effect throughout northern Australia in the late nineteenth century in which, according to Lyndon Megarrity, 'Pacific Island labourers did the back-breaking work which allowed the Queensland sugar industry to prosper'.[36] At Butterworth, the employment of 'extra Asian labour' to do the 'heavy lifting' for Australian servicemen not only highlights the stubborn persistence of these anxieties regarding the perceived inability of 'white men' to withstand the rigours of working in the tropics, but also reveals the enduring colonial understandings of race which informed them.

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[32] Monthly Medical Reports and Medical Aspects – No.2 ACS Malaya, December 1956, A705 – 132/2/960 Part 1, NAA.
[33] *Ibid*.
[34] *Ibid*.
[35] No.2 ACS Unit History Sheet, August 1956, A11353 – 9/1/AIR Part 2, NAA.
[36] Lyndon Megarrity, "'White Queensland': the Queensland Government's ideological position on the use of Pacific Island labourers in the sugar sector, 1880-1901", *The Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 52, no. 1 (2006): p. 1.

Towards the end of their tour of duty in Malaya, RAAF doctors again reflected on the issue of health in the tropics for members of No.2 ACS. In the squadron's monthly medical report for December 1957 it was noted that even though many of the men 'have now been here for two years and four months … none has shown any specific physical reaction to the heat'.[37] Despite this, there remained a desire to align experience with colonially inherited expectations. Again drawing on long-established prejudices concerning the effects of tropical heat on the European body, one Australian medical report claimed, without the provision of any evidence, that 'there is probably a slight mental lethargy of which the majority is unaware … which will only become apparent in contrast on return to a cooler climate'.[38]

The fact that No.2 ACS personnel had spent the previous few years building airstrips in tropical climes (in the Australian external territories of Cocos Island and Manus Island as well as the north Queensland city of Townsville) does not seem to have entered these particular medical calculations concerning the effects of the tropical environment in Penang on the 'European' constitutions of Australian servicemen. The distinction between working in certain 'tropical' areas as opposed to other 'tropical' areas does illustrate, however, the direct connection between climate and race within the minds of Australian officials. An intimate intermingling of the 'tropical' climate of Penang and the perceived stunted development of 'native peoples' largely explains the fetish surrounding the effect of the 'tropics' on the bodies of Australian servicemen that plagued the opinions of medical officers into the late 1950s.

If disease, contamination and the tropical climate concerned Australian officials, then the civilian Asian workers employed by the RAAF and Army in Penang represented one of the principal vectors of potential infection. 'It has long been an established fact', reported one Australian medical officer in the mid-1960s,

> that the Asian workforce presents a potential hazard to service personnel and their dependents unless care is taken to exclude from employment those Asians who are suffering from a disease, particularly of a communicable nature such as tuberculosis.[39]

Consequently, prior to their engagement, locally employed civilians underwent a series of medical examinations before being passed 'Fit for Employment'. Chest X-rays, skin inspections, dental examinations and urine testing were carried out on all potential Asian

[37] Monthly Medical Reports and Medical Aspects – No.2 ACS Malaya, December 1957.
[38] *Ibid*.
[39] Minute 4/2/AIR/1 (94) – Amendment to the Manning Establishment, No.4 RAAF Hospital, Medical Officers, A703 635/2/509 Part 2, NAA.

employees. In addition to these general medical checks, cooks, kitchen hands, stewards and the domestic servants of Australian families also underwent skin, ear and stool examinations at regular intervals. By limiting contact to only those Asian workers declared free from disease, Australian officials sought, in practical terms, to neutralise the role of 'the native' as a carrier of disease. Despite these precautions, however, the civilian Asian workforce continued to be viewed as a potential source of threat to the health of Australian servicemen and their families.

In these early encounters, many Australian officials and individuals extended this association of pestilence and disease within the local populations to much more specific racial stereotypes of Asians as inherently less capable than their 'European' counterparts. By contrasting the technological developments of Western societies in areas such as medicine and sanitation against the apparent lack of similar progress in colonial Asia, many Australians framed their opinions around what they encountered in Malaya in terms of 'civilized' and 'uncivilized'. These judgements worked to reinforce otherness, further distancing many Australians from the local populations.

By drawing on pseudo-scientific Darwinian hierarchies of evolution, the perceived relative advancement of the 'European' in Malaya resulted in a comfortable reinforcement of Western superiority. As one Australian wife noted in a letter home in December 1957, 'the very first Malay kampong I had seen was completely devoid of civilised (that is European) influences. All the people lived in attap and wood huts – women carried water in cans or pitchers on their heads and nearly all of them wore the sarong and the children – nothing'.[40] After serving with the RAAF at Butterworth in the late 1950s, Bruce Dawes also noted the prevailing Australian attitude. 'Many Australians', commented Dawes, thought that the local people had come 'down out of the trees only recently'.[41]

Rather than problematize the divide between Australians and Asians in the early years, close contact within workplaces at the Butterworth base instead often saw attitudes develop into entrenched behaviours.[42] As early as 19 July 1955, less than two weeks after the

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[40] Len and Beth Johnson, *Malayan Adventure*, p. 87.
[41] Alison Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady: Australian Impressions of Asia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 73.
[42] Direct contact, notes Strahan, 'does not necessarily engender greater mutual tolerance, and in countries such as Yugoslavia and South Africa, history has patterned inter-ethnic relations into rigid mistrust and antagonism. White occupation of the Australian continent was based upon the violent dispossession of the indigenous population; by the 1950s nearly 170 years of interaction had merely entrenched racism against Aborigines in white Australian society. However, in some situations, especially in countries which are not the centre of deeply embedded blood attachments to the soil, intermingling can undermine certain myths, encouraging people

arrival in Malaya of the advance party of No.2 ACS, local Asian labourers worked alongside Australian servicemen in the task of re-building the Butterworth airbase. The number of locals employed to help re-build the airstrip peaked at just over 700 towards the end of 1957. Taking labour turnover into consideration, the actual number of local individuals employed from 1955 till 1958 on the re-building project numbered well over sixteen hundred.[43] The overwhelming majority of these local civilians formed a labour pool employed on the most basic tasks - ranging from cleaning hangar floors, toilets and other workshop spaces to outdoor manual labour at either the quarry or rock crushing sites.

Only a very few and select number of local employees gained employment as carpenters, welders or mechanics because their standard, according to Australian officials, was 'very low in comparison with Service personnel'.[44] Close supervision for these local tradespeople was required to ensure that their work reached and then continued at an acceptable level.[45] In the case of the locally employed mechanics, for example, the Department of Air insisted that, because of the poor standard of workmanship by 'Asian Mechanics', they could only be employed as assistants to RAAF service technicians and were 'never' to be left 'working without supervision'.[46] Local tradespeople, even the most proficient of them, could only ever aspire to become a supervised assistant within the Australian workforce.

Although Asian employees of No.2 ACS provided an essential manpower contribution to the larger goal of re-building the Butterworth base, in practice, most only ever occupied positions of curiosity and at times derision. Indeed, an underlying racial element pervades many of the musings within No.2 ACS's monthly gazette concerning the employment of 'native labourers'. Although everybody, from senior officers all the way down to the most junior Australian service personnel, is subjected to a certain brand of humour based upon one's mistakes or misfortunes, airmen writing in the squadron gazette seemed to stress racial stereotypes and hierarchies when referring to local employees. In June 1958, one article noted that a 'Malay driver', who 'walked around with a limp when

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to reassess certain inherited beliefs' – Strahan, "An Oriental Scourge", p. 195. Strahan could easily extend this discuss to the tenacity of racial stereotypes within the colonial arena, stereotypes which not only died slowly but did so only when they no longer served the greater goals of empire.

[43] *Bising*, June, 1958, p. 17.

[44] No.2 ACS Unit History Sheet, January 1956.

[45] *Ibid*.

[46] Minute No.2SQN 1229/1/P3 (13A) – Establishment Civilian Labour No.2(B) Squadron, 15 January 1960, A11284 1229/1/P3 Part 2, NAA.

watched' and 'got 2 days light duty' after 'being kicked' by an Australian airman for his deceit.[47]

Monthly medical reports reveal attitudes similar to those recorded in the No.2 ACS monthly gazettes. In February 1958, the Senior Medical Officer at Butterworth, Squadron Leader J.R. "Jack" Harrison, reported that 'a vast horde of Asians is employed in the [hygiene] section … mostly old and rather sluggish, scruffy Indians employed on such diverse jobs as mosquito elimination, garbage disposal, cleaning drains, bathrooms and toilets … the section badly needs the attention of an energetic man who can supervise the work and eliminate the more idle among the labourers'.[48] Categorising these employees as 'sluggish' and 'scruffy' drew on many of the colonial stereotypes of 'Indians' long held by British communities in the East.[49] It can only be imagined that if 'an energetic man' had been found to supervise this 'vast horde of Asians' that he would have been either an entirely atypical individual or otherwise perhaps, a 'European'.

Although purely economic and practical terms justified the employment of local workers over their more expensive Australian equivalent for some basic manual labouring positions, the chief concern driving decisions by Australian military officials was neither financial nor practical but instead drew on colonial constructions of European prestige. Indeed, some positions, like those of gardeners, cleaners, kitchen hands, waiters and drivers were always intended to be filled by local labour for reasons of status and tradition. A report in April 1958 further noted that 'climate conditions, local customs and the status of Europeans in the community have dictated that more domestic musterings than would be usual' in Australia were required at the Butterworth base.[50] The reason for the provision of more local workers than would have otherwise been utilized for similar duties undertaken at military bases located on Australian soil not only drew on notions of colonial prestige, but also took into account perceptions regarding the limited physical and mental capabilities of local labour in comparison to Europeans.

Notions of 'European' superiority had long influenced ideas regarding the productivity of 'natives'. In his 1926 book, *Malay Land*, R.J.H. Sidney summed up the

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[47] *Bising*, June, 1958, p. 17.
[48] Monthly Medical Reports and Medical Aspects – No.2 ACS Malaya, February 1958, A705 – 132/2/960 Part 1, NAA.
[49] Mohammad Ayub Jajja, "A Passage to India: The Colonial Discourse and the Representation of India and Indians as Stereotypes", *Gomal University Journal of Research*, 29, no. 3 (2013): p.38-48.
[50] Plan for Establishing and Maintaining the RAAF Element of the Commonwealth Far East Strategic Reserve, 17 December 1954, A5954 1463/2, NAA.

argument with typical colonial confidence when he wrote that 'labour may certainly be cheap in this country, but it takes a great many people to do what one Englishman would consider an easy job'.[51] Just as Sidney and his English compatriots of the early twentieth century viewed Asians as generally less capable due to the inherent inferiorities of their race, so too did most Australians at that time. In 1921, Australia's future Ambassador to China, Frederic Eggleston, penned an article titled 'White Australia' in which he outlined much the same appreciation of the abilities of 'Asiatics'. One unskilled Englishman, wrote Eggleston, 'could do as much work as three Japanese, not merely because of his strength, but because of his "greater fortitude and endurance, educated intelligence and the ability to consume and utilise more food"'.[52] Evidence disputing these notions of inherent Asian inability over the course of the first half of the twentieth century, including the capture of Singapore by the Imperial Japanese Army, did little to disabuse hardened advocates of these racially loaded concepts.

In 1955, Australian military planners continued to accept these principles of 'Asiatic inferiority'. Early efforts at reducing the cost of the Australian deployment included plans to fill some RAAF positions with suitably qualified non-RAAF personnel from the local workforce. One of the earliest plans for 'Establishing and Maintaining the RAAF element at Butterworth' identified a number of 'appropriate posts' that could possibly be filled by local non-RAAF personnel.[53] Almost all of the 652 positions identified in the plan performed the most basic labour functions. In spite of this, the authors of the plan went on to point out that because of deficiencies, both mental and physical, with the majority of members of the local workforce, '2-4 non-RAAF personnel' would be required to fill each individual RAAF position.[54] In other words, because of the reduced work capacity of members of the local labour force, two or more of them would be required to do the job normally performed by just one Australian.

The conclusion that several 'native labourers' were required for each vacant RAAF position also took into account the fact that locally engaged labour worked much longer hours than their RAAF equivalents. In 1960, the RAAF officer in charge of the Civilian Labour Office, Flight Lieutenant (FLTLT) A.C.R. Charlesworth, noted that local workers were required to work for a minimum of 44 hours per week over six days as opposed to the

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[51] R.J.H. Sidney, *Malay Land "Tanah Malayu": Some Phases of Life in Modern British Malaya* (London: Cecil Palmer, 1926), p. 38.
[52] Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady*, p. 13.
[53] Plan for Establishing and Maintaining the RAAF Element of the Commonwealth Far East Strategic Reserve, 17 December 1954, A5954 1463/2, NAA.
[54] *Ibid*.

accepted working week for RAAF personnel of 38 hours per week over five days.[55] In terms of annual leave, locally employed civilians also fared far worse than their RAAF equivalents. Local civilian employees were granted a total of 12 days annual leave at the end of each year worked. This compared to five weeks annual leave provided for RAAF airmen, which consisted of the normal three weeks recreational leave entitled to each Australian serviceman plus an additional two weeks annual leave for each year posted to Butterworth. In no small irony, the extra period of annual leave was to compensate Australian servicemen for the 'enervating climatic conditions' which the 'European' endured in Malaya.[56]

The table below, taken from an official communication from one of the Australian flying squadrons in 1960, provides a typical example of how Commanding Officers of Australian units in Malaya employed local civilians to fill otherwise vacant RAAF positions. While the unfilled RAAF clerk positions required two local workers for each RAAF vacancy, three local workers were determined as necessary to be able to perform the equivalent amount and quality of work of just one RAAF general hand.

TRADE	No of RAAF Posts Established		No of Posts occupied by Airmen		No of Posts Occupied by Indig. Lab.	REMARKS
	CPLS	ACS	CPLS	ACS		
Clk	-	1	-	-	2	
Clk A	-	1	-	-	2	
Clk E	-	1	-	-	-	
Clk G	-	-	-	-	-	
S Hand	-	2	-	-	6	
G Hand	-	6	-	-	18	
Equip Asst	-	1	-	1	-	
A/f Mech	-	1	-	-	2	
Eng Mech	-	1	-	-	2	
Arm Mech	-	1	-	-	1	
Surf Fin	-	-	-	-	-	
A/c M Wkr	-	-	-	-	-	
B'smith	-	-	-	-	-	
Gen Fitt	-	-	-	-	-	
Metal Mech	-	-	-	-	-	

Figure 4.1. Extract from Minute No.2 Sqn 1229/1/P3 (21A) – 'Locally Engaged Civilians – Establishment' of 29 February 1960.

From the early 1960s onwards, as the RAAF settled in at Butterworth, the popularity of a posting to the base meant that, in practice, very few vacant RAAF positions needed to be filled by non-RAAF personnel. Consequently, for practical reasons rather than ideological ones, the practice of employing '2-4 non-RAAF personnel' from the local workforce in lieu of a single RAAF airman quickly became redundant.

[55] Loose Minute No.2SQN 1229/1/P3 (67A) – No.2(B) Squadron – Civilian Establishment, 13 December 1960, A11284/1/P3 Parts 1-3, NAA.
[56] Report of the Combined Service/Treasury team, 28 June 1955.

Further codifying the status of locally employed civilians, separate facilities were often provided for local workers at the Butterworth base. Towards the end of 1955, for example, as their numbers increased around the various worksites at the Butterworth base, an 'Asian Canteen' was constructed near the 'Workshops hangar' to provide meals for the 'native labourers' employed by No.2 ACS.[57] The separate 'Asian Canteen' served not only to physically segregate local employees from the Australian workforce, but also worked to symbolically place the Asian workforce on the lowest rung of the squadron's hierarchy. In a military structure where Australian officers, senior airmen and other ranks each retired to their own private messes for meals, the construction of an 'Asian Canteen' specifically for the use of local civilians whose employment overwhelmingly consisted of the most basic and menial physical tasks, clearly situated this group below the junior Australian airmen who directly supervised their work. The position of 'native labourers' diverged from the traditional structure of military hierarchy in only one respect, namely that race rather than qualifications, rank and employment, determined the makeup and overall position of the group.

Structures of Isolation

The combination of ideas concerning the dangerous environment of Malaya and racial stereotypes of Asians as less developed human beings than their 'European' counterparts also informed other areas of social contact between Australians and the local communities of Penang in these early years. In 1959, GPCAPT L.R. "Laurie" Trudinger, discussing the stress of living for the first time in an Asian country, noted that Australian families in Penang had the 'problem of living as a minority, scattered throughout an Asian community' and that time was required for 'them to adapt themselves to such things as the smells, the foreign tongue, the habits of their neighbours and the necessity of barring doors and windows against sneak thieves and intruders'.[58] In effect, 'the stress of living … in an Asian country' extended beyond both the foreign environment and potential contact with infection and disease to also include a number of other anxieties relating to encounters with the innate cunning and deceit of the 'Oriental character'.

[57] No.2 ACS Unit History Sheet, December 1955.
[58] Report on Organisation of Medical Facilities and on General Medical Conditions and Problems in Malaya and Singapore, with Particular Reference to RAAF Base Butterworth, June 1959, A705 132/2/972, NAA.

In 1960, several cases of sexual offences committed against children in Penang prompted the Adjutant of 1RAR to include a warning to Australian parents in Routine Orders. 'All parents', wrote the Adjutant, 'are reminded of the danger which exists and are advised not to let children wander, especially in bushy and lonely areas, and not to leave young children without adequate supervision. There is a need for closer supervision here than in Australia'.[59] In effect, both the physical and social environments of Penang conformed to contemporary conceptions of Asia as a potential source of pestilence and danger. As with the case of the 'Asian canteen', the 'Free From Infection' checks and the separate 'Asian sick parades' - held every morning at Butterworth for the Asian workforce - these ideas led to the construction of physical, social and cultural barriers that sought to protect Australian servicemen and their families from the hazards of contact with the surrounding Asian environment.

Segregation based upon perceptions of inferiority and uncleanliness extended to everyday chores such as grocery shopping for the one-hundred families accommodated at the Tanjong Tokong housing estate. Once the estate was completed and occupied in late 1956, questions began to arise over the availability of shopping facilities for Australian Army families. Standard practice for providing such facilities for service families in overseas locations like Malaya usually involved locating a 'family store' alongside any large barracks or housing estate. In the late 1940s, at Australia's 'Rainbow Village' in Japan, the Australian Army solved a similar problem by providing a building, rent free, to the Australian Army Canteen Services (AACS) to operate a family grocery store.[60] In the case of Malaya, the British equivalent of the AACS, the Navy, Army, Air Force Institute or 'NAAFI', already operated several such stores in the Penang area. In foreign environments like Malaya, both the AACS and NAAFI provided the comfort, cleanliness and familiarity of 'European type shops' for British and Australian families.

Two NAAFI stores already existed on Penang Island when the Australian Army chose to build the housing estate at Tanjong Tokong. One, more a temporary outlet facility, was located in a garage next to the Garrison Club in Georgetown about 5½ miles from Tanjong Tokong, while the other was located at Minden Barracks about 10 miles from the estate. Catering for the large influx of Australian families not only exceed the capability of these

[59] 1RAR Routine Orders, 12 July 1960, AWM95 – AACD, AWM.
[60] Minute RM 23/5 – 'Family Shop – Tanjong Tokong, Malaya', 14 May 1958, MP927/1 A259/55/139, NAA, Melbourne.

existing NAAFI facilities, but a lack of public transport between Tanjong Tokong and Minden Barracks prohibited many Australian families from shopping at the larger, more permanent NAAFI store located there.

As has been the case whenever large bodies of troops have established bases on foreign territory, local traders quickly moved in to secure their share of the 'garrison economy'. In the case of Tanjong Tokong, 'native shopkeepers' began building shops on the edge of the Australian housing estate as early as 1957. In response, the Australian Army took immediate steps to protect service families from the undesirable aspects of engaging with local traders and their inferior products.

In outlining the case for a 'European type shop' to Major-General R.G. "Reggie" Pollard, the Quartermaster-General (QMG) of the Australian Army, Lieutenant-Colonel D.G. "Derek" Sharp from the HQ Australian Army Force FARELF drew attention to the cleanliness and quality of NAAFI facilities as opposed to those of the 'native shopkeepers'. Local traders, wrote Sharp, 'build what we call "shop-houses" – revolting affairs having a shop downstairs and living quarters above, fronting onto the roadway and storm-water drains, and resulting in slum conditions within a short space of time'.[61] The Secretary of the Department of Defence, Sir E.W. 'Ted' Hicks, largely agreed with the above concerns, adding for good measure that 'these native shopkeepers' displayed a 'deplorable lack of hygiene in handling and storage of food (especially fish, meat and vegetables) resulting in increased attention being required due to disease from consuming contaminated food'.[62] Hicks concluded: 'I therefore strongly recommend that approval be given for the use of a build/lease house in the Tanjong Tokong Estate to provide NAAFI with the facilities required to furnish a family shop service'.[63]

Australian defence officials preferred providing NAAFI facilities to Australian families at the estate for another important reason. 'We believe it is undesirable that civilian shopkeepers should be allowed to be first into the area', wrote the QMG Pollard to the Minister for Defence in 1958, because 'of the unlimited credit which they will make available'. 'In the past', the QMG continued, 'it has been found that the considerable leisure time available to families, together with the unlimited credit offering, all too frequently

[61] Minute DO/DGS/11, 3 January 1957, MP927/1 A259/55/139, NAA, Melbourne.
[62] Minute A259/55/139 (Q2), 25 November 1958, MP927/1 A259/55/139, NAA, Melbourne.
[63] *Ibid*.

results in unmanageable debts accruing'.[64] The Secretary of the Department of the Army, A.D. "Allan" McKnight, concurred, writing that 'native shopkeepers will give unlimited credit' and 'some housewives are apt to run up large accounts which their husbands are unable or have great difficulty in honouring'.[65]

These concerns again drew heavily on past British colonial practice. According to Bayly and Harper, signing 'chits' had long been the accepted custom by which 'Europeans' paid for nearly everything in Malaya and Singapore.[66] At least economically, the system suited local traders because it leveraged two ruling principles of the British elite - unlimited credit both encouraged Europeans to overspend in pursuit of a lavish colonial lifestyle and then harnessed 'European' prestige as the principle mechanism for guaranteeing payment.

In the end, concerns over the extension of unlimited credit to Australian families proved prescient in a few isolated cases. 'A member shall not, without just cause or excuse, refuse or fail to pay on demand any debt lawfully due and owing by him to a civilian in MALAYA/SINGAPORE', wrote the Commanding Officer of 2RAR in August 1957, two months prior to the unit's return home to Australia.[67] After pointing out that debts between local traders and Australian servicemen remained a private concern of the individuals involved, the CO of 2RAR added a further caveat to his order. 'It should be clearly understood that failure to pay a lawful debt will adversely affect the prestige of AUSTRALIA in general and the Australian Army in particular'.[68] The issue of prestige even became codified into Australian military law. At the end of the CO's missive, he notified all ranks that any application for financial assistance to settle debts in Malaya would result in charges being laid against the member in question.

One common thread links the politics and practices of racial rhetoric and segregation in the early years of the Australian presence in Malaya - namely that the invocation of race often functioned to both distinguish and explain the inherent superiority of Australian servicemen and their families. Interpreted as a 'rhetorical political strategy', as Stoler might suggest, the language and practice of racial difference conjured up the supposed moral and

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[64] Minute RM 23/5 – 'Family Shop – Tanjong Tokong, Malaya', of 14 May 1958.
[65] Minute A259/55/139 (Q2), 25 November 1958.
[66] Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Armies: Britain's Asian Empire & The War With Japan* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), p. 140.
[67] 2RAR Routine Orders, 21 August 1957, AWM95 – AACD, AWM.
[68] *Ibid*.

physical deficiencies of the local populations, at once distinguishing them, the local populations, from the Australian community.[69]

Interchanging the social categories of 'race' and 'class' also provides the added insight that as a collective whole, the Australian military presence, or at the very least Australian military authorities, sought to harness racial difference in order to describe and ascribe class relationships. In other words, racial difference was utilized to do the more specific political work of defining hierarchies of class and privilege. Australians, in this 'class' reading of the racial rhetoric and practices employed by Australian military authorities, collectively possessed a range of inherent strengths, both moral and physical, that placed them in a 'social' class far above members of the local populations. By placing themselves in an 'upper' class of colonial society, the Australian community could then justify a range of unequal, and at times intolerant, attitudes and behaviours that framed their experience in Penang in these early years.

By representing local people in Malaya as childlike and in desperate need of instruction, several articles about the RAAF at Butterworth in the *RAAF News* throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s further contributed to this construction of racial hierarchy and class distinction. On 28 October 1958, the *RAAF News* reported that Australian Rules Football enthusiasts among the RAAF community in Penang were 'helping to spread the Australian way of life in South East Asia' by teaching the locals how to play the Australian code.[70] Leading the movement was Corporal Bill Thomson of Brunswick, Victoria, a former lower grade player with Fitzroy. Having only just arrived in Penang, and having little first-hand knowledge of the local peoples and cultures, Corporal Thomson set about coaching local schoolboys in the 7-14 year age range because, he believed, that this group was 'most likely to develop the new code in Malaya'.[71] Corporal Thomson told reporters at the *RAAF News* that 'we already have a team of 18 Asians ready to play from young men working on the RAAF base here at Butterworth. However, in the early stages we will split them up into two teams, adding our own men to make up the full team. In this way the play won't be too one-sided and the Asians will learn a lot faster'.[72]

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[69] Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 8.
[70] *RAAF News*, no.281, 28 October 1958.
[71] *Ibid*.
[72] *Ibid*.

Perhaps even more audacious than Corporal Thomson's vision of AFL football blossoming in Southeast Asia, the *RAAF News* reported in January 1959 that the RAAF base at Butterworth had adopted a small fishing village two miles north of the Butterworth airfield.[73] The village in question, Bagan Belat, already knew the RAAF well, the *RAAF News* reported, because Australian *Sabre* jet fighters and *Canberra* jet bombers flew over the small village nearly every day. Rather symbolically, the Chairman of the Village Committee, WGCDR J.D.R. "John" Pratt, decided to begin providing practical assistance to the adopted village by spreading the Christmas message. In the early morning of Christmas Day in 1958, the RAAF arrived at Began Belat, set up a Christmas tree and distributed Christmas presents to the village children.

Whether the local inhabitants of the village were actually Christians or not is not recorded in the *RAAF News* article but the tone of the endeavour was unmistakable. The RAAF Chaplain at Butterworth, Padre John Elliot, said of the adopted village project that 'we are just scratching the surface, but at least this move gives an opportunity to those who want to make a start'.[74] Clearly, according to this message from the RAAF Padre, if the inhabitants of Bagan Belat wished to move on from their 'meagre livelihood' of rice-padi cultivation and fishing, then the RAAF was more than happy to expand its 'civilising mission' in Penang.

Early Contact with the British

According to Jared van Duinen, Australian nationalism 'constituted a kind of localised Britishness', an identity that was an amalgam of both 'Australian and British'.[75] At the heart of this amalgam was an inherent Australian uniqueness that often found voice in subtle perceptions of cultural difference. As Schreuder and Ward have noted, Australians drew 'heavily on the language, culture, and heritage of an imagined community of Britishness', while at the same time 'insisting on the distinctive interests and aspirations of a people who, by virtue of their physical displacement from Britain, had an outlook and perspective all their own'.[76] Indeed, an antagonism based on perceptions of difference was one of the core

[73] *RAAF News*, No.285, 7 January 1959.
[74] *Ibid*.
[75] Jared van Duinen, "Bodyline, the British World and the Evolution of an Australian National Identity", *The International Journal of the History of Sport* (2014): p. 2.
[76] Schreuder and Ward, *Australia's Empire*, p. 11.

dynamics of British-Australian relations, which, 'far from undermining the sentimental bonds of Empire', was in fact an integral feature of 'mutual identification and understanding'.[77]

The fact that Australians in Malaya in the 1950s and 1960s identified as belonging to the 'European' race mattered little when confronted by the stark cultural and social contrasts between themselves and their British counterparts. Although the canons of 'white prestige' demanded some collegiality between the 'European' races in Malaya, differences nonetheless simmered just below the surface. Beth Johnson hinted at this aspect of life in Penang when she wrote that it was often hard 'to grasp the general customs of the three races in Malaya (four if you counted the British)'.[78] Indeed, for many Australians, the challenges of accommodating British sensibilities proved just as difficult as adjusting to the more socially foreign aspects of life amongst the Asian populations.

Issues of social status and class have been central to Australian encounters with British military personnel. During the First World War, according to Joan Beaumont, Australian servicemen railed against the 'rigid social hierarchies' that informed the behaviour of some of their counterparts from European societies.[79] Indeed, the distinctively nationalistic hue of the 'larrikin digger' owed much of his 'anti-authoritarian' attitude to a discrete lack of respect for the class differences so obvious in the British Army.[80] In looking at the experiences of Australian nurses in British military hospitals in Egypt, Palestine, Greece and India between 1914 and 1918, Kristy Harris has also noted a British-Australian antagonism based on perceptions of difference. British nurses, Harris suggests, regarded 'their colonial cousins with some disdain', refusing to work with them unless 'fully qualified' – a conceit based entirely on British perceptions that Australian nursing standards had yet to reach their own.[81]

These perceptions of difference continued during the Second World War. When soldiers of the Second Australian Imperial Force 8/2AIF arrived in Singapore in February 1941 for their first stint of 'garrison duties' in Malaya, the coarse demeanour of the 'larrikin

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[77] Stuart Ward, *Australia and the British Embrace: The Demise of the Imperial Ideal* (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 2001), p. 6.
[78] Len and Beth Johnson, *Malayan Adventure*, p. 117.
[79] Joan Beaumont, "The Anzac legend", *Australia's War 1914-18*, ed. Joan Beaumont (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1995), p. 152.
[80] Marianne Barker, *Nightingales in the Mud: The Digger Sisters of the Great War 1914-1918* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1989), p. 13; Richard White, *Inventing Australia: images and identity 1688-1980* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1981), p. 136.
[81] Kristy Harris, "Red Rag to a British Bull?: Australian Trained Nurses Working with British Nurses During World War One" in *Exploring the British World: Identity, Cultural Production, Institutions*, eds. Kate Darian-Smith, Patricia Grimshaw, Kiera Lindsey, Stuart McIntyre (Melbourne: RMIT Publishing, 2004), p. 126.

digger' clashed almost immediately with the haughty countenance of British phlegm. As the 8/2AIF disembarked at the Singapore wharfs, soldiers of Australia's 'civilian' army shouted, sung and the odd few even decided to throw coins at the British dignitaries and senior officers waiting to greet them at the docks.[82] Australian soldiers disrupted official British pageantry not because of any animosity towards the particular individuals gathered, but rather as a way of symbolically mocking what those gathered individuals represented.

Of course, perceptions of difference existed on both sides of the British/Australian divide and, when the time came, the British often reciprocated in kind. Writing about the British attempt to fortify the Peninsula in the face of an impending Japanese onslaught, Bayly and Harper observed that,

> the Australians, who arrived from early 1941, were humiliated by the treatment meted out to 'poor whites' in Singapore. They were not permitted to enter the sacred European clubs and hotels; the people they were sent to defend did not wish to know them socially. Even former residents whose membership dated from before the war were denied their clubs in Australian uniform.[83]

But as the Australian experience in Penang in the late 1950s suggests, history may well record being differentiated from the detritus of Britain's old colonial elite in Malaya in largely positive terms.

One of the principle reasons for the distinction between the newly arrived Australians and the established British community in Malaya involved the fiercely guarded traditions of social status in colonial societies. Francis Hutchins has aptly described how some sections of British colonial societies styled themselves as a sort of 'middle-class aristocracy', underscoring how imperial life could allow them to live 'in a manner well above the station from which they had sprung in England'.[84] That these anxieties still troubled an overseas British community in the mid-1950s should come as no surprise. Years of residence in Malaya, with all the benefits that social differentiation had gifted the British community, instilled a zeal for protecting its gains in a way relatively unaffected by social developments within the larger outside world.

In social terms, the experience of Beth Johnson, who lived at Tanjong Tokong on Penang Island, is significant. The English, Beth recalled, 'were a distinct group that usually

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[82] Janet Uhr, *Against the Sun: The AIF in Malaya, 1941-1942* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1998), p. 2.
[83] Bayly and Harper, *Forgotten Armies*, p. 64.
[84] Elizabeth Buettner, *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 20.

set out to make Australians feel inadequate'.[85] At times, the reminders of difference between the established English community in Malaya and the newly arrived Australians came in fairly straightforward terms. Johnson remembers one of 'the more friendly British teachers' at the children's school explaining 'that people in the UK were different from the colonial types'.[86] Such direct advice from the 'more friendly' British teachers no doubt served to put Australian families in their social place in colonial Malaya, which, at least according to some, was well and truly underneath the established British community.

At one point in her stay in Penang, Beth Johnson took a job playing piano for the local ballet teacher, Mrs Pim, an English woman who had lived in Penang for many years. Young girls of Indian, Chinese, Malay and European descent attended lessons during which Johnson noticed a series of explicitly racist behaviours on the part of Mrs Pim. In the end, Johnson resigned after witnessing 'Mrs Pim rushing to wash her hands after a ballet class saying she had "touched those little niggers!"'.[87] More generally, Johnson observed 'that many Britishers acted and spoke in a superior way towards Oriental people, calling "boy" when they wanted service and forgetting to say "please" and "thank you"'.[88] Although she noted that 'sadly, it was not unknown for some Australians to copy that kind of behaviour', most rejected the high class 'pukka sahib' image of the traditional metropolitan English gentleman in the colonies and instead interacted with individuals from other races in a more casual, albeit at times equally insensitive, manner.

Several aspects of British military administration in Malaya also highlighted the general divide between Australian and British attitudes. Australians found it curious that 'the British other ranks pay was not as good as the Australian other ranks pay, although the officers' pay was infinitely better'.[89] And British rations, according to the CO of 2RAR, Lieutenant Colonel J.G. "Jim" Ochiltree, were 'not as meaty or as good as ours, as the Australian ones'. Indeed, complaints about sub-standard British rations fell on sympathetic ears back in Australia. Consequently, when Australian soldiers were integrated with British units, they received 'a special financial supplement' so that they could buy more food rather than 'starve on the British rations'.[90]

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[85] Len and Beth Johnson, *Malayan Adventure*, p. 197.
[86] *Ibid*.
[87] Len and Beth Johnson, *Malayan Adventure*, p. 150.
[88] *Ibid*.
[89] 'Transcript of Oral History Recording – Brigadier James Graham Ochiltree, OBE (Ret'd)', Sound Collection - S00369, AWM, p. 22.
[90] *Ibid*., p. 44.

Although Ochiltree noted that 'relations with the Brits were good', he also recalled that 'we found that the British Army Administration was a headache' - to us it seemed 'a pretty harsh and a tough one and we had to learn the ropes'.[91] There was a number of things, Ochiltree continued, that left us bewildered,

> like when the barrack stores people conducted an inspection of the barracks and where there was a mark here or a chip here or a broken light shade there, they socked us for them and we had to pay. This was carried to rather ridiculous extremes–for example, in the ceiling in my office which I think it was about 12 feet high, there was a broken lampshade and we were called upon to make good that damage and I suggested to the brigade commander that this was quite ridiculous. I certainly didn't get a step ladder which I would need to climb up and break it and that was, as I say it was purely and fairly typical of the rather punitive system of barracks room damages.[92]

We also had annual administrative inspections, Ochiltree further explained,

> where a team of officers-usually the formation commander and his staff-would go back, looking at pay books looking at leave records, going through how many pairs of socks you have got in the company Q Stores and this was purely a British idea. And when I was asked by the brigade commander, when did we want our administrative inspection I said, "We Australians don't have them." and he said," well, you are jolly well are going to have one now", which indeed we did, headed up by the divisional commander but those were things that were new to us and we learnt through experience.[93]

These rigid and inflexible administrative processes also impacted on the lives of Australian families who occupied British married quarters in Penang. 'We were pretty naive when we went in there', remembered Leslie Margaret Ochiltree. When one Australian family was moving out of Minden Barracks, she recalled, 'we had a particularly nasty little British sergeant who was billing them for this and billing them for that … and I had heard about this gentleman, so I got in the car and screamed down and stood over him while he did the inventory'. Although Leslie conceded that 'there were a few scratches on the furniture', she just could not tolerate the seemingly nastiness of the British way of doing things – 'I mean you don't bill people for every tiny scratch, and so we learnt about things like that'.[94]

Differences between Australians and servicemen from the United Kingdom also played out within the workplace. The integration of some of the smaller Australian Army and RAAF detachments within existing British units in Malaya or the retention of key RAF

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[91] *Ibid*., p. 94.
[92] *Ibid*., p. 94.
[93] *Ibid*., p. 96.
[94] *Ibid*., p. 118.

or British Army personnel in certain positions in Australian units bought about close interaction between Australian servicemen and their British counterparts. For the RAAF at Butterworth, a number of the base support services - the base fire section, the base police flight, the provost section and the base medical facilities - retained RAF personnel up until British Forces withdrew from Malaya in the early 1970s. With the odd exception, such as the occasion in July 1968 in which a drunken RAAF LAC told an RAF Flying Officer to 'piss off' because he was 'in the light blue mob' and hence 'a fucking guest on this base', these working relationships appear to have been largely trouble-free and in most cases productive.[95]

On the odd occasion when difficulties did arise between Australian servicemen and their British counterparts, however, cultural difference always served as the principle means of explaining the irreconcilable nature of the encounter. Attempts in late 1956 to incorporate two Army units, 3 Company, Royal Australian Army Services Corps (3 Coy RASC) and 2 Infantry Workshop, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (2 Inf Wksp REME), highlighted a number of these cultural discrepancies. 'The Australian soldier', wrote Colonel Speed when discussing the issue, 'is a Regular, generally of more mature age, knowledge and experience than the national serviceman who provides the greater proportion of the strength of integrated units'.[96] Subsequently, Colonel Speed continued, 'many of the United Kingdom non-commissioned officers are younger and less experienced than the Australian soldiers with whom they are associated'.[97] Within this framework, tensions arose over issues of control, discipline, duties and leave, with most Australian soldiers feeling slighted at their treatment vis-à-vis their younger, short-term equivalents in the British Army.

A visit to the two integrated units in question by the Australian Chief of the General Staff in July 1956 highlighted the discontent amongst Australian soldiers. If the British Commanding Officer, continued Colonel Speed in his response to the issue, does not 'fully understand the Australian mentality' or does not 'really know how to handle Australians, trouble can ensue'.[98] But this difference between the 'mentalities' of Australian and U.K. personnel continued to stir discontent within this particular integrated workplace. In the end, arrangements were made for the re-grouping of several personnel within the sub-units so that

[95] Proceeding of Court Martial, [APPLEBY Keith Banks (Leading Aircraftman): Service Number - A17875: Unit - No 478 (Main) Squadron, Butterworth, Royal Australian Air Force: Date of Court Martial - 26 April 1968], A471 – 92244, NAA.
[96] Australian Army Force, FARELF, Monthly Report No. 7/56, AWM95 – AACD, AWM.
[97] *Ibid*.
[98] *Ibid*.

Australian members were supervised directly by other Australian soldiers and had direct access to the nearest Australian officer on important administrative matters.

While these administrative measures ameliorated the situation to some degree, a 'complete rapprochement between Australian and United Kingdom personnel in those two units' was unlikely, according to follow-up reports by HQ Australian Army Force FARELF, until a proportion of those Australian and United Kingdom personnel concerned were transferred.[99] In the next month's report, evidence emerged that a small group of eight Australian soldiers had coerced other members of the unit into participating in a non-fraternisation agreement between Australian and United Kingdom personnel. Remedial action to remove these 'eight troublesome' Australian soldiers somewhat improved the immediate situation, but morale in both units continued to suffer for a number of years.

In questionnaire responses, many Australians posted to Butterworth similarly reflected on some of the cultural differences that marked out the Australian community as different from that of the extant British community in Penang. But rather than reflect on direct encounters with British servicemen, questionnaire participants instead contrasted the different ways in which the newly arrived Australians and the long-standing British community interacted with local people. The Australians, confirmed a RAAF flight lieutenant posted to No.3 SQN in June 1959, 'mixed very well with the locals - to a much better extent than my experience with the Brits'.[100] One Australian corporal posted to Butterworth in May 1967 recalled that in his experience 'Australian expats seemed to be more accepting/accommodating of differences that our British counterparts … amahs were always eager to move from British families to Australian families'.[101] 'There was quite a strong dislike for the Brits out there', wrote the wife of a senior Australian chaplain in late 1971, again contrasting the likable nature of the Australian community from the seemingly rigid and aloof character of their well-established British counterparts.[102]

This is not to suggest that total animosity dominated the relationship between the Australian and British communities in Penang, but rather that when differences were identified, culture rather race worked to bolster notions of national identity and belonging. The reflections of one RAAF officer posted to Butterworth in the late 1950s are typical:

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[99] Australian Army Force, FARELF, Monthly Report No. 8/56, AWM95 – AACD, AWM.
[100] *Questionnaire Response*: FLTLT, No.3 SQN, June 1959 – June 1961.
[101] *Questionnaire Response*: CPL, Base SQN, May 1967 – November 1969.
[102] *Questionnaire Response*: Wife, October 1971 – February 1974.

> As the Personal Assistant to the Air Officer Commanding Malay during the Malayan Emergency - firstly at KL and then, following Malayan independence, in Singapore when the HQ moved from Malaya to overcome political sensitivities. I was the only Australian airman living on the RAF Base at KL - and then Seletar. It was also my first experience of living with the Brits, many of whom were great blokes and most friendly and welcoming. But there were some who still gave the impression that 'colonials' were, well, at a lower level … later, at Butterworth, where the vast majority of airmen were Australian, I noticed a completely different relationship between us and the locals - the Aussie informality resulted in a more friendly relationship. Mind you, there was still much irreverent comment about the 'nogs', etc., but there was no vindictiveness in this and I sensed that the locals realised this.

While the differences in 'mentalities' between the British and the Australians were clearly subsumed under the general rubric of 'European' racial membership in Malaya, they undoubtedly denoted a demarcation between the two groups based upon cultural understandings and practices.

Conclusion

Notions of the Asian environment as a place full of dirt, disease and decay and the corresponding paternal responsibility to exert a 'civilising' influence on such environments has provided one of the central justifications for the entire British imperial project. These ideas have also prompted successive European communities resident in Asia to create barriers, both physical and social, as a way to avoid contact with their suspected harmful surroundings. As the Australian forces took up their position in Malaya during the twilight years of the British Empire, many of these assumptions regarding climate and the Asian environment remained potent influences in how they engaged with their new surroundings. By drawing upon many of these traditional colonial narratives, Australians began articulating those qualities which distinguished between 'self' and 'other' in Malaya.

Officially, the first few years of Australia's deployment to Malaya consisted of a series of attempts at formal segregation. The 'Asian' canteen for local civilians employed to help construct the base as well as the daily 'Asian' sick parade sought to mark out a clear distinction between the Australians and the local populations. These concepts of segregation, clearly stemming from racial stereotypes based on inferiority and subservience, also informed the numbers of local civilians employed to fill vacancies in the ranks of Australia's deployment in which anywhere from 2-4 local civilians were deemed 'equivalent' to one 'European' worker. These official efforts of discrimination and separation no doubt played a

clear role in defining and policing the racial boundaries that set Australians apart from Asians and helped to sustain them as worthy representatives of a superior 'European' culture.

If Australians regarded themselves as members of the 'European' race, however, they also viewed themselves as culturally different from their counterparts from the United Kingdom. At times these distinctions gave rise to further segregations, but this time within the 'European' military community in Malaya. Although the pervasiveness and severity of these particular divisions should not be overstated, they nevertheless point to the construction of a uniquely Australian identity in Malaya, one based on differentiations of both race and culture. In their own way, each of these identifications of difference helped to create an atmosphere which tended to favour segregation and isolation – from both the local Asian populations as well as other British servicemen – as a way of further strengthening identity and self-representation.

As the next chapter discusses, this tendency on the part of Australian military officials to isolate the Australian community, both physically and socially, extended to even the most intimate of contact between Australian servicemen and the local populations.

Chapter Five

"Out of Bounds": Policing the Carnal Boundaries - Sex, Race and Inter-racial Intimacy

Colonial encounters involving large bodies of unmarried European men and a corresponding lack of single European women almost always resulted in intimate liaisons between the coloniser and the colonised. Indeed, from the early seventeenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century, many European empires actively encouraged semi-permanent inter-racial unions, usually in the form of concubinage, rather than arrange and pay for the transport of eligible European women to the colonies.[1] In British Malaya, officials counted on the social services that local women supplied, not only as 'useful guides to the language', but also as protection 'against the ill-health that sexual abstention, isolation and boredom were thought to bring'.[2] Official sanction meant that these unions aroused no particular stigma within European social circles.[3] Capitan Francis Light, for example, who sailed into Penang harbour in 1786 to formally take possession of the island, lived openly and faithfully with his Eurasian mistress, Martina Rozells, while he was superintendent of the settlement.[4]

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, officially sanctioned inter-racial intimacy between European men and local women expanded to include regulated prostitution. As a means of providing female companionship in the male dominated landscapes of overseas colonies, officially regulated prostitution often proved politically problematic. Critics back in London railed against the moral degeneracy of such a program for British servicemen and government officials. Medical justifications for regulated prostitution, outlined within the British Contagious Diseases Act and the strictly policed system of lock hospitals for prostitutes with sexually transmitted infections (STIs), failed to deter critics of the scheme. By the end of the nineteenth century, sustained criticism ended, at least officially, the British experiment with regulated prostitution to service the needs of European men in the colonies.

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[1] George Woodcock, *The British in the Far East* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), p. 166.
[2] See both Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 46-55 and Margaret Shennan, *Out in the Midday Sun: The British in Malaya, 1880-1960* (London: John Murray, 2000), who notes that many of the British pioneer generation in Malaya 'took to himself one of the complaisant, amusing good-tempered and good-mannered daughters of the East', p. 66.
[3] Dennis Kincaid, *British Social Life in India, 1608-1937* (London: George Rutledge, 1938), p. 67.
[4] Woodcock, *The British in the Far East*, p. 166.

In 1909, the Colonial Office, formally declared its disapproval of 'concubinage' as an acceptable practice in all British colonies. The days of European men openly consorting with their Asian concubines or visiting officially sanctioned brothels had ended. Under the increasingly restrictive moral regime accompanying the more European-oriented cultural attitudes of superiority and isolation of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, permanent and semi-permanent relationships between European men and local women in British colonies became publically unacceptable.

Although, as John Butcher notes, sexual relations between European men and Asian women were still 'unofficially' condoned, if a European man 'wished to appear openly with an Asian woman and to treat her as he would a European woman he was indeed committing "social suicide"'.[5] In 1929, the editor of Penang's English-language newspaper, *The Straits Echo*, George Bilainkin, similarly noted that inter-racial marriage 'is not tolerated and the exceptions emphasise the rule; where it happens, it is frowned upon so firmly that it does not show its face to the world'.[6] As late as September 1956, a British rubber planter in Malaya, John Dodd, wrote to his father that 'no planter in this company has an Asian wife. It really is frowned upon. Someone no doubt will be the first though and, for sure, will face a lot of problems'.[7]

As Australian forces moved into Penang in late 1955, military authorities drew upon these most recent incarnations of British colonial discourse. Reflecting the broader forms of inter-racial segregation and non-fraternisation discussed in the previous chapter, such practices were, not surprisingly, extended to the intimate sphere of sexual relationships. Conveniently, these colonial discourses neatly dovetailed with the 'mistrust, fear and even hostility' with which most Australians in the 1950s still perceived the populations of Asia.[8] Instigating a strict policy of racial segregation and non-fraternisation for Australian servicemen in Malaya thus made perfect sense to a cohort of military leaders imbued with such ingrained perspectives and convictions.

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[5] John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya 1880-1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 222.
[6] George Bilainkin, *Hail, Penang!* (Penang: Areca Books, 2010), p. 107.
[7] John Dodd, *A Company of Planters: Confessions of a Colonial Rubber Planter in 1950s Malaya* (Singapore: Monsoon Books Pte Ltd, 2007), p. 42. See also the reflections of around the same time of Michael Thorp in *Elephants, Tigers & Tappers: Recollections of a British Rubber Planter in Malaya* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Pty Ltd, 2009).
[8] Lachlan M. Strahan, "An Oriental Scourge: Australia and the Asian Flu Epidemic of 1957", *Historical Studies*, 26:103 (1995): pp.182-203.

In the early 1950s, drawing heavily on the experiences of servicemen in postwar Japan and the subsequent admission of the Japanese wives of BCOF personnel, Australian military officials developed and implemented a series of policies designed to deter Australian servicemen from engaging in any form of sexual interaction with local Asian women while posted to Penang. These 'official' attitudes set Australian authorities on a collision course with the enduring inclination of Australian servicemen to enthusiastically embrace the carnal temptations on offer during military service on foreign shores.[9] This chapter explores the realities of contact between individual Australian servicemen and local Asian women in Penang and the official Australian policies that sought to regulate that contact.

Penang's Night-Life, Sex & 'That' Disease

For centuries, European lore combined a 'long tradition of male travel as an erotics of ravishment' with images of a 'libidinously eroticized' Orient to suggest a sexual landscape in the East ripe for the unfettered fulfilment of masculine fantasy.[10] In contrast to images of the East as dirty, immoral and primitive, sexual representations of the East instead focused on the sensual, the luxuriant and the decadent. For Edward Said, the sexualisation of Oriental women 'fairly stands for the pattern of relative strength between East and West and the discourse about the Orient that it enabled'.[11]

As part of their colonial heritage, Broinowski has suggested that 'most Australians had been imbued … with the East-West, male-female double standard', their expectations of Asia 'moulded by Puccini'.[12] As late as 1986, Australian novelist Robert Drewe described

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[9] Charles Bean's diary notes that 'there was a great deal of [venereal] disease amongst our men, which they brought on themselves by their indulgences in Cairo', Kevin Fewster ed., *Bean's Gallipoli: The Diaries of Australia's Official War Correspondent* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2007); Richard White, "Sun, Sand, and Syphilis: Australian Soldiers and the Orient, Egypt, 1914", *Australian Cultural History* 9 (1990): pp. 49-64; Raden Dunbar, *The Secrets of the Anzacs: the untold story of venereal disease in the Australian Army, 1914-1919* (Brunswick, VIC: Scribe Publishing, 2014); Peter Stanely, *Bad Characters: Sex, Crime, Mutiny, Murder and the Australian Imperial Force* (Sydney: Murdoch Books / Pier 9, 2010); In the occupation of Japan in the aftermath of the Second World War, Robin Gerster notes of Australia's contribution that 'the hedonism of Occupation life seems slightly shocking … the gendered paradigm of the Australian Occupation is that of the aggressively heterosexual male Occupier imposing himself on the female Occupied', see Robin Gerster, *Travels in Atomic Sunshine: Australia and the Occupation of Japan* (Melbourne: Scribe Publications, 2008), p. 106; Michael Sturma, "Public Health and Sexual Morality: Venereal Disease in World War II Australia", *Signs* 13:4 (Summer 1988): pp. 725-740.

[10] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 33.

[11] *Ibid*., p. 14.

[12] Alison Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady: Australian Impressions of Asia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 107.

the erotic landscape in Asia in more familiar terms: 'many western men would fantasize that Asia was one big nameless nightclub, one lush Garden of Eden where the women are petite, subservient and available'.[13] For Australian servicemen arriving in Penang for the first time in the mid-1950s, these well-established and enduring images of a sexualised Asia added a further dimension to their expectations of what a posting to the 'exotic' East might involve.

Of all the temptations on offer for Australian military forces in Penang, the lure of bars and clubs in Georgetown for single servicemen proved to be the most seductive. In addition to the often dull routines of daily life in the military, soldiers and airmen lacked many of the usual social structures that would normally occupy their time while off-duty. Although military officials understood the role played by boredom and social isolation in driving single men into the bars and clubs of Georgetown, experiments with distractions such as 'hard' physical training and competitive sports only ever provided a temporary deterrent to the excitement and sexual temptations of city nightlife.

In many ways, the claims staked by Australian defence officials on team spirit, male bonding and useful homo-sociality as part of a healthy 'warrior' culture among servicemen tacitly endorsed an ethos of manliness that embraced acts of heavy drinking and female conquest.[14] Within this confusing milieu of masculinity, more than a few Australian soldiers and airmen viewed the official discouragement of sexual interaction with local Asian women as inconsistent and unrealistic, and instead came to regard the bars and clubs of Georgetown as an essential component of overseas military life in Penang.

The nightlife of Penang, according to a guide produced by the *Mariners' Club Penang* in 1958, was 'not as fun-loving and riotously gay as Singapore or Hong Kong … not blatant, not noisy and frothy' but rather, the city of Georgetown 'pulsated at night, softly, quietly, and beneath the surface calm there throbs the usual sexy, steamy side that you find in any city in the East'.[15] The guide noted that 'if you want the thrills, the romance and the adventure, you can have your share of them, as much or as little as you wish'.[16] In addition to the restaurants, singing cafes and regular bars, Georgetown had 'more than its quota of first-class air-conditioned cinema halls' that regularly programmed the latest Hollywood films and

[13] *Ibid*., p. 183.
[14] Maria Hön and Seungsook Moon, 'The Politics of Gender, Sexuality, Race and Class in the U.S. Military Empire' in *Over There: Living with the U.S. Military Empire form World War Two to the Present,* ed. Maria Hön and Seungsook Moon (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 18.
[15] *Guide to the Mariners' Club Penang*, 1958, p. 62, Australian National Library.
[16] *Ibid*., p. 62.

occasionally hosted 'flamboyant revues by visiting troupes'.[17] Georgetown, according to the *Mariners' Club* guide, also offered a variety of entertainment involving physical contact with local Asian women. At the *Joget Modern*, Australian servicemen could dance 'to the hot rhythms of Latin American sambas and mambos' with 'pretty Malay girls clad in tight-fitting sarong-kebayas', while at a popular nightspot near the Waterfall Gardens, 'young Thai girls' were ready to dance to 'ramvong music'.[18]

Figure 5.1. Dreaming about home while in Malaya, dreaming of Malaya while at Home, (June 1958 edition of *Bising*, Troopship Collection, Australian War Memorial).

The most sought-after nightspots in the late 1950s, at least for Australian servicemen, were the city's two Cabarets, the *Sky Dance Hall* on Noordin Street and the *City Lights Dance Hall* on Leith Street, both in the heart of Georgetown. Both venues featured nightly strip-tease shows, a variety of nude women posing in various positions around the venue as well as hundreds of hostesses and taxi dancers who could be purchased by the hour to either dance or sit at a table. At the *City Lights*, troops and airmen enjoyed performances by Malaya's best known strip-teasers, including the renowned Rose Chan, who came specifically to Penang in 1955 to perform for the newly arrived Australian servicemen. Melbourne's *The Argus* reported that not only did Rose Chan dance wearing 'only a tiny G-string and two strategically placed flowers', but that Australian servicemen 'climbed on

[17] *Ibid*.
[18] *Ibid*.

chairs and tables for a better view'.[19] Before, during and after these performances, the 'pretty little Chinese taxi dancers' of the *City Lights* were available for engagement.[20]

With Rose Chan and the hundreds of taxi-dancers at the *City Lights* and the *Sky Dance Hall* whetting the appetite of Australian servicemen, military officials faced an enormous task in confining the lure of 'off-base Asiatic temptations' to just the Dance Halls of Georgetown. Officials grew concerned that Penang's nightclubs might tempt Australian troops and airmen to venture further into the 'seedier' side of Penang's nightlife. With its long history as a popular tourist destination for Western travellers, Penang Island in the late 1950s did indeed contain a vibrant and thriving sex industry. According to a census of the population taken in June 1957, 6.25 million people lived in Malaya. Of the four major city centres, Georgetown ranked second in terms of size with a population of 235,000.[21] And according to local Press reports, the Federation of Malaya contained an estimated 28,000 prostitutes, with Penang regarded as the major centre of the country's sex industry.[22]

Managing the potential problems associated with Penang's erotic temptations occupied the minds of Australian officials as soon as troops and airmen boarded ships in Australia. In the first few days after members of No.2 ACS boarded the *New Australia* in Townsville in September 1955, squadron personnel received a series of lectures from the RAAF Senior Medical Officer on both the dangers and prophylaxis of STIs.[23] Films graphically illustrating the physical consequences of contracting sexually transmitted diseases were screened while on-route to Malaya. The information presented to airmen painted a picture of the local sex industry in Penang as sordid, filthy and ridden with disease. Essentially, this early and well-worn strategy adopted by military officials sought to dissuade Australian airmen from sampling the sexual temptations of Penang's nightlife by stressing the importance of discipline and relied almost exclusively on individual self-regulation.

Like their RAAF counterparts, Australian Army officials initially adopted a policy aimed at discouraging soldiers from engaging in risky sexual behaviour while off-duty in Penang. One 3rd Battalion Royal Australian Regiment (3RAR) Routine Instruction noted that 'commanders must accept the fact that this [venereal disease] is a serious man-management

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[19] *The Argus*, 24 October 1955.
[20] *The Argus*, 22 October 1955.
[21] Brief on Malaya prepared for the Minister of External Affairs, by the Australian High Commissioner in Kuala Lumpur, August 1957, A1838 - 3026/2/1 Part 4, NAA.
[22] Monthly Medical Reports and Medical Aspects – No.2 ACS Malaya, February 1958, A705 – 132/2/960 Part 1, NAA.
[23] Monthly Medical Reports and Medical Aspects – No.2 ACS Malaya, October 1955.

problem which can be alleviated by good leadership'.[24] The instruction further outlined the availability of training films on STIs as well as the need for unit commanders to give 'frequent and adequate talks … on the subject' with 'a record of the discussion' verified 'in the Orders Book'. Again, the thrust of this initial approach by Australian Army officials focussed almost entirely on self-discipline and the need for individual soldiers to heed official warnings and advice.

When 2RAR arrived in Penang in October 1955, Army officers implemented a rather novel approach to complement the suite of lectures and warnings by medical officers against dalliances with local Asian prostitutes. Two weeks after their arrival in Penang, members of the battalion were loaded into trucks for an 'official' tour of Georgetown's red light district. Officers narrated the tour with vivid warnings regarding the prevalence of STIs among local women. For some, such as Private Ron Leverton, the tactic worked - 'after what I've been told about some of those places, you couldn't get me in there for a thousand quid'.[25]

For most Australian soldiers, however, the official vice tour simply proved to be a familiarity trip. Indeed, Australian soldiers 'whistled at attractive Chinese and Malay girls' from Australian Army trucks as the tour proceeded through the local red-light district. One Australian officer responded by telling the troops to 'look at them if you like, but if you're wise, that's all you'll do'.[26] Yet, the very fact of having to respond to Australian soldiers whistling at local Asian women while on an official 'vice tour' designed to dissuade troops from risky sexual behaviour augured poorly for a strategy based largely on self-discipline. If latter behaviour is anything to go by, the tour of the red light district by 2RAR did just as much to animate opportunity and desire as it did to inhibit them.

Recognising the limits of self-discipline, Australian military officials sought to strengthen their strategy of dissuasion with a series of prohibitions carrying the added weight of formal military discipline. In parallel with information on the medical implications of STIs and verbal injunctions against visiting the local red light district, Australian officials declared most of Georgetown 'Out of Bounds' for Australian troops and airmen. In the first two years of the Australian presence in Penang, and prior to the formal granting of independence to Malaya in 1957, 'Out of Bounds' signs were physically placed at various locations around the island to indicate the areas which were 'off limits'. Australian troops

[24] 3RAR Administrative Instruction 1/57, January 1957, AWM95 – AACD, AWM.
[25] *The Argus*, 22 October 1955, "Diggers of a Penang 'Vice Tour'".
[26] *Ibid*.

and airmen were ordered to restrict their presence to cafes, bars, restaurants and hotels displaying the sign 'Recommended for HM Forces' and signed by an appropriate representative of the office of the Provost Marshall.[27] The extent of the exclusion zone prompted one Australian soldier, at the time actively engaged in fighting Communist Terrorists (CTs) in the Malayan jungle, to comment, perhaps somewhat sarcastically, that Penang indeed 'must be a pretty rough spot' considering most of Georgetown was officially 'out of bounds'.[28]

To clarify matters further, Routine Orders at both Minden Barracks and at the RAAF base at Butterworth regularly published lists of the areas of Georgetown that were either 'In Bounds' or 'Out of Bounds' for Australian troops and airmen. The lists named both specific establishments that servicemen were categorically prohibited from entering as well as whole areas of the city that were deemed 'off limits'. Perhaps as a foil against the more enterprising individuals who sought a 'legally' usable defence against being in an 'off limits' area, an instruction appeared in 2RAR Routine Orders in early 1956 placing all Trishaws in Penang 'out of bounds' between the hours of 1900-0700.[29]

With all potential loopholes closed, military officials outlined the consequences of disobeying the published Routine Orders. Australian servicemen were warned that 'leave for all personnel present in, or creating a disturbance in, an 'Out of Bounds' area will be cancelled for an indefinite period'.[30] In order to enforce these orders by ensuring that adequate personnel were available to patrol known trouble areas, Australian authorities reinforced the local British anti-vice section of the Far East Command Provost Marshal with two Australian Non-Commissioned Officers.

Notwithstanding this barrage of information and official prohibition, most Australian servicemen simply ignored the warnings about contracting STIs and the threats of punishment for being caught in areas deemed 'off limits'. In private, military officials, long familiar with the behaviour of Australian servicemen on overseas deployments, largely accepted the futility of declaring areas of Penang 'out of bounds' and warning soldiers and airmen of the potential consequences of visiting the local red light district. According to the CO of 2RAR, Lieutenant Colonel J.G. "Jim" Ochiltree, out-of-bounds were actually 'a great

[27] 2RAR Routine Orders 30/56, July 1956, AWM95 – AACD, AWM.
[28] *The Argus*, 22 October 1955, "Diggers of a Penang 'Vice Tour'".
[29] 2RAR Routine Orders 12/56, March 1956, AWM95 – AACD, AWM.
[30] *Ibid*.

incentive to anyone to treat himself to wander in and say, "I wonder why it is out of bounds?" and then get picked up by the military police'.[31] Reflecting on his battalion's time in Penang, Ochiltree recalled that, by the end of their two year tour of duty, 'we had quite a number of troops who had been apprehended in the out-of-bounds areas'.[32] So in spite the many and varied official strategies of prevention, the Australian men very quickly introduced themselves to the erotic pleasures of Penang - followed soon after by the inevitable rise in the number of servicemen presenting at medical parades with STIs.

On 12 September 1955, only six weeks after the arrival of the main party of No.2 ACS, medical staff reported 29 cases of 'venereal disease', approximately 10% of the entire squadron.[33] By the end of 1955, another 15 members of the squadron presented at sick parade with some form of STIs. On receiving the first reports regarding the high rates of STIs among Australian airmen in late 1955, the Director-General of Medical Services for the RAAF, AVM E.A. "Edward" Daley, wrote to the Commanding Officer of No.2 ACS.[34] With 'some consternation', Daley noted 'that a considerable number of airmen have been admitted to the Kinrara British Military Hospital' in Kuala Lumpur for the treatment of STIs.[35] 'Every effort', warned the Director-General, 'will be made by your Unit to draw the attention of all personnel to the modes of infection, dangers, etc., of venereal diseases by means of talks, films, demonstration models, etc'.[36]

For Australian Army officials, the high numbers of soldiers presenting with some form of STI represented a significant man-management problem. Ochiltree recalled that,

> if a chap got VD and he was out on patrol for a week or 10 days, it meant that a patrol either had to be called off or you had to call in a helicopter to evacuate him or somebody had to go back with him, escort him back, it was a burden on his mates … it was a bloody problem. A soldier in the middle of an operation would get a dose and if you flew a helicopter in to evacuate him, you would spoil the whole, you would blow your security.[37]

In effect, issues surrounding soldiers contracting STIs amounted to far more than the loss of the individual in question for the period of his recuperation.

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[31] 'Transcript of Oral History Recording – Brigadier James Graham Ochiltree, OBE (Ret'd)', Sound Collection - S00369, AWM.
[32] *Ibid.*
[33] Monthly Medical Reports and Medical Aspects – No.2 ACS Malaya, October 1955.
[34] Minute 132/2/960, "Monthly Medical Report – September 1955", A705 132/2/960 Part 1, NAA.
[35] *Ibid*.
[36] *Ibid*.
[37] 'Transcript of Oral History Recording – Brigadier James Graham Ochiltree, OBE (Ret'd)', Sound Collection - S00369, AWM.

With 55 reported cases in 1956, 49 cases reported in 1957 and a further 22 cases reported in 1958 prior to the squadron's mid-year departure, No.2 ACS reported a total of 170 cases of sexually transmitted infection during their three years at Butterworth. With medical staff observing that very few airmen reported to medical section more than once with a sexually transmitted disease, the 170 reported cases represented approximately 40% of the single men who served with No.2 ACS while the squadron was stationed at Butterworth.[38]

Although exact figures for the infection rate among Australian soldiers stationed in Penang from 1955 to 1961 are not available, it is probable that the infection rates encountered by Army medical officials were similar to those noted above by RAAF medical officers, if not higher given the high numbers of young single men in an infantry battalion. In each of their monthly reports, the Australian Army Force Headquarters FARELF usually reported that 'the figures for VD show no marked change'. On the odd occasions when a monthly report did indicate a decrease in the number of soldiers presenting with some form of sexually transmitted disease, as was the case in February 1959, the following month's report inevitably noted that 'the downward trend in VD figures … did not continue', with 'a return to the general average rate'.[39]

Almost certainly, many cases of STIs in both soldiers and airmen went unreported. Indeed, a significant number of RAAF airmen sought to deal with the matter of contracting an STI through one of several 'non-official' channels available in Penang. During an informal discussion with medical staff in early 1956, members of No.2 ACS admitted to preferring to seek treatment for a sexually transmitted infection at local civilian doctors in order to avoid having the illness recorded in their medical files. The airmen interviewed offered several reasons for preferring to avoid official scrutiny. Not only would the fact of contracting a STI while in Malaya be permanently on an individual's medical record, but, just as importantly, most Australian airmen believed that when viewed by female medical clerks and orderlies back in Australia, the information would not remain confidential.

With a number of British doctors still operating private practices in Georgetown, the one-off financial cost of such a visit usually compared favourably to the permanent burden of recording an instance of infection in an individual's medical file. Another option involved securing and self-administering medicine through one of the local pharmacies or 'unofficially' through the Australian medical system. As HQ RAAF Butterworth noted in

[38] Monthly Medical Reports and Medical Aspects – No.2 ACS Malaya, December 1957.
[39] Australian Army Force, FARELF, Monthly Report No. 8/58, AWM95 – AACD, AWM.

November 1958, 'it is known that many RAAF personnel are using penicillin tablets as prophylaxis without follow up'.[40] Although medical staff issued a warning to squadron personnel regarding the dangers associated with seeking treatment through 'unofficial' channels, it would be reasonable to regard the 'official' number of reported cases of STIs among Australian servicemen as being a fairly conservative estimate.

Despite the 'official' policy of prohibition on visiting the red light district and the numerous appeals to military discipline, from mid-1956 onwards, all RAAF airmen began to receive a compulsory issue of condoms before going out on leave. For their part, Australian Army command adopted similar practices. Although not compulsory, Battalion Routine Orders in May 1956 stated rather bluntly that 'in view of the high rate of Venereal Disease' in Georgetown 'any member of 2RAR who exposes himself to disease will make use of the prophylactics available in Company Orderly Rooms'.[41] According to Ochiltree,

> Although we try and drum it into them - get yourself issued with all the necessary condoms and that beforehand and for God sake, use them! … I think regrettably a number of soldiers were pretty slack in their adequate precautions, and this would be borne out by the fact that we would get cases with soldiers getting a dose of VD several times. And although we would try to moralise with them and that sort of thing, my own experience with Australian troops, stretching back from 1940 onwards, was it was like water off a duck's back to a number of soldiers.[42]

Accepting the difficulty of circumscribing the high rate of STIs among Australian servicemen in Penang in these early years prompted military officials to attempt to further regulate and control the actions of soldiers and airmen.

As an additional safeguard, the Australian Army funded a new Prophylactic Centre (PAC) in Georgetown as a kind of risky sexual behaviour first-aid post. All Australian servicemen were informed that the newly established PAC was to be made use of by any servicemen 'at the first available opportunity after exposure'.[43] Sub-unit and platoon commanders of Australian soldiers were further instructed to ensure that all personnel under their command understood where prophylactics could be obtained, the location of the PAC in Georgetown and 'knowledge of the action required of those who expose themselves to risk of infection'.[44]

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[40] HQ RAAF Butterworth Monthly Medical Report, November 1958, A705 132/2/966, NAA.
[41] 2RAR Routine Orders 21/56, May 1956, AWM95 – AACD, AWM.
[42] 'Transcript of Oral History Recording – Brigadier James Graham Ochiltree, OBE (Ret'd)', Sound Collection - S00369, AWM.
[43] 2RAR Routine Orders 21/56, May 1956, AWM95 – AACD, AWM.
[44] 3RAR Administrative Instruction 1/57, January 1957, AWM95 – AACD, AWM.

In an interview with Ian McNeill in 1985, Ochiltree also recalled his attempts to establish a regimental brothel in Penang to arrest the high rates of STIs among Australian soldiers. Ochiltree offered that,

> when my battalion went to the Middle East, we in 1940 went down (as an advance party) and we took over from the Highland Light Infantry and we took over their regimental brothel. We found that the VD rate when our battalion went down to Port Said dropped from, I don't know what it was, four or five percent down to about .001, because the brothel was properly regimented. That meant the soldier could go in and have a meal and have a dance and whatever and because the prostitutes were under army medical supervision and police supervision, there was no VD.[45]

Ochiltree became 'frustrated with efforts to establish a regimental brothel' in Penang because 'the Malays didn't recognise prostitution, they reckon there was no such thing as prostitution or brothels' and 'that meant the troops could really get stuck into anything'.[46] Consequently, 'the VD rate went up as it did in Japan in the early days of the occupation'.[47]

Attempts by Australian military officials to reduce the infection rate of STIs through practical measures based on medical prevention and control, however, significantly undermined the initial strategy of self-discipline and prohibition. Australian soldiers and airmen now received two conflicting messages from their military superiors. At the same time as injunctions on patronizing certain bars, clubs and hotels in Georgetown continued, Australian military officials not only issued condoms to servicemen prior to evening leave but further established facilities in the heart of the city for use after any potential exposure to STIs. The message essentially amounted to a policy of proscribing all sexual contact with local Asian women along with some added practical measures designed to assist those individuals who chose to disobey the initial order. Although Australian officials adopted these conflicting policies in tandem in an attempt to address, in a practical way, the issue of high rates of infection, Australian servicemen could have been forgiven for feeling that some form of tacit approval had been given to otherwise 'Out of Bounds' activities.

Given the conflicting messages on STIs originating from within the RAAF and Army hierarchies, the issue was further complicated by the addition of another layer of punitive measures. While Australian servicemen were informed that 'under no circumstances will the infection itself … be the subject of disciplinary action' and 'no financial penalties will be

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[45] 'Transcript of Oral History Recording – Brigadier James Graham Ochiltree, OBE (Ret'd)', Sound Collection - S00369, AWM.
[46] *Ibid*.
[47] *Ibid*.

imposed on a member because he is absent from duty on account of venereal disease, whether or not due to misconduct', disciplinary action would be taken 'against any member who, having contracted venereal disease, fails to report the fact to the proper military authority'.[48] In addition to this extra disciplinary action against those who failed to report a sexually transmitted infection, Australian troops were informed that disciplinary action would be taken against personnel contracting STIs who could not prove that they had made use of the prophylactic treatment centre in Georgetown immediately after the incident that may have caused the potential infection. In effect, these additional punitive measures sought to re-establish military control over the process of contracting and treating STIs.

For those Australian soldiers and airmen heading into Georgetown for an evening of entertainment and relaxation, the contradictory collection of official orders amounted to a rather confusing, and at times insidious, set of rules. Contracting a STI by itself was not a punishable offence but, in an official catch-22, not attending the Prophylactic Centre after exposure to a 'potential' infection was a punishable offence. By attending the centre in instances where infection was highly unlikely, soldiers were, in effect, leaving a record of their nocturnal activities for military superiors to scrutinize, something most of them would clearly have wanted to avoid. But in instances where infection was likely, a visit to the PAC in Georgetown provided not only the necessary medical assistance but also indemnity against any possible military discipline in case an infection did indeed result. In other words, by making it a serious offence not to utilize the Australian Army Prophylactic Centre in Georgetown after any 'potential' exposure, officials put themselves into a position to gather information on the night-time activities of a number of soldiers who would otherwise have escaped their attention.

Adding further to the catalogue of punitive measures outlined above, Australian military officials employed one final administrative procedure designed to discourage any form of risky sexual behaviour that could potentially lead to venereal infection. Although Australian soldiers were not subject to military discipline for any single venereal infection, Army policy dictated that 'any soldier who contracts VD three times' would be repatriated home to Australia for discharge from the Army.[49] A similar policy applied to Australian airmen. As HQ RAAF Butterworth made clear in January 1959, 'it is intended to recommend

[48] 3RAR Routine Orders 15/58, Apr 1958, AWM95 – AACD, AWM.
[49] Australian Army Force, FARELF, Monthly Report No. 1/59, AWM95 – AACD, AWM.

the return to Australia through administrative channels those who have more than 3 re-infections in a short period'.[50]

In effect, this measure heightened the seriousness of what was already a confusing milieu of 'official' management and control. Although exact statistics for this type of administrative action are unavailable, in January 1959, the Australian Army Force HQ in Singapore noted that due to having contracted VD three times 'a number of soldiers have already been sent back to Australia for discharge'.[51] Clearly, despite all of the measures employed by senior military officials in Penang, a significant number of Australian soldiers and airmen continued to run the gauntlet of frequenting areas officially deemed 'out of bounds', and in doing so, a small number paid the price by forfeiting their service careers.

While the Australian experience with STIs in Penang focused almost exclusively on controlling male sexual behaviour, some actions of the Provost Marshal section did mirror the management of prostitution sanctioned by British military officials over a hundred years earlier. As Levine's recent study notes, nineteenth century Contagious Diseases legislation, enacted throughout the British Empire to control 'venereal disease' among soldiers, 'always understood disease as a by-product of prostitution'.[52] As such, the legislation emphasized the management of female sexual activity with a register of prostitutes, their regular and compulsory examination and hospitalisation in 'lock hospitals' for infected women.

For the most part, Australian military commanders have sought to prevent high rates of infection by denying access to brothels by placing brothels and red light districts off limits to servicemen. Only very rarely have they pursued the management of prostitution or female sexual behaviour as a way of reducing STIs. During the First World War, local brothels were placed 'off limits', as they were during the Pacific War and the Allied occupation of Japan.[53] Although it was a policy that almost never worked, exceptions to this strategy of prevention were rare. In 1947, BCOF commanders 'ordered sex workers to leave base areas, and professed surprise when these policies did not work'.[54] When local sex workers did leave,

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[50] HQ RAAF Butterworth Monthly Medical Report, January 1959.
[51] Australian Army Force, FARELF, Monthly Report No. 1/59, AWM95 – AACD, AWM.
[52] Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race & Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 37.
[53] Peter Stanely, *Bad Characters: Sex, Crime, Mutiny, Murder and the Australian Imperial Force* (Sydney: Murdoch Books / Pier 9, 2010); Sean Brawley and Chris Dixon, *Hollywood's South Seas and the Pacific War: Searching for Dorothy Lamour* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), pp.66-68; Sarah Kovner, *Occupying Power: Sex Workers and Servicemen in Postwar Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), p. 46.
[54] Sarah Kovner, *Occupying Power: Sex Workers and Servicemen in Postwar Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2012), p. 43.

they ‘disappeared for a few days’, only to return, often ‘with encouragement from the troops’ after a short period of time.[55] The other exception appears to be the management of two military brothels in Port Said in 1940 by Australian military commanders during the Second World War.[56]

In early 1956, in an echo of earlier British strategies to control STIs through the management of women, 2RAR Routine Orders reminded soldiers that ‘if venereal disease is contracted, the name of the person involved and the name of the establishment should be noted to prevent, by treatment of that person, any further spread to other personnel’.[57] This order stood rather ambiguously beside direct injunctions against any sexual contact with local Asian women, which, despite the equivocal nature of some instructions in Routine Orders, remained the mainstay of Australian policy. In most cases, it is highly unlikely that Australian soldiers would have been able to furnish authorities with the name of the prostitute engaged, even if they felt inclined to do so. Any designs Australian officials had with this type of intervention were clearly entertained only briefly as this specific instruction in Routine Orders appeared only once in early 1956.

By the end of their tour of duty in Malaya, No.2 ACS had established a reputation for enjoying the ‘exotic’ temptations of the East in Penang. Because the nearest venereologist in Malaya was based at the Kinrara British Military Hospital, all patients requiring more than routine investigation for a sexually transmitted disease were forced to travel south to Kuala Lumpur. In early 1958, the British venereologist informed the Senior Medical Officer at Butterworth, SQNLDR J.R. “Jack” Harrison, that he was prepared to hold weekly consultations at Butterworth - if demand continued to warrant it. Harrison, rather curtly, replied that, ‘if 2 A.C.S. is any criterion, it will’.[58]

Towards the end of 1958, after No.2 ACS had returned to Australia, newly arrived RAAF flying squadrons at Butterworth continued to struggle with the issue of high rates of STIs among servicemen. In September 1958, HQ RAAF Butterworth noted that medical staff had treated ‘35 cases of VD’ - of which most affected RAAF members ‘came from a

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[55] *Ibid*.

[56] In an interview in Melbourne on 28 February 1985, the interviewer, Ian McNeill, raised the issue of STIs with Brigadier J.G. “Jim” Ochiltree (Ret’d). After Ochiltree mentioned the Australian administered military brothels in 1940, McNeill prompted: “You had your regimental brothel in Egypt though?”, to which Ochiltree replied: “In Egypt, in Port Said, we had the one, I took over from the HLI [Highland Light Infantry] and opened a second”; ‘Transcript of Oral History Recording – Brigadier James Graham Ochiltree, OBE (Ret’d)’, Sound Collection - S00369, AWM.

[57] 2RAR Routine Orders 1/56, January 1956, AWM95 – AACD, AWM.

[58] Minute 1801/16/Med (1A), 14 March 1958, A705 – 132/2/960 Part 1, NAA.

recently arrived unit'.[59] Lectures by the Senior Medical Officer to newly arrived units provided a temporary drop in infection rates but did little to affect a longer-term decline. In practice, lectures, warnings and official prohibitions failed to deter the majority of Australian airmen from visiting the 'off base Asiatic temptations' of Georgetown. By April 1959, medical officials reported another 'considerable rise in this disease (VD) rate particularly towards the end of the month'.[60] In June 1959, HQ RAAF Butterworth again noted that 'the high rate of venereal disease is continuing'. With approximately 130 officers and 680 airmen resident in Penang in 1959, medical staff recorded a total of 124 cases of STIs for the year.[61]

In the late 1950s, forays into the red light district of Penang not only defied military officialdom, but were also tied to the attitudes of Australian soldiers and airmen towards infection. In practice, Australian soldiers and airmen understood STIs in rather less administrative terms than their military superiors. The particular circumstances of boredom and military routine experienced by large numbers of single soldiers and airmen in Penang during the late 1950s produced an atmosphere entirely conducive to bawdy and brash displays of masculinity. Within this environment, Australian soldiers and airmen often constructed their own codes of manliness - ones which rarely corresponded to the gentlemanly comportment demanded by senior military officials. Indeed, popular images of soldiers and airmen as tough, brave, loyal and hyper-masculine are far from asexual constructions and many Australian soldiers and airmen no doubt agreed, at least privately among themselves, with the American physician who, in 1918, claimed that 'a sexless soldier is a paradox … the greater the maleness, the greater the warrior'.[62]

In the case of No.2 ACS, a nervous symbiosis between self-satisfaction and self-effacement with regard to sexual encounters in Penang appeared early in the pages of the squadron's monthly gazette. Of all the anecdotes, jokes and cartoons, two particular comments succinctly capture the tenor of the subtle dialogue that ran through the pages of the squadron's gazette regarding the relationship between private and official perspectives of Penang's nightlife. Under the title 'Famous Last Words', two comments were offered below the subtitle 'Penang'. 'I wonder if this place is Out of Bounds?', the first comment asks,

[59] HQ RAAF Butterworth Monthly Medical Report for September 1958, A705 132/2/966, NAA.
[60] See HQ RAAF Butterworth Monthly Medical Reports for 1959, A705 132/2/966, NAA.
[61] *Ibid*.
[62] Levine, *Prostitution, Race & Politics*, p. 153.

while the second suggestively notes that 'I've always found it's worth the few extra dollars'.[63]

Bold, irreverent, honest and entirely grounded in their actual experience, this airmen's perspectives continued into the very last edition of the gazette. Anyone, the gazette writers noted in June 1958, sent to the British Military Hospital at Kinrara usually had to 'suffer the ribald comments of his mates'.[64] 'No one is the faintest bit interested', the writer continued, 'in the fact that Kinrara treats all illnesses. If you went to Kinrara then, boy, you had *that* disease'.[65] Over time, and privately among themselves, the vices and transgressions of Penang's nightlife had developed into uneasy markers of identity and shared experience. At least as far the RAAF airmen of No.2 ACS were concerned, and in contrast to the efforts of senior military officers, during their time in Malaya, they 'proved that they are first and foremost men'.[66]

Much of the discussion above has focused on servicemen contracting some form of STI during the early years of the Australian military presence in Penang. Although Australia's presence continued until the late 1980s, issues surrounding STIs ceased to be a major concern for military authorities from the early 1960s onwards. This is not to suggest that prostitution, vice and STIs disappeared entirely from the scene altogether, on the contrary, they did not. But it is apparent from the official record that the enormous administrative effort designed to prevent and treat STIs in Australian servicemen in the late 1950s had ceased by the early 1960s.

After this initial struggle with vice and sexually transmitted disease in Penang, only brief snippets of similar administrative actions dealing with these issues dot the official record from the early 1960s onwards. In October 1964, the RAAF Police Section at Butterworth reported to the CO of Base Squadron that during the month '56 patrols of "out of bounds" areas' were conducted.[67] So not only did some areas of Penang Island and Butterworth remain officially 'out of bounds' to Australian servicemen and their families, but tellingly, RAAF Police still considered it appropriate to regularly patrol those areas for the

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[63] *Bising*, July 1956, p. 5.
[64] *Bising*, June 1958, p. 22.
[65] *Ibid*.
[66] *Ibid*.
[67] Although the actual policy of declaring large parts of Penang 'Out of Bounds' remained unchanged in principle, the physical signs around the city of Georgetown and other areas of Penang quickly disappeared after the Federation of Malaya formally gained independence in 1957. For their perspective, the signs, as a symbol of colonial control, were incompatible with the newly independent nation.

presence of Australian servicemen. But the fact that monthly reports in 1964 now noted the number of patrols conducted by Service Police rather than the infection rate speaks directly to the changed behaviour of Australian servicemen in Penang.

In the early 1970s, the Australian Army began deploying an infantry company to Butterworth, on a three month rotational basis, to provide additional security for the Australian assets at the Butterworth Base. In addition to the infantry company, Australian Army officials deployed two members of the Provost Section with instructions 'to police Butterworth town and Penang Island paying particular attention to the activities of the personnel of the Coy Det [Company Detachment] and to keep the Coy Comd [Company Commander] fully informed on incidents and off duty discipline'.[68] As opposed to the menacing orders of the late 1950s to refrain from fraternising with local women, Australian soldiers detached to Butterworth in 1970 were simply advised that 'the VD infection is more prevalent in Penang' than in either Malacca or Singapore and accordingly 'contraceptives are available in bulk issue from 4 RAAF Hospital or may be drawn from the Guard Room at the Main Gate'.[69]

In a 1975 interview with Sydney journalist Jeffery James, senior RAAF police at Butterworth openly discussed the regular execution of RAAF vice patrols throughout Georgetown.[70] Checks were not only carried out for RAAF personnel at known trouble spots, but also for prostitutes known to have contracted some form of STI. If any such prostitutes were found, RAAF police issued a warning to bar management that if these women continued untreated, the bar would be put on the RAAF 'no go' list. The vice raids discussed by RAAF police in the 1975 interview echoed many of the strategies implemented in the early years of the Australian presence in Penang - knowledge and surveillance of known trouble spots continued, some form of register of prostitutes was clearly in operation for the majority of Australia's military presence in Penang and exclusion zones, whether known formally as 'Out of Bounds' areas or known unofficially as '"no-go" lists', continued to be utilized in an effort to reduce the instances of risky sexual behaviour. But in contrast to the late 1950s, in which Australian patronage of the bars and clubs of Georgetown dominated the concerns of military officials, by the mid-1960s, issues of vice and prostitution as well as

[68] Minute 663-F1-1 – 'Provost Assistance – Butterworth', 11 May 1972 from DAPM, Major W.S. Godden, to HQ 28 ANZUK Bde, AWM207 663/F1/1, AWM.
[69] Administrative Instruction – AS/NZ COY Butterworth issued from HQ 28 COMWEL Inf Bde, 30 October 1970, AWM200 R579/1/17G Part 2, AWM.
[70] Jeffery James, *Sky High: the experience of RAAF at Butterworth*, Item#: 582284, NFSA.

the resultant policing efforts to curb risky sexual behaviour, had been dramatically scaled down.

Several 'demographic' factors help to explain the decline in administrative attention being paid to sexually transmitted infections. First, in September 1961, the Australian Army battalion relocated to Terendak, near Malacca, taking with them a large number of young, single Australian soldiers who would otherwise have continued to be tempted by the local sex industry. Second, from the early 1960s onwards, the overwhelming majority of RAAF airmen posted to Butterworth were married.[71] In 1962, the ratio of married members to the total male strength of the RAAF was 64.8%. At Butterworth approximately 80% of RAAF servicemen were married. A number of factors produced this higher proportion of married members at Butterworth, including the popularity of a posting to Butterworth as well as the technical implications of flying advanced fighter aircraft. Both of these factors resulted in the selection of senior airmen and thus, those selected were more likely to be older and married. In addition, many single airmen in long-term relationships were reluctant to leave their fiancées and girlfriends in Australia for two years while they were posted overseas. As a result, hasty marriages prior to a posting to Butterworth were not uncommon.

From the early 1960s, with such a high proportion of married couples and young families, life in Penang for the Australian military community settled into patterns and rhythms whose focus revolved around family gatherings, sports clubs, and the popular Australian Hostel rather than the bawdy bars and nightclubs of Georgetown. Thus, the explanation for the drop in STIs rates in Australian servicemen in Penang from the early 1960s onwards appears to be due to the simple fact that the Australian Army presence in Penang had ended and the overwhelming majority of RAAF airmen were married and thus highly unlikely to expose themselves to venereal infection by engaging in risky sexual behaviour.

The significance of this outcome on the long-term legacy of the Australian presence in Penang should not be underestimated. In comparison to U.S. bases in the Asia/Pacific region in the post-war period, in which the interaction between American GIs and local women in the Philippines, Okinawa and South Korea have come to represent the unequal and hyper-masculine power relationship between the United States and the 'host' countries, the more family oriented Australian community in Penang from the 1960s onwards allowed other

[71] Establishment Forecasts – Development of RAAF Butterworth (1964-1971), A703 – 635/8/6, NAA.

narratives to develop to describe the Australian presence. In contrast to the squalid 'camptowns' ringing most U.S. bases, the hybrid spaces or 'contact zones' connecting the Australian community in Penang to the local society did not consist of hundreds of tacky bars and brothels. Consequently, unlike the contemporary U.S. experience, the overarching narrative defining the Australian experience in Penang does not include sexual contact and exploitation as one of its central themes.

Semi-Permanent and 'Temporary' Relationships

In the early years of British engagement with the 'East', Englishmen often took native mistresses while living in the colonies.[72] In her study of the British in Malaya, Shennan notes that, up until the outbreak of the First World War, 'it was common practice' for British civil servants and European planters working on rubber estates 'to keep Malayan mistresses', colloquially known as 'keeps'.[73] One result of these largely sexual relationships between European men and local Asian women was, of course, the production of children, leading to the creation of that 'forlorn race of beings', as one missionary later referred to them, known to history as 'Eurasians'.[74] Echoes of this British practice continued in both Australia's contribution to the occupation of Japan and in the American experience of overseas bases in the Asia/Pacific region in the post-war period.[75]

In the late 1950s, following in this tradition of 'keeps', a small number of Australian servicemen took advantage of their two year tour of duty in Malaya to similarly form 'temporary' relationships with local Asian women. In one such case, the Commanding Officer of No.2 ACS, WGCDR P.G. "Percy" Lings, received an angry letter from Mr. Ban Teong Hoe, venting his fury over the abandonment of his young daughter by an Australian leading aircraftsman (LAC). In the letter, Mr Ban Teong Hoe noted that his daughter was only 17 years old and still at school when, 'relying on his promises to marry her, she thoughtlessly allowed him to seduce her in such places as the Shanghai Hotel, Seaview Hotel

[72] Piers Brandon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire, 1781-1997* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), pp. 53-55; Woodcock, *The British in the Far East*, pp. 9-10; E. M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experience of the Raj, c.1800-1947* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), pp. 32-35.
[73] Shennan, *Out in the Midday Sun*, p. 68.
[74] Brandon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire*, p. 53.
[75] Robin Gerster, *Travels in Atomic Sunshine: Australia and the Occupation of Japan* (Melbourne: Scribe Publications, 2008), pp. 205-215; Seungsook Moon, 'Regulating Desire, Managing Empire: U.S. Military Prostitution in South Korea, 1945-1970', pp. 39-77, in Maria Höhn and Seungsook Moon.

and White Horse Hotel'.[76] But when it came time for No.2 ACS to return to Australia after re-building the Butterworth airbase, the Australian LAC ended the relationship. The consequences of 'temporary' relationships also mirrored British colonial tradition. On 17 November 1958, not long after No.2 ACS had returned home to Australia, the young daughter of Mr. Ban Teong Hoe, who had remained in Penang, gave birth to a baby boy.[77]

WGCDR Lings responded to Mr. Ban Teong Hoe's letter by telling him that the matter was a purely private affair and entirely beyond the jurisdiction of official service intervention. As the rest of this chapter explains, however, in no way did Australian defence officials regard romantic relationships between Australian servicemen and local Asian women as purely private affairs. Rather, this response by WGCDR Lings can be seen within a much wider context - one in which Defence officials actively encouraged Australian servicemen to dissolve their relationships with local Asian women at the completion of their tours of duty in Malaya, even in those particular cases where children were involved.

A cartoon in the final No.2 ACS gazette, depicting an Australian serviceman running away from a pursuing Asian female, with an angry Chinese father figure brandishing a firearm in the background for good measure, suggests that this particular RAAF airman may not have been the only Australian serviceman to regard relationships begun in Malaya as purely temporary affairs.

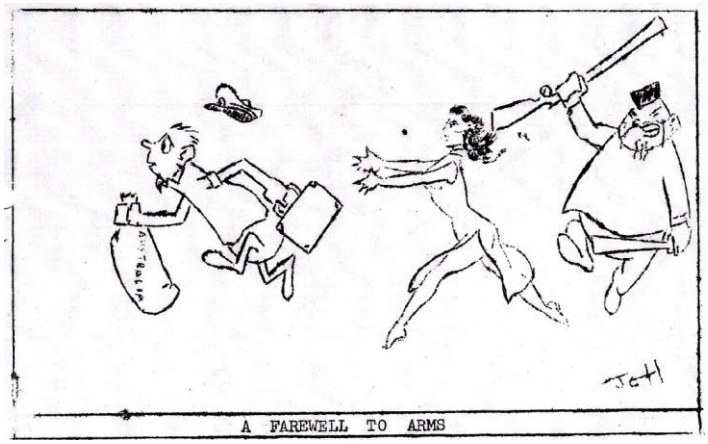

Figure 5.2. 'A Farewell to Arms', (June 1958, *Bising*, Troopship Collection, AWM)

[76] Private letter from Mr. Ban Teong Hoe to CO, No.2 ACS, 2 February 1958, A11353 – 6/5/AIR Part 1, NAA.
[77] *Ibid*.

The Malayan Brides Problem – Official Subterfuge & Private Resistance

Although short-term liaisons of one sort or another proliferated during the first few years of the Australian Army and RAAF presence in Penang, inevitably, some interactions between Australian servicemen and local Asian women developed into much more enduring relationships. For these Australian servicemen, the twilight of their posting to Malaya signalled not so much the end of their relationships but rather the beginning of a bitter struggle with Australian officials regarding the administrative policies and procedures required to marry and return home to 'White' Australia with their new 'Asian' brides. Although a number of individual Australian servicemen were interested in bringing home the women they had fallen in love with while posted to Penang, Australian military officials were equally determined that they would return home unaccompanied.

On 1 December 1962, in a ceremony at a local Penang chapel, a member of the teaching staff at the RAAF School, Penang, Miss Phylis Kee, married a European rubber planter working in Malaya, Mr Walter Codd. The novelty of such a pairing reached reporters at the *RAAF News* who duly reported the marriage in the March 1963 edition of the newspaper under the sub-heading 'Cupid Abroad'.[78] In early 1965, referring to the engagement of RAAF Nursing Service sister Janet Snow of Pingelly, WA, and Capitan Geoffrey Carter (Royal Australian Artillery) of Brisbane, QLD, the *RAAF News* reported that wedding bells were 'just around the corner for this young couple now serving at RAAF Base Butterworth, Malaysia'.[79] Both Janet and Geoffrey had been working at Butterworth for just under ten months before publically announcing their engagement. In subsequent years, the *RAAF News* published the details of a number of similar such engagements and weddings involving Australian servicemen.

The banality of such seemingly innocuous reporting, however, hides a much darker facet of official Australian policy towards certain types of marriages in Penang. Not once, in the entire time Australian forces were deployed to Penang, did the *RAAF News* report on the marriage of an Australian serviceman to a local Asian woman. As an instrument of disseminating officially sanctioned news and information, this oversight on the part of the *RAAF News* was far from unintentional. Unlike other Australian newspapers, such at the *Sydney Morning Herald*, which recognised the contemporary newsworthiness of inter-racial marriage, the *RAAF News* steadfastly refused to report on the issue at all. As the rest of this

[78] *RAAF News*, March 1963 – 'Cupid Abroad'.
[79] *RAAF News*, March 1965 – 'Wedding Bells'.

chapter explores, throughout the 1950s, 1960s and the early 1970s, Australian Defence officials employed a series of policy initiatives designed to actively deter Australian servicemen from marrying local Asian women whilst posted to Malaya. The lack of reporting within the *RAAF News*, an official Defence newspaper, simply reflected this policy of deterrence.

Prior to Australia's military commitment to Malaya and Singapore in 1955, Australian politicians had already wrestled with the issue of marriages between Australian servicemen and Asian women.[80] From 1946 to 1952, for almost the entire duration of Australia's contribution to the Allied occupation of Japan as part of BCOF, Australian servicemen were prohibited from bringing home their Japanese wives and fiancées. In response to concerted agitation from the servicemen themselves and increasing levels of public support for their plight, on 27 March 1952, one month prior to the formal ratification of the Japanese Peace Treaty, H.E. "Harold" Holt, the Minister for Immigration in the recently re-elected Menzies government, granted formal permission for Japanese women who were either married or engaged to Australian soldiers to enter Australia.

For a section of the Australian community, Holt's decision to allow the Japanese wives and children of Australian servicemen to enter Australia had dealt a crucial, and entirely unacceptable, blow to the White Australia policy. As the former Australian Minister for Immigration, Arthur Calwell, wrote in March 1954, 'the great majority of Australians are anti-Japanese' and were appalled that, in allowing the admission of Japanese war brides to Australia, the Menzies Government had destroyed 'one of the most vital principles' of our nation.[81]

It was not the intention of the Menzies government, however, to undermine the basic principles of the White Australia policy. Instead, as Gwenda Tavan notes, the decision merely 'highlighted the essentially pragmatic nature of the Menzies government, showing itself prepared to apply discretion and flexibility' in a limited number of cases regarding Asian immigration.[82] This said, against a more general background of administrative liberalisation of the White Australia Policy in the late 1950s (including the abolition of the

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[80] The history of the White Australia Policy at this time is covered in Sean Brawley, *The White Peril: Foreign Relations and Asian Immigration to Australasia and North America, 191*-78 (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press Ltd, 1995).
[81] Arthur A. Calwell, "We Must Not be Soft with Japanese Butchers", *The Charleville Times*, 4 March, 1954, p. 16.
[82] Gwenda Tavan, "The Limits of Discretion: The Role of the Liberal Party in the Dismantling of the White Australia Policy", *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 51:3 (2005): pp. 418-428.

Dictation Test in 1956 and permission for "distinguished and highly qualified" Asians to migrate contained in the new Migration Act of 1958) it did appear to many Australians that, as far as servicemen serving in Asia were concerned, a precedent had been set by the BCOF experience.[83] The reality, however, was very different. While External Affairs continued to lobby government for a softening of the White Australia policy as a positive way to improve Australia's reputation in the region and the Department of Immigration continued to liberalise the policy's administration into the 1960s, the Department of Defence instead remained firmly opposed to any relaxation of Australia's restrictive immigration policy, especially as it applied to the Asian brides of Australian servicemen.

In early 1954, with Australian servicemen still stationed in Korea and Japan observing the conditions of the Korean War armistice, the RAAF released a general order setting out an agreed inter-Service policy regarding 'marriages between Service personnel and Asians'.[84] Air Force Standing Order (AFSO) 2/1954 stated that 'although a marriage to an Asian cannot in law be prevented', a marriage between 'a member of the RAAF and an Asian would have a number of disadvantages, mainly to the individuals concerned' and therefore 'the fact that Asian marriages are permissable [sic] should not be made known'.[85] In effect, and presumably with the sanction of the Menzies' government through the relevant defence and armed services ministers, defence policy sought to conceal as far as possible the basic right of Australian servicemen to marry Asian women. In addition to this official policy of non-disclosure, Australian military officials in both the RAAF and the Army also embarked on a course of action designed to actively dissuade Australian servicemen from marrying local Asian women.

One of the basic strategies behind AFSO 2/1954 and later revisions involved subtly discouraging Australian servicemen from marrying Asian women by suggesting that almost overwhelming administrative barriers existed to such a marriage. In fact, after Holt's decision in 1952, no such barriers existed at all, except for those artificially suggested or created by the Department of Defence. A later version of the policy noted that Australian servicemen should be given the impression that a marriage 'to an Asian is a complicated,

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[83] Meg Gurry and Gwenda Tavan, "Too soft and long-haired?: The Department of External Affairs and the White Australia policy, 1946-1966", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 58:1 (2004): pp. 127-142; Sean Brawley, "The Department of Immigration and Abolition of the "White Australia" Policy Reflected through the Private Diaries of Sir Peter Heydon", *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 41:3 (1995): pp. 420-434.
[84] AFSO 2/1954 – Marriages between RAAF Personnel and Asians, National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA) A11353, 6/5/AIR Part 1.
[85] *Ibid*.

expensive and lengthy process'.[86] In addition to a series of medical checks, security checks, character references and police checks, Australian military officials insisted on a range of interviews to further provide the impression of an overly complicated process. Soldiers and airmen were informed that failure to satisfy the requirements of any of these checks would result in a serviceman's fiancée or wife not being allowed to immigrate to Australia. The notes for Commanding Officers (COs) on how to counsel servicemen contemplating marrying an Asian woman included the advice that, given the difficulties involved, Australian servicemen should be made aware that proceeding with such a marriage would, in the end, most probably amount to little more than 'a costly experiment'.[87]

In addition to this general advice on the 'complicated, expensive and lengthy' administrative processes to be undertaken should a member wish to proceed with 'such a marriage', Australian servicemen were ordered to attend a series of interviews with senior military officers *prior* to their marriage. In the absence of any 'legal impediments' that could otherwise prevent 'such a marriage', AFSO 2/1954 demanded that,

> each Officer Commanding or Commanding Officer of a formation or unit in an area outside Australia where a marriage between a member of the RAAF and an Asian is considered likely to occur is therefore to issue a routine order that any proposed marriage outside Australia must be notified to the Commanding Officer of the member contemplating marriage.

Although the racial basis of the resulting order remained concealed under the general rubric of 'any proposed marriage outside Australia', it was duly noted that any Australian serviceman wishing to marry 'a British subject of wholly European descent' may of course do so 'without formality'.[88] For an Australian serviceman seeking to marry a local Asian woman, however, the process was decidedly more rigorous.

Like their RAAF counterparts, for the six years they occupied Minden Barracks on Penang Island, Australian Army Commanders enforced orders issued by the Department of Defence regarding 'Asian' marriages. As soon as 2RAR arrived in Penang in 1955, the following blunt message appeared in Routine Orders: 'any member contemplating marriage to an Asian will consult his Commanding Officer regarding immigration aspects'.[89]

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[86] Minute R503/1/2 – Marriage between Members of the AMF and Asians in the Republic of Vietnam, 15 August 1968, AWM: 207 R503/F1/3.
[87] Annex A to Minute FE 6508/PS/1 – Policy – Security Vetting Mixed Marriages, 29 December 1964, AWM: 207 R503/F1/3.
[88] Minute 418.72 (AS) – Marriage of Australian Service Members to Non-Australian Citizens – Provisional Instructions, AWM: 207 R503/F1/3.
[89] 2RAR Routine Orders, 18 November 1955, AWM95 – AACD, AWM.

Additionally, Lieutenant-Colonel Ochiltree, Commanding Officer (CO) of 2RAR, added one further layer of administration. No Australian officer or serviceman, Ochiltree ordered in February 1956, 'will be married without producing to the officiating minister or Civil Registrar a certificate signed by his or her CO giving proof of his or her identity and evidencing the fact, according to his or her service records, he or she is free to marry'.[90]

In practice, Ochiltree had no legal power to influence local officials at the Penang Registry Office or annul marriages once they had taken place. But the CO could, of course, impose military discipline for failing to comply with a Routine Order. Indeed, the crux of the order was not to punish soldiers for getting married but rather to get Australian soldiers to 'consult' with their COs prior to proceeding with the marriage. As the end of the two-year tour of duty of 2RAR in Penang approached in early 1957, Ochiltree again reminded soldiers of the requirement to 'consult' prior to getting married. 'There is evidence', Ochiltree noted in February 1957,

> that one or more members of the Battalion are contemplating marriage to women not born in AUSTRALIA, without first ensuring that such women will be accepted for entry into AUSTRALIA when the members concerned return home. Members are reminded that the wife of a serviceman is NOT automatically eligible for entry into AUSTRALIA … The Army has a system for finding out from the Department of Immigration whether a woman is likely to be accepted for entry to AUSTRALIA. Members are strongly advised to have this enquiry made before they marry, and so avoid trouble later.[91]

With soldiers and airmen now ordered to submit to an interview with their COs, the 'official' Defence policy of dissuasion began.

One of the first tactics employed by COs during the interview sessions demanded by AFSO 2/1954 and later revisions involved warning Australian servicemen of the potential for serious immigration problems. Commanding Officers were ordered to explain to servicemen that, 'in his own interests and those of his intended wife, the member should obtain advice <u>before</u> he marries as to whether the marriage will be valid in Australia, and whether the wife will be eligible for admission to Australia'.[92] Although the Department of Defence was fully aware that most such marriages 'would be valid in Australia', the information presented to servicemen strongly hinted at the possibility that Asian wives and fiancées might not be allowed 'to settle in Australia and possible difficulties could arise in that regard if the

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[90] *Ibid*.
[91] 2RAR Routine Orders, 14 February 1957, AWM95 – AACD, AWM.
[92] AFSO 2/1954: Marriages between RAAF Personnel and Asians.

marriage eventuates'.[93] The effectiveness of this ploy alone can be gleaned from a later comment by the CO of 1RAR regarding his unit's experience in Malaya in the mid-1960s. 'Although a soldier could not be prevented from marrying a local', the CO wrote to Australian Army Headquarters in Singapore, the fact that clearances for some intended brides to enter Australia had not been received from the Australian High Commission in a timely manner had already been a sufficient deterrent to prevent 'a number of undesirables marrying and entering Australia'.[94]

In addition to raising questions regarding their possible rejection by the Department of Immigration, Australian Defence officials also insinuated that a marriage to a local Asian woman could adversely impact on an individual's service career. AFSO 2/1954 ordered COs to point out that 'the member's marriage to an alien, while not automatically debarring him from any appointment, would render him subject to critical and continuing security examination'.[95] This security check, the order further clarified, 'would be extremely critical if the wife were also an enemy alien'. Although the term 'enemy alien' most probably referred to women specifically from the various Chinese communities in Malaya and Singapore, the use of 'alien' to describe all Asian women clearly communicates the sense of 'other' so necessary to the logic of these security procedures. For soldiers and airmen who had considered themselves career servicemen, or had anticipated a promotion in the not too distant future, the implied threat of professional stagnation as a result of falling in love and marrying a local Asian woman created the spectre of an all-or-nothing choice. In effect, senior Australian military officers tacitly discouraged 'Asian marriages' by conflating ideas of national security, career progression and 'ill-conceived' marriages to Asian women to threaten professional isolation and stagnation if a particular serviceman proceeded with his intended marriage.

Adding to this catalogue of 'complicated' administrative procedures, 'potential' immigration problems and 'adverse' career implications, Commanding Officers also presented soldiers and airmen with a series of moral arguments designed to discourage them from proceeding with the intended nuptials. In the 'counselling session' with servicemen, AFSO 2/1954 instructed COs to place 'particular emphasis . . . on the difficulties which any children of the marriage are likely to encounter' in Australia, 'particularly if their appearance,

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[93] *Ibid*.
[94] Minute R503/3/1, 15 April 1971, AWM: 328 R503/F1/1.
[95] AFSO 2/1954: Marriages between RAAF Personnel and Asians.

as is quite likely, is Asiatic'.[96] Not only did this appraisal paint a rather damning image of racial attitudes throughout the general population of Australia at the time, but it additionally sought to burden each individual servicemen considering marrying a local Asian woman with the full consequences of those same ingrained national attitudes. As a later version of these official Defence policies stated even more succinctly, 'the problems that an Asian wife and the resulting children of such a marriage are likely to encounter' in Australia, 'include Asian appearance, racial prejudice, customs, language, religion and loneliness'.[97] In other words, by highlighting the innumerable instances of racial vilification likely to be encountered by wives and children in a hostile and unaccepting Australia, servicemen were being asked to reflect on their responsibility as the author of this potential lifetime of misery and discomfort for their partners and family, all of which could be avoided of course, by heeding the advice of their COs and breaking off the existing engagement.

In 1964, a sample list of questions provided to assist COs during these counselling sessions also indicated a number of other, more insidious, forms of moral persuasion that could be employed. Questions involved interrogating an individual serviceman's 'own qualifications to contract an "off-beat" marriage', including lengthy inquiries regarding the soldier or airman's 'own home background', whether or not there were frequent 'arguments among parents' and even if there had been the 'loss of one or both parents' in his own family due to illness or divorce.[98] Clearly, probing an individual serviceman's family background for dysfunction amounted to a rather sinister strategy for gaining information that could then be used to explain to the individual in question his own perverted logic for wishing to deviate so far from the accepted practices of marriage in Australian society. By lucidly explaining away the reasons for such an unorthodox situation, Australian COs could then offer sage advice on how to rectify the situation, namely, by breaking of the engagement, returning to Australia and marrying an Australian woman.

If soldiers and airmen survived the interrogation of their own personal and family backgrounds, COs again sought to use the hostile environment likely to be encountered back in Australia to their advantage. Questions regarding the woman's family background, educational standards, ability to converse in English and aptitude to adapt to a western style of living were probed in an effort to ascertain her suitability as a life-long partner in

[96] *Ibid*.
[97] Minute R503/1/2 – Marriage between Members of the AMF and Asians in the Republic of Vietnam.
[98] Annex A to Minute FE 6508/PS/1 – Policy – Security Vetting Mixed Marriages.

Australia. Other questions included whether 'the place and circumstances' of your first introduction 'inspired confidence', 'what religion would the children be' and whether or not an Asian wife would 'receive sympathy and help from your next of kin'.[99] Some of the questions suggested in the official Defence policy for use by COs when interviewing servicemen intending to marry a local Asian woman even dismissed the possibility of genuine affection between 'Europeans' and Asians altogether. In grilling servicemen about the appearance of the 'girl' in question, one proposed line of argument suggested that soldiers and airmen be reminded that 'what seems "cute" now, may seem embarrassing in Australia'.[100]

Behind all the administrative and moral barriers placed in the way of marriages between Australian servicemen and local Asian women, stood a cohort of Australian officials still wedded to the 'traditional colonial view' of the mystical East as synonymous with savagery, backwardness and degeneracy.[101] Implicit in the official Defence policy is the categorisation of the uncivilised populations of Asia as the binary opposite of the civilised white Australian population. As insidious as these official policies were, in practice, the actions of many senior Australian Commanding Officers and other Defence officials not only accorded with the spirit of the Defence Department's policy regarding 'Asian marriage', but rather, at times, their actions went much further.

Discouraging 'Asian Marriages' in Practice: 1955-1972

When the Australian Army and the RAAF arrived in Penang in 1955, the policy directives contained in AFSO 2/1954 were re-issued to all Commanding Officers.[102] A minute from GPCAPT E.G. "Ed" Fyfe of the RAAF Liaison Staff in Singapore to the CO of No.2 ACS at Butterworth on 26 March 1956 not only reminded WGCDR Lings of his obligations to follow the provisions of the official policy regarding inter-racial marriages as laid out in AFSO 2/1954, but also hinted at the underlying attitude driving official policy. 'Commanding

[99] *Ibid*.
[100] *Ibid*.
[101] Like many scholars of imperial history, Anne McClintock has noted the implicit link between the very construction of notions of whiteness and blackness, masculinity and femininity, progress and backwardness, middle-class values and degeneracy as some of the essential consequences of a properly functioning Empire. This 'tradition colonial view' as referred to here is perhaps best illustrated in the rhetoric of Britain's 'civilizing mission' which, through the Victorian era aimed at 'washing and clothing the savage'; see Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
[102] Army HQ Administrative Instruction A5/1/63 - "Australian Army Component BCFESR", 26 August 1955, MT1131/1 A244/1/54, NAA.

Officers are strongly advised to submit all applications for mixed marriages to the Department of Air for decision', wrote Fyfe, 'even though, in their opinion, the marriage is likely to be not in the best interests of the member or the service'.[103]

In early 1956, a mere five months after the main party of No.2 ACS had arrived at Butterworth, the first instance of what the *Sydney Morning Herald* labelled the 'Malayan Brides' Problem' came to the attention of both senior military officers in Malaya and the Australian press.[104] The prospect of inter-racial marriages stemmed, the *Sydney Morning Herald* article explained, from the fact that Malayan girls were 'just as purposeful as their Western sisters in getting their man'. But just because most Malayan and Chinese girls said 'yes' to inter-racial marriages, the same article warned, just 'what Australian mothers and fathers' and Australian 'authorities will say when they have to face the question is another matter'. RAAF Sergeant Hilton T. Hayes, of Coonabarabran, NSW, sought a more specific answer to both these questions when, on 9 January 1956, he informed his CO of his intention to marry Miss Ruby Baptiste, described in the Australian press as 'a pretty, dark-haired Eurasian girl, who has lived all her life in Penang'.[105] 'And I am certainly looking forward to settling down' in Australia, Ruby Baptiste told Australian reporters, 'if it will accept me'.[106]

Despite the administrative and bureaucratic barriers placed in the way by Australian officials determined to limit the number of Asian brides being brought back to Australia, by the conclusion of their tour of duty in Malaya, a total of thirteen members of No. 2 ACS had met, fallen in love with and had married local Asian women. For reasons that are not noted in the official record, immigration authorities 'officially' refused entry to only one potential bride. No. 2 ACS scribes provided their own commentary on the 'Malayan Brides' Problem', it seems, with honesty and clarity, in a cartoon published in the last edition of their squadron monthly gazette. No doubt referring to the nature of the interrogation by the CO, the cartoon depicts an Australian serviceman carrying a sack in the shape of a female who is asked by an on-looking senior Australian officer: 'You checked with customs, LAC?'.[107]

Although the No. 2 ACS cartoon presents the ordeal of official interviews, medical checks, security checks and police checks in a typically laconic and relaxed fashion, the reality for individual Australian servicemen seeking to have their prospective brides

[103] Minute 1236/1/P3(3A) , 29 March 1956, A11353 6/5/AIR Part 1, NAA.
[104] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 January 1956, p. 1.
[105] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 January 1956, 3.
[106] *Argus*, 11 January 1956, 7.
[107] *Bising*, unofficial gazette of No.2 Airfield Construction Squadron, June 1958, Troopship Collection, AWM.

recognised as 'legitimate' by Australian military authorities could be quite different. The series of reports compiled for each and every marriage included searching for any incriminating records pertaining to the potential bride at the offices of local Social Welfare agencies and with Anti-Vice, Service Police and Civilian Police authorities in order to alert the Department of Immigration as to any potential adverse character flaws of the applicant. Australian service police additionally interviewed immediate family members, ensured adequate health checks had been undertaken and inspected present living conditions, least they betray a candidate unworthy of Australian citizenship. Questions of religious persuasion and previous employment guided most interviews, while household cleanliness assumed significant importance as a measure of a potential bride's 'ability to adjust to Australian conditions'.[108]

Figure 5.3. Australian RAAF airmen illustrate their view of the Department of Defence Policy regarding 'Asian Marriages', (Australian War Memorial, Troopship Collection, *Bising: The unofficial gazette of No.2ACS*)

When Corporal D. Clifford applied to marry Miss Nelly Chuah Lean Lee in March 1958, RAAF Service Police conducted a series of investigations into her background and general family life. In their subsequent report on Miss Lee, RAAF Service Police noted not only her previous employment as a 'Dance Hostess' at the *City Lights Cabaret* but also that her mother's residence on Kedah Road was situated 'in a very poor area' and was 'in a very dirty and untidy state'.[109] Similarly, when Warrant Officer B.B. "Bert" Bartley of the RAAF

[108] 2RAR Minute 157/1/1 – Asian Marriages, 19 March 1962, AWM: 207 R503/F1/3.
[109] Minute 705/14/4/P1, 18 March 1958, NAA: A11353 – 6/5/AIR Part 1.

Service Police visited the family of Miss Jeannie Yeap Beng Hong on 7 January 1958, physical appearances, cleanliness and the general standard of living of the family were used to measure the distance between Miss Hong and the western concepts of civilisation and modernity. In his report on the proposed marriage between Jeannie and Corporal D.A. Fox, Bartley noted that the premises where Jeannie had grown up were 'situated in a native kampong area, in a filthy state with very little sanitary facilities'.[110] Although both marriages proceeded unmolested by further official censure, the very fact of assessing 'native' backwardness through judgements based on cleanliness conformed to long-standing western concepts of colonial superiority. As Levine has noted, throughout the colonial period, 'physical dirt and filth was one of the most widely remarked upon mechanisms for measuring distance from civilisation, and the implicit link to moral and racial purity was always central in this calculus'.[111]

Just how diligent and aggressive each Commanding Officer was in complying with the official Department of Defence policy of discouraging 'Asian marriages' is difficult to determine from the official record. A particular Commanding Officer's personal opinion on the subject of White Australia, Asian immigration, his exact style of leadership and his relationship with his subordinates would all have significantly impacted the tone and intensity of the counselling session ordered by the policy. While a sympathetic CO could have defiantly provided emotional support, administrative clarity and general succour from the deceptive nature of the official guidelines, a CO whose personal views accorded with official policy would no doubt have proved a significant hurdle for even the most determined Australian serviceman. The exact number of Australian soldiers and airman who were actually dissuaded from proceeding with an intended marriage is impossible to gauge from the official record.

For their part, by the end of 2RAR's first tour of duty in Malaya in November 1957, a total of fourteen Australian soldiers had married local Asian women. With a unit strength of nearly three times that of the RAAF's No. 2 ACS, which was stationed in Penang over the same period, the fourteen marriages entered into by soldiers represented a significantly lower percentage in relative terms to the thirteen marriages to local Asian women by RAAF airmen. One explanation for this difference may lie in the relative enthusiasm with which the Australian Army Commanders followed the Defence Department's official policy. From

[110] Minute 705/14/4/P1, 13 January 1958, NAA: A11353 – 6/5/AIR Part 1.
[111] Levine, *Prostitution, Race & Politics*, p. 180.

reports by the Headquarters Australian Army Force FARELF, in late 1956, there is some evidence to suggest that this is indeed the case. One Australian Army Private, the Headquarters noted on 26 September 1956, 'was recently deterred from marrying a PORTUGUESE whom he believed was pregnant by him'.[112] Another Australian Army Private, who presumably had been stationed in Japan as part of BCOF or during the Korean War, the same report noted, 'wants to marry a JAPANESE with whom he has been corresponding for just over three years . . . could not shake him'.[113]

Evidence also suggests that some Commanding Officers were not content to simply follow the official policy of dissuasion but instead went much further in preventing soldiers and airmen from marrying local Asian women. In late 1964, Headquarters Australian Army Force FARELF confirmed that an additional 'semi-official' policy was at times used to 'physically' thwart intended inter-racial marriages. According to Army General Routine Order 294/62, 'if a soldier makes his intentions to marry known, but, not amounting to official notification, he is re-posted elsewhere'.[114]

Although a reference to this practice of repatriation appears in the official record only once in 1964, there are several examples which suggest that the policy of physically relocating servicemen suspected of wishing to marry a local Asian woman in the near future was practiced from the very beginning of the Australian deployment to Malaya in 1955. In September 1956, for example, Headquarters Australian Army Force FARELF noted that a particular Australian Private in Penang 'had been transferred . . . three months before to get him away from a woman of JAPANESE/INDONESIAN parentage with three (illegitimate?) children with whom he was contemplating marriage'.[115]

Evidence that senior officers within the RAAF also physically removed airmen from Malaya whom they thought may be considering marrying a local Asian woman appeared in a minute from the Head of the RAAF Liaison Staff in Singapore in March 1956. In this 1956 correspondence, Group Captain Fyfe wrote that 'an airman was sent back to Australia to prevent a marriage which, in the opinion of this staff and the Commanding Officer, would

[112] Appendix 'A' to Australian Army Force, FARELF, Minute 35/1/3, 26 September 1956, AWM: Australian Army Commanders' Diaries, Headquarters Units, Box 95.
[113] *Ibid*.
[114] Loose Handwritten Note – Asian Marriage in Borneo, AWM: 207 R503/F1/3.
[115] Appendix 'A' to Australian Army Force, FARELF, Minute 35/1/3, AWM: Australian Army Commanders' Diaries, Headquarters Units.

have brought discredit on the service'.[116] Several Australian airmen who completed questionnaires for this study also make reference to this policy of physical removal.

CPL Peter Spencer arrived in Penang in November 1958. At a social function at the home of a RAAF couple, Spencer and one of his RAAF colleagues met two local women, who just happened to be sisters, and both couples began dating. As their relationship flourished, Peter and Mary decided to marry, bringing them into direct contact with the RAAF's official policy of dissuasion. In the questionnaire Peter completed for this study he recalled 'quite a few terrible interviews with RAAF service police and security personnel', who wished to know why I wanted to marry Mary and why 'white girls were not good enough' for me - 'I felt like I was almost being bullied rather than interviewed'.[117]

Australian officials also grilled Mary during a series of demanding interviews and a 'very uncomfortable' medical exam. But in contrast to the insidious nature of official 'dissuasion', recalled Spencer, was the 'extremely supportive', 'friendly', and 'helpful' assistance provided by both the RAAF Padre and the majority of the Australian community in Penang. After encountering further administrative difficulties with passports and travel, Peter and Mary returned to Australia together as a married couple in December 1960. In 2013 they celebrated their fifty-fourth wedding anniversary.

The story of CPL Spencer's RAAF colleague, who was dating Mary's sister, had a rather more unfortunate ending. As Peter explained: after 'my friend made public his intentions of getting engaged', he was promptly shipped back to Australia for a very short leave 'so he could once again see what young white girls looked like'.[118] When this airman returned to Penang from Australia, he subsequently broke off his engagement to Mary's sister. Although some couples, often with the support of friends and colleagues, persisted in the face of official obfuscation and bullying, others could simply not withstand the brutal nature of the process. For these couples, the Defence policy of discouraging 'Asian marriages' ended their engagements. As the recollection of those who survived the official policy of dissuasion attests, considerable fortitude was needed to stand up to senior Defence official and military officers.

Leading Aircraftsman (LAC) Wilfred Robert Hardy was posted to No.114 Mobile Control and Reporting Unit (No.114 MCRU) in July 1958. In Penang, Hardy met, fell in

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[116] Minute 1236/1/P3 (3A) - Inter-Racial Marriages, 29 March 1959, NAA: A11353 – 6/5/AIR Part 1.
[117] *Questionnaire Response*, CPL, Base SQN, November 1958 – December 1960.
[118] *Ibid*.

love with and proposed to the woman of this dreams - Helen. After becoming aware of his intention to marry a local Chinese woman, RAAF officials at Butterworth immediately sent Hardy home to Australia for a few months to reflect on his engagement. In a questionnaire response for this study, Wilfred recalled his experience of official dissuasion,

> I was subjected to the worst grilling imaginable. I was told that I could never live in Australia with that girl and my half-caste children would be worthless. As one stage, a friendly officer in my unit arranged for me to see the Legal Officer about the lies that I was being fed and I was told later that a heated argument ensued between him and the RAAF Service Police. The grilling didn't stop until my father, a Minister of Religion, went to his local federal member … and as soon as it went political, the abuse stopped. The RAAF Service Police, through an interpreter, interviewed Helen's mother and gave her a very hard time of it, accusing her of trying to off-load her daughter for what money she could get out of me … I can never forgive those evil bastards for what they tried to do to us and particular to Helen's mum, such a gracious, lovely old lady.[119]

Figure 5.4. Wedding of Wilfred and Helen Hardy in Penang (with permission from Wilfred).

[119] *Questionnaire Response*, LAC, No.114 MCRU: July 1958 – February 1961.

On 2 February 1961, having resisted pressure to break off their engagement, Wilfred and Helen returned to Australia as a married couple. 'The remarkable thing', recalled Wilfred, 'was that we found absolute peace in Australia'.[120] 'For about three weeks we were looking over our shoulders expecting racist slurs, but then we realised that no one was taking any notice of us at all'.[121] The fortitude to stand firm in the face of official RAAF censure rewarded Wilfred and Helen Hardy with a loving marriage that, with 'three wonderful children' and 'five brilliant grandchildren', is still prospering after more than fifty years.

Just how many potential marriages between Australian servicemen and local Asian women the policies of Defence Department officials prevented in Penang will probably never be known. Despite the continuing liberalisation of the White Australia Policy, notably after 1966 and culminating with the final removal of racial discrimination in Australia's migration policy in 1973, official Defence policy on the issue continued unchanged well into the early 1970s. This said, a process of normalization and acceptance on behalf of both senior officials and servicemen contributed to a progressive diminution of the harsher realities of the policy as the number of 'such' marriages steadily increased. By the mid-1960s, attempts to dissuade 'Asian' marriages by local COs had lost much of their ability to influence servicemen determined to proceed with their marriage.

In time, the official Defence policy of discouraging 'Asian' marriages faded from consciousness. In June 1980, the marriage between LAC D.L. Palmer and his fiancée, Noor Aini, an 'Asian' marriage that would have been strenuously discouraged as a matter of principle in the late 1950s and early 1960s, took place in the gardens of an Australian married quarters – that of GPCAPT N.R. "Norman" Wade, the CO of LAC Palmer's unit.[122] With GPCAPT Wade and his wife in attendance, and in front of a select group of family and friends, including a number of senior RAAF officers, LAC Palmer and his fiancée exchanged vows in a civil ceremony to become husband and wife.

Conclusion

Colonial discourses have often paid close attention to the sexual interactions between European men and Asian women within the colonial encounter. Stoler has observed that 'no

[120] *Ibid*.
[121] *Ibid*.
[122] No.478 SQN Unit History sheets, June 1980, A9186, #154, NAA.

subject is discussed more than sex in colonial literature and no subject more frequently invoked to foster the racist stereotypes of European society'.[123] Indeed, 'whiteness and race', according to Levine, 'were closely and critically tied to sex – via the body, via reproduction, via deep fears about racial dilution and racial mixing, about racial uncertainties that might destabilize the fictions of racial purity and incomparability'.[124] In other words, managing sexual interactions has always been one of the primary interests of colonial authorities as a mechanism for articulating racial and class boundaries at the colonial interface. The link between intimate interactions within the colonial landscape and the racially-specific assumptions upon which they rested provides a powerful way to access the attitudes of colonial officials as well as the often contrasting attitudes of the men and women residing at the interface of the colonial encounter.

In the case of the Australian military community in Penang, the actions of Australian servicemen and the responses of senior Defence officials faithfully echoed many of these long-standing colonial discourses. Despite official attitudes, the overwhelming majority of Australian servicemen in the late 1950s and early 1960s readily introduced themselves to the carnal pleasures on offer in Penang, much to the chagrin and official condemnation of senior military officials. Various mechanisms enacted to prevent sexual interactions between Australian servicemen and local Asian women drew on a number of established colonial forms of racial segregation, including physically sign-posting areas of Georgetown as 'out of bounds', policing known locations of trouble and vice, and monitoring certain establishments and individuals involved in prostitution. While many of these solutions had a practical impulse aimed at combating the high rates of STIs, an underlying racial element clearly infused the overall execution of these policies.

In discouraging 'Asian' marriages in the early years of the Australian presence in Penang, Australian officials again drew on a lengthy discourse of colonial conceit. Although the policy remained unchanged well into the 1970s, demographic changes within the Australian community in Penang in the early 1960s as well as a certain 'normalisation' of the process clearly contributed to a decline in the importance of addressing the issue of 'Asian' marriages by RAAF Commanders. In parallel with this reduced importance was a definitive shift in attitudes within the Australian community, as evidenced by the fact that one senior

[123] Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, p. 43.
[124] Levine, *Prostitution, Race & Politics*, p. 6.

RAAF Commander not only failed to ‘discourage’ an ‘Asian’ marriage in 1980, but rather actively encouraged it by hosting it in the gardens of his sea-side married quarters.

Chapter Six

No.4 RAAF Hospital: The Last Hospital of the British Raj

In July 1962, the British military hospital in Kinrara, Kuala Lumpur, closed. A year later, in July 1963, the British military hospital in Taiping (approximately one hundred kilometres south-east of the airbase at Butterworth, in northern Perak) also closed. The withdrawal of these British medical units from the Malay Peninsula forced Australian military authorities to consider other arrangements for the provision of medical services for servicemen and their families in Penang. To make up for this shortfall, extensions to the sick quarters at Butterworth eventually resulted in the establishment of an eighty-six bed hospital at the base - No.4 RAAF Hospital.

At the time of the hospital's opening on 1 March 1965, medical personnel from the British Army, Royal Air Force (RAF) and RAAF all contributed to the initial staff of the hospital in proportion to the size of their respective forces in the immediate area. But as the British presence on the Peninsula continued to draw down, culminating in the decision taken by Prime Minister Harold Wilson to withdraw all British forces 'East of Suez' in January 1968, the hospital at Butterworth, like much of the remaining 'British' presence in Malaysia, became the sole domain of Australian service personnel. In the early 1970s, the last British military units and personnel were being withdrawn from Butterworth, including the British doctors and nurses still on staff at No.4 RAAF Hospital.

On 23 August 1974, Australian medical officers decided to farewell their departing British colleagues with a party. In true military style, a theme informed the decoration, cuisine and costume of the farewell gathering. As the No.4 RAAF Hospital unit history sheets noted, Australian medical officers and staff farewelled their departing British colleagues with a party whose theme was 'suitably entitled' the 'End of the Raj'.[1] In many ways, Australian servicemen farewelling their British counterparts with an 'End of the Raj' party held on the *terra firma* of Asia in the mid-1970s poignantly reflected many of the larger social and cultural transformations then taking place within Britain, Australia and Southeast Asia. After toasting *bon voyage* to the last remaining remnants of the British in Malaya, the

[1] No.4 RAAF Hospital Unit History Sheets, March 65 – June 87, A9146 - #423 (Box12), NAA.

Australian military community remained in Penang to face a future free from both the comforts and constraints of the 'British embrace'.[2]

This chapter explores the circumstances surrounding the establishment, in March 1965, of No.4 RAAF Hospital. In doing so, this chapter further highlights the British colonial setting into which the Australia military community arrived in 1955 and the tensions that existed between the established 'British' *modus operandi* in Malaya and the expectations and behaviours of Australian families. By establishing their own military hospital in the aftermath of the closure of British medical facilities in Malaya, this chapter also begins to explore the nature of the Australian military presence that continued to reside in Penang long after British forces had departed.

The Extant British Military Hospital System

Reconstruction of the airbase at Butterworth by No.2 Airfield Construction Squadron neared completion in early 1958. At the same time, the RAAF Director-General of Medical Services, Air Vice Marshal (AVM) E.A. "Edward" Daley, began to consider the long-term provision of medical services for Australian servicemen and their families in Penang. On 20 February 1958, with the stated aim of investigating the 'medical facilities which would be available for RAAF personnel and their dependants', Daley dispatched Group Capitan (GPCAPT) L.R. "Laurie" Trudinger, the senior Australian Medical Officer at Headquarters Far Eastern Air Force (HQFEAF) in Singapore, to the RAAF base at Butterworth. Over the course of the next two days, Trudinger visited a number of medical facilities in Penang, including the sick quarters at Butterworth, Penang General Hospital, the Penang Maternity Hospital and the British Military Hospital in Taiping. Two weeks later, on 14 March 1958, Trudinger submitted his report to Daley on the 'medical facilities available to RAAF personnel and their dependents in the vicinity of Butterworth and Penang'.[3]

At the time of Trudinger's inspection visit, a mixture of British Army, Australian Army, Royal Air Force (RAF) and RAAF doctors and nurses provided medical services for British and Australian military personnel and their families in Penang. Regardless of service or nationality, the actual provision of medical services depended principally on the location

[2] See Stuart Ward, *Australia and the British Embrace: The Demise of the Imperial Ideal* (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 2001).
[3] A1801/16/Med (1A) - "Report – Inspection Visit to FEAF and Malaya", 14 March 1958, A705 – 132/2/960 Part 1, NAA.

of the nearest British facilities. RAF and RAAF medical staff treated the majority of single RAAF airmen at Butterworth as well as personnel from British and Australian Army units located on or near the airbase. Both the Australian Army and the RAAF families located on Penang Island were instead treated at the existing British Army medical facilities at Minden Barracks.

At the RAAF base at Butterworth, three medical officers - two RAF doctors and the senior Australian medical officer, Squadron Leader (SQNLDR) J.R. "Jack" Harrison - staffed a Station Sick Quarters (SSQ). Other medical staff assisting these three doctors included three nursing sisters from the RAAF Nursing Service (RAAFNS), eleven medical orderlies - seven from the RAAF and four from the RAF - three RAAF medical clerks, one laboratory technician and twenty-two local labourers.[4] With only twenty-nine beds and no surgical facilities, the Butterworth SSQ maintained out-patient and in-patient medical treatment to a standard roughly equivalent to that of a contemporary general practitioner. But, according to Trudinger, given the unique circumstances of the RAAF at Butterworth, the size and scope of medical responsibilities at this SSQ was 'far in excess of any other RAAF Base of similar size'.[5]

Several factors increased the scope of medical responsibilities at the Butterworth SSQ. The hot and humid climate of Penang introduced a range of added medical matters, including issues related to public health and domestic hygiene as well as a number of tropical infections and diseases that would not normally have been encountered by military doctors back in Australia. Further, the treatment of families who lived on or around the Butterworth base forced military doctors to consider a range of medical issues over and above their typical duties. Attending to family accidents and general medical emergencies as well as both the specialist medical needs of women and infant welfare were all things that many military doctors would not have encountered in the practice of medicine on a military base back in Australia. These factors were in addition to the many and varied medical issues that arose as a direct result of active operations related to the on-going Malayan Emergency during the late 1950s.

These factors not only compelled medical personnel at the Butterworth SSQ to cater to a much wider array of medical issues, but also significantly increased the number of

[4] Report on Organisation of Medical Facilities and on General Medical Conditions and Problems in Malaya and Singapore, June 1959, A705 132/2/972, NAA.
[5] Report on Organisation of Medical Facilities … Malaya and Singapore, June 1959.

patients requiring treatment. Indeed, the principal factor enlarging both the size and scale of medical services being provided at Butterworth was the sheer number of people being cared for by the SSQ. In June 1959, Trudinger reported that the three doctors and their supporting staff at Butterworth were responsible for the medical care of over three thousand people, a figure which included 840 RAAF personnel, 474 Australian Army personnel and 445 RAF personnel working at Butterworth as well as 179 'European' dependants living on the mainland near the base.[6] These figures do not account for the Australians living on Penang Island, whose medical care was not the responsibility of the base SSQ.

In addition to the 'European' component on the mainland, and in contrast to what would normally be expected at a RAAF base in Australia, the Butterworth SSQ also provided medical treatment to locally employed Asians who worked as either labour at the base or as domestic servants for Australian families. Although HQFEAF conditions of employment required that 'these Asians be entitled to treatment only for injuries or diseases acquired in the course of their duty', Australian medical officials at Butterworth, in accordance with long-standing British practice, decided to provide a far greater service to the local civilian employees.[7] Over and above emergency care, one Australian medical officer and one 'Asian hospital assistant' conducted routine medical examinations and 'fitness for employment' checks on all civilian employees who presented at the daily 'Asian sick parade'.[8] As much as the civilian employees appreciated the additional medical care, its impetus, at least according the Senior Medical Officer (SMO) at Butterworth, stemmed from a largely pragmatic, and not overly magnanimous, source. 'By the time', wrote SQNLDR Harrison in February 1958, 'one has decided whether a patient is an emergency or not (the average Asian can look half dead if he wants) … one might as well see the lot'.[9]

On Penang Island, British Army Medical Officers of the Royal Army Medical Corps stationed at Minden Barracks provided general medical treatment to all military personnel and their dependants who lived on the island. Daily sick parades were carried out by these officers at both Minden Barracks as well as in specially allocated consulting and treatment rooms at the Runnymede Hotel and the Australian Hostel. In effect, for the majority of the 1067 dependants of RAAF personnel living on the island in 1959, the first step in seeking

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[6] *Ibid*.
[7] Monthly Medical Reports and Medical Aspects – No.2 ACS Malaya, February 1958, A705 – 132/2/960 Part 1, NAA.
[8] *Ibid*.
[9] *Ibid*.

medical treatment involved attending a daily clinic at the Australian Hostel. From a purely medical point of view, these arrangements on Penang Island more than matched those provided by the SSQ at the RAAF base at Butterworth. But for a variety of largely non-medical reasons, these arrangements divided British medical staff and the Australian community on the island.

At the heart of the teething problems regarding the provision of medical care to Australian families on Penang Island lay an underlying tension between the perceptions of the newly arrived Australian wives and the established practices of British military doctors in Malaya. On the one hand, dissatisfaction on the part of the Australian women centred principally on the attitude of the young British Army medical officers, who were generally on short-term national service engagements. Australian women insinuated that the young British doctors were not 'able to cope satisfactorily with the full requirements of a large number of wives - particularly where more complicated female complaints were concerned'.[10] Having been accustomed to dealing primarily with servicemen, GPCAPT Trudinger reported that the British Army doctors had not had 'a great deal of experience in dealing with women and children' and so were also less likely 'to adopt a "general practitioner" attitude' and 'take the time and trouble to explain' medical issues with female patients.[11] An earlier report put the issue in slightly franker terms - 'the young British doctors just did not understand' the needs of 'Australian wives and families'.[12]

From their perspective, British Army medical officers stated that the Australian families, and the families of No.2 ACS in particular, 'are a far greater burden than are the British families'.[13] As this was their first contact with both military doctors as well as 'free medicine', British doctors felt that 'too much' had been made by the Australian wives of the medical benefits promised to them by the Australian government while on a posting to Malaya.[14] Complaints from the doctors noted that Australian women demand 'more than reasonable attention', particularly 'with regard to home calls'.[15] In June 1957, Colonel F.W. "Frank" Speed, at the Headquarters Australian Army Force, FARELF, contrasted the British and Australian dimensions of the situation:- 'The problem is not so acute with the British

[10] Minute 22/1/15 – "Medical Services: Penang", 21 June 1957, MT1131/1 A251/11/517, NAA, Melbourne.
[11] Report on Organisation of Medical Facilities … Malaya and Singapore, June 1959, June 1959.
[12] A1801/16/Med (1A) – "Report – Inspection Visit to FEAF and Malaya", 14 March 1958, A705 – 132/2/960 Part 1, NAA.
[13] Monthly Medical Reports and Medical Aspects No.2ACS – Monthly Medical Report – February 1958.
[14] *Ibid*.
[15] *Ibid*.

Army families as, over a number of years, those wives have learnt to accept what they are given … Australian wives are not of this frame of mind'.[16]

Tensions between Australian women and British doctors clearly turned on issues regarding the doctor/patient relationship rather than any particular concerns over medical competence or ability. By early 1958, with neither party prepared to either budge or negotiate, both GPCAPT Trudinger and SQNLDR Harrison recommended the appointment of 'a more senior and preferably an Australian doctor' to resolve the lingering tension.[17] In other words, in Penang, in the late 1950s, professional contact between Australian service families and British military doctors provoked so much dissatisfaction on both sides that the only possible solution envisaged by senior military officers involved the permanent separation of both parties and the employment of an Australian doctor to administer to the specialist medical needs of Australian women and children.

In September 1958, Major F.A. "Frank" Lillier of the Royal Australian Army Medical Corps arrived in Penang to provide medical care to the Australian families living on Penang Island. A short time later, Headquarters Australian Army Force, FARELF, noted with some satisfaction that the appointment of Major Lillier 'for the medical care of Australian families in Penang has been fully justified' and that 'effective treatment for the large number of families on the island' was now being provided.[18] Less than a year later, the clinics run by Major Lillier began to cater mostly to the families of Australian Army personnel on Penang Island. RAAF dependents instead began to visit clinics run by a civilian doctor, Nancy Radford, employed by the RAAF specifically to meet the medical needs of Australian airmen and their families on the island.

Even with the amelioration of these 'growing pains', as the first Officer Commanding Butterworth, Air Commodore K.R.J. "Keith" Parsons, referred to them, medical services at both the Butterworth SSQ and at the various clinics on Penang Island were unable to deal with a number of more complicated medical cases. In one monthly medical report, SQNLDR Harrison noted that due to the rather 'limited nature' of the Army medical facilities on Penang Island, 'anything at all complex' must be sent to one of the larger British Military Hospitals in the region.[19] The same reasoning applied to medical facilities at the Butterworth

[16] Minute 22/1/15 – "Medical Services: Penang", 21 June 1957.
[17] *Ibid*.
[18] Australian Army Force, FARELF, Monthly Report No. 9/58, AWM95 - AACD, AWM.
[19] Monthly Medical Reports and Medical Aspects No.2ACS – Monthly Medical Report – December 1957.

SSQ. Of particular concern to senior military officers was the provision of general surgical and obstetric services to Australian servicemen and their families. For reasons that will be expanded upon below, regardless of the effort, resources and inconvenience involved in reaching some of the existing British military medical facilities in the region, senior officers preferred using them over the local hospital system for reasons which again drew on long-standing notions of Asian inferiority and backwardness.

The British Military Hospital at Taiping was the nearest large British medical facility for Australian families at both Butterworth and on Penang Island. With 160 beds, the hospital provided facilities to cover most branches of medicine, including the chief concerns of the RAAF at Butterworth - general surgical and obstetrics. Although GPCAPT Trudinger described Taiping as 'a town with few European amenities' and with a climate 'less pleasant than that of Penang', British doctors at the hospital were fully prepared to accept all Australian maternity cases from Butterworth. In order to avoid potential travel complications, Australian women generally arrived in Taiping via service ambulance about one week prior to their expected delivery date and remained at the hospital for a further two weeks following the birth of their children. When Trudinger visited the Taiping hospital in May 1959, he found '5 RAAF wives as midwifery patients' who 'all appeared to be happy and content'.[20]

In cases not involving immediate attention, for example, less acute surgical cases or elective surgical cases, options existed to transport Australian patients from Penang further afield to one of the other British military facilities on the Malay Peninsula. These included the Kinrara British Military Hospital at Kuala Lumpur, where many members of No.2 ACS with serious cases of sexually transmitted infections had been compelled to visit in order to see the only British venereologist in the region, and the British Army and RAF Hospitals in Singapore. Although travel to Kuala Lumpur and Singapore to attend one of these hospitals involved considerable expense and effort on the part of both senior military administrators and the patients themselves, these hospitals were held in high esteem for one principle reason - namely that the medical and nursing staff were 'all British'. In one of his reports, GPCAPT Trudinger noted rather matter-of-factly that at Taiping 'the medical and nursing staff are all British' and as such 'there is no reason to doubt their competence'.[21] Apart from these British military facilities, the only other medical option available to Australian servicemen

[20] Report on Organisation of Medical Facilities … Malaya and Singapore, June 1959.
[21] Monthly Medical Reports and Medical Aspects No.2ACS – Monthly Medical Report – February 1958.

and their families in Penang involved a visit to one of the local civilian hospitals, and in particular, to Penang General Hospital.

Penang General Hospital

Initial assessments by Australian medical officers painted a rather bleak picture of Penang General Hospital. According to GPCAPT Trudinger, Penang General was 'a large institution of 650 beds, situated in pleasant surroundings', and that 'the first class accommodation' at the hospital was 'well up to European standards'.[22] SQNLDR Harrison described Penang General as 'overcrowded and understaffed'.[23] But in the opinions of both RAAF medical officers, because Penang General was 'run entirely by Asians', organisational standards at the hospital were 'not high'. Patients were required 'to wait in queues (Asians and Europeans alike)' and no guarantees were available for the provision of preferential treatment for 'Europeans'. In his assessment of local medical facilities, Trudinger counselled against the widespread use of Penang General by the Australian military community in Penang.

In making his case against Penang General, GPCAPT Trudinger noted that 'in the general section there are no single private rooms, so accommodation away from Asian patients is not always possible'.[24] Outlining his specific objections to the use of maternity services at Penang General, Trudinger argued that Australian wives 'may be nursed in the same ward as Asians, whose habits may be unpleasant'.[25] 'Under present arrangements', Trudinger's assessment continued, 'some wives may be nursed with Asians in 1B or 1C accommodation' and as a consequence, the 'cleanliness of linen and toilet facilities was not always adequate'.[26] Clearly, close proximity to Asian patients and the concomitant issues of dirt, filth and 'unpleasant habits' troubled senior Australian medical officers in the late 1950s.

By drawing on those staple colonial tropes of cleanliness and contamination, the attitude of senior Australian medical officers to the use of Penang General Hospital mirrored some of the more unsavoury aspects of past British colonial culture. According to John Butcher's study of the British community in Malaya from 1880 to 1941, the issue of racial segregation figured prominently in a number of colonial government organisations, including

[22] Report – Inspection Visit to FEAF and Malaya, 14 March 1958, A705 – 132/2/960 Part 1, NAA.
[23] Monthly Medical Reports and Medical Aspects No.2ACS – Monthly Medical Report – February 1958.
[24] Report on Organisation of Medical Facilities … Malaya and Singapore, June 1959.
[25] *Ibid*.
[26] *Ibid*.

the notorious 'colour bar' within the Malayan Civil Service.[27] In the early part of the twentieth century, the Malayan railways provided separate carriages for 'Europeans' and 'Asians'.[28] The history of British hospitals in Malaya also offers a number of examples of segregation based entirely on race, including the 'European Hospital' in Kuala Lumpur which provided separate medical facilities for Europeans and Asians up until 1931. But if a lack of racial segregation within the wards of Penang General continued to trouble Australian officials in the late 1950s, the even bigger concern was the increasing employment of Asian medical staff at the hospital.

The medical staff at Penang General, GPCAPT Trudinger noted with some disquiet in March 1958, 'is part Asian and part European but the Asian element appears to be increasing'.[29] The nursing staff at Penang General, 'though containing some Europeans' was 'in the main, Asian' and consequently 'the standard of nursing leaves something to be desired'.[30] This is despite the fact that, as a consequence of both the AIF Malayan Nurses Fund (established by former Australian POWs) and the Colombo Plan, significant numbers of Malayan nurses had been trained in Australia since the late 1940s.[31]

In terms of obstetrics, the Matron in charge of the midwifery section was British and, according to Trudinger, 'appeared competent'.[32] The Chief Obstetrician, Doctor Poh, however, was 'a Chinese'.[33] GPCAPT Trudinger also raised objections to the use of Penang General for midwifery on the grounds that 'Asian nurses' carried out some of the deliveries by themselves, without the assistance of either the Matron in charge or Doctor Poh.[34] Driving this angst over Penang General was not so much that the standards of the Asian staff at the hospital were poor, but rather, that staff at the hospital were Asian and therefore their standards had to be 'poor'. Mirroring the Australian experience with local tradesmen and general labourers in Penang in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Asian medical staff at Penang General were considered inherently less capable that their 'European' counterparts.

With the Federation of Malaya gaining Independence from the British in August 1957, many positions in Malayan hospitals previously filled by 'Europeans' instead began to

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[27] John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya 1880-1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 90-121.
[28] *Ibid*.
[29] Report – Inspection Visit to FEAF and Malaya, 14 March 1958.
[30] *Ibid*.
[31] See *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 December 1945, p. 6; and *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 4 November 1953, p. 1.
[32] Report – Inspection Visit to FEAF and Malaya, 14 March 1958.
[33] *Ibid*.
[34] Report on Organisation of Medical Facilities … Malaya and Singapore, June 1959.

be increasingly filled by Asian doctors and nurses. With this in mind, GPCAPT Trudinger noted that 'the general standard of Asian hospitals is showing a tendency to deteriorate and eventually will become unsatisfactory'.[35] 'This aspect will need to be continually under review by the S.M.O. Butterworth', Trudinger continued, 'and I myself would think that the point at which this hospital [Penang General] becomes unsatisfactory will be reached when the British matron of the obstetrical department is replaced by an Asian'.[36] For his part, SQNLDR Harrison, similarly noted that 'since 'Merdeka', several of the best European doctors have left the hospital and the standard of both medicine and nursing has somewhat deteriorated'.[37] Foreseeing the dire consequences of further increases in the number of Asian doctors and nurses at Penang General, Trudinger strongly recommended utilizing the facilities at the British Military Hospital in Taiping, where Australian women would be provided with 'a British obstetrician practicing British medicine with a British standard of ethics'.[38]

For a variety of reasons associated with expediency and convenience, a number of Australians, including maternity patients, did attend Penang General for medical treatment in the late 1950s. In contrast to the dread and stigma attached to Penang General by both GPCAPT Trudinger and SQNLDR Harrison, the general impression of the hospital from Australian patients who had actually been confined there was largely positive. Much to the surprise of senior Australian medical officers, and as yet another example of how the lived experience of many Australians differed significantly from the perceptions of senior military officials, the majority of Australian maternity patients in the late 1950s had 'no aversion' at all 'to being attended to by Asian doctors'.[39]

In 1959, with more than a hint of revelation, GPCAPT Trudinger noted that a 'number of the wives have been quite happy with their confinement at Penang General Hospital, including the wife of the RAF Medical Officer, who expressed satisfaction'.[40] The British matron in charge of midwifery at Penang General even confided to Trudinger that 'a number of Australian Army wives' had purposely delayed their departure to Taiping 'so that the emergency of impending delivery' would allow them to attend Penang General.[41] Many

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[35] *Ibid*.
[36] *Ibid*.
[37] Monthly Medical Reports and Medical Aspects No.2ACS – Monthly Medical Report – December 1957.
[38] Report on Organisation of Medical Facilities … Malaya and Singapore, June 1959.
[39] Report – Inspection Visit to FEAF and Malaya, 14 March 1958.
[40] Report on Organisation of Medical Facilities … Malaya and Singapore, June 1959.
[41] *Ibid*.

Australian women preferred to remain close to their families and friends in Penang during the weeks prior to and immediately following the births of their children rather than travel alone to Taiping for the sole purpose of visiting a 'European' doctor.[42]

Although the attitudes of Australian women to confinement at Penang General for childbirth contrasted significantly with the antipathy of senior medical officials, and indeed their subsequent experiences were overwhelmingly reported as positive, GPCAPT Trudinger remained wedded to his impressions that Penang General was unfit for Australian servicemen and their dependants. 'Provided they can obtain 1A accommodation', Trudinger conceded, Australian wives should be allowed to attend Penang General for midwifery 'if they so desire'.[43] But in his reports on the provision of medical services for Australian servicemen and their dependants in both March 1958 and June 1959, Trudinger clearly made the point that Australian dependants should 'in no way' feel that 'they are forced to go to an Asian hospital' and should 'in no way be made to feel that they are compelled by circumstance to attend to Asian doctors'.[44]

In the early 1960s, as part of the British military withdrawal from the Malayan Peninsula, the British Military Hospitals at both Kinrara and Taiping closed. Because these facilities provided the only surgical and obstetric facilities of an appropriate 'European' standard for Australian families living in Penang, their closure forced RAAF officials to make other arrangements for the medical treatment of servicemen and their dependants. As the Officer Commanding RAAF Butterworth reported to the Chief of the Air Staff in late 1961, 'the civilian facilities on the island of Penang are running down' and the standards were constantly being 'lowered further by the departure of British trained doctors'.[45] Because relying on local civilian facilities, such as Penang General, involved accepting the standards and practices of 'Asian' medical staff, a scenario beyond the tolerance of most senior Australian officials, extensions to the Butterworth SSQ were considered essential. With the Australian Army Battalion, now relocated to Malacca, operating its own 120 bed hospital, Australian officials decided to expand the SSQ at Butterworth into an Australian military hospital to deal with routine hospitalisation, general surgery and midwifery for Australian servicemen and their dependants in Penang.

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[42] *Ibid*.
[43] *Ibid*.
[44] *Ibid*.
[45] Monthly report by OC RAAF Butterworth to Chief of Air Staff, 7 August 1961, A1196 – 37/501/612 Part 1, NAA.

The Establishment of No.4 RAAF Hospital

In October 1964, Australian Defence officials confirmed the decision to extend the Butterworth SSQ into an eighty-six bed hospital. Officially formed as a RAAF unit on 1 March 1965, No.4 RAAF Hospital, under the command of Wing Commander A. Cameron provided medical services to both Australian servicemen and their families as well as the British Army and RAF personnel remaining in northern Malaya. Of the eighty-six beds at the Butterworth hospital, fifty-two were nominally allocated to fill the needs of the British Army units in the area, twenty-one were allocated to meet the needs of RAAF personnel and their families and ten were allocated on the same basis to the RAF.[46] On paper at least, the staff contributed to the Butterworth hospital by the British Army, RAF and RAAF reflected these ratios.

In May 1965, to complement the new hospital at Butterworth, the British established a 20 bed British Military Maternity Hospital at Minden Barracks on Penang Island, staffed wholly by British Army medical officers and nurses. Negotiations on the appropriate British contribution to the manning of No.4 RAAF Hospital took the British staff at this new maternity hospital into account, somewhat reducing their commitment at the Butterworth facility. Indeed, the British Army Director of Medical Services, Lieutenant Colonel J.L. "John" Kilgour went so far as to blame the wives of Australian airmen posted to Butterworth for the need to establish the maternity hospital at Minden Barracks in the first place. Kilgour wrote to his Australian counterpart that 'due to the good domestic facilities being available for bringing up young children while living in Penang and partly due to favourable financial conditions over the cost of hospitalisation here compared with conditions in Australia' the 'fertility rate among Australian wives' was 'very high'.[47] 'Three children in a three year tour' among the Australians, he further explained, 'is not uncommon'. Indeed, by December 1966, over half of the 500 babies that had been born at the twenty-bed maternity hospital at Minden Barracks were to the wives of Australian military personnel in Penang.[48]

In order to cater for the anticipated diversity of patients at Butterworth, initial plans for the establishment and operation of No.4 RAAF Hospital allocated beds according to race and gender. Of the eighty-six beds at No.4 RAAF Hospital, three separate wards, with a total

[46] Minute 635/2/509(24) – "Proposed RAAF Establishment for RAAF Hospital Butterworth", 10 March 1964, A703 – 635/2/509 Part 1, NAA.
[47] Minute FE 9324 Med1, 18 May 1964, A703 – 635/2/509 Part 1, NAA.
[48] *RAAF News*, Vol.8, No.7, December 1966 – "Jolly" Penang Story.

of forty-eight beds, were nominally allocated to 'European Males', two wards, totalling twenty-four beds, were allocated to 'European Women and Children', while just one ward of fourteen beds was allocated to 'Asian men, women and children'.[49] Not only did these differentiations based on race and gender influence plans for the physical layout of the hospital, they also impacted on the projected staffing levels allocated to each ward. In late 1963, in her bid to increase the nursing staff earmarked for the new hospital, the Matron at Butterworth included a 'proposed' nursing roster for the hospital. Of the twenty-three British nurses and ten Asian 'assistant nurses' planned for the hospital, various staff were allocated for the full-time supervision of all the 'European' wards on a 24 hour basis, while none were allocated, at any time, to supervise the 'Asian' ward.[50]

Although the initial plans for the hospital envisaged separate wards to physically isolate Australian patients from Asian patients, the issue was not so much one of proximity. Indeed, the Butterworth SSQ had employed a number of Asian 'assistant nurses' to tend to Australian patients from the mid-1950s onwards. Rather, the issue was one of reinforcing, via spatial and physical means, contemporary racial hierarchies and conceptions of social status. While such a conclusion does not reflect in any way on individual staff members of No.4 RAAF Hospital, it does confirm an on-going 'official' attitude towards racial segregation based on long-established colonial notions of Asian inferiority, backwardness and uncleanliness.

To what extent these initial plans for racial segregation influenced the everyday operation of No.4 RAAF Hospital once it was actually opened is difficult to tell. There is no reason to doubt that, amidst the daily hustle and bustle of hospital life, patients, whether 'European' or 'Asian', received the best medical attention that staff at No.4 RAAF Hospital could provide. But what these 'official' dialogues between senior Australian military staff do show, however, is that, in the mid-1960s, the initial plans for the establishment and operation of No.4 RAAF Hospital were deeply inflected with racial sentiments geared towards physically separating the Australian community from the foreign peoples and landscapes of Asia. This is over and above the fact that the very establishment of the hospital itself grew out of concerns to segregate the Australian military community from the perceived dirt, filth and incompetence ascribed to local medical facilities.

[49] Minute 635/2/254, 7 November 1963, A703 – 635/2/509 Part 1, NAA.
[50] *Ibid*.

When No.4 RAAF Hospital was formed in 1965, gender and race played important roles in determining the overall structure of the unit. Indeed, the positions, jobs, salaries and working conditions to which any particular individual could aspire depended almost entirely upon considerations of gender and race. In other words, by formalizing the upper bounds to which certain groups could aspire, whether based on gender or race or a combination of both, the organisational structure of No.4 RAAF Hospital reflected contemporary understandings of ability, worth and power vis-à-vis race and gender. In practice, the organisation of the hospital echoed the practices of many other RAAF units at Butterworth, mirroring many of the more widespread conceits of gender and race shaping both the structure and administration of the Australian military community in general.

Considerations of gender divided the Australian workforce at No.4 RAAF Hospital. Overwhelmingly, RAAF servicemen filled the majority of senior positions at the Butterworth hospital. The senior doctor at the hospital, established at the level of Wing Commander, doubled as the Commanding Officer (CO) of the unit. Underneath the CO, two Flight Lieutenant Medical Officers supported the Senior Medical Officer (SMO), who held the rank of Squadron Leader. Also at the officer level were an administrative officer, a pharmaceutical officer as well as any number of visiting specialists, whose rank varied according to their expertise and experience. All of these positions were occupied by men.

A variety of RAAF airmen, from the ranks of Leading Aircraftsman to Sergeant, ran the orderly room, the medical records section and the equipment section.[51] In perhaps the only instance where professional training and responsibility somewhat overlapped between men in the RAAF and women in the RAAFNS, No.4 RAAF Hospital employed twenty-five 'European Male' nursing staff. Of these twenty-five male nurses, eight were filled by 'Nursing Attendants' of the RAF, seven were filled by 'Army Medical Nurses' of the British Army and ten were filled by RAAF 'Medical Orderlies'.[52]

Opportunities for Australian women wishing to work at No.4 RAAF Hospital were far more limited. Indeed, regardless of qualifications, up until the early 1980s, women were unable to join the RAAF in any capacity at all. Australian women wishing to work *with* the RAAF were forced to join either the Woman's Royal Australian Air Force (WRAAF) or the

[51] Minute 4/2/AIR/1 (94) - 'Amendment to the Manning Establishment No.4 RAAF Hospital, Medical Officers', A703 635/2/509 Part 2, NAA.
[52] *Ibid*.

RAAF Nursing Service (RAAFNS) as a nursing sister.[53] Many of the positions and roles within both the WRAAF and the RAAFNS restricted women to administrative or medical roles that supported the day-to-day functioning of the male-dominated RAAF. From the mid-1950s onwards, the RAAF base at Butterworth offered no employment for women of the WRAAF, although a number of positions, first at the base SSQ and then later at No.4 RAAF Hospital, were established for RAAFNS nurses.

At No.4 RAAF Hospital, the senior RAAFNS officer, with a rank of Wing Officer, filled the position of Hospital Matron and administered a total staff of twenty-two female nursing officers drawn from the RAF, British Army and the RAAFNS.[54] Of these twenty-two nursing officers, the RAAFNS provided seven nurses - a number which included the Matron. Duties performed by nursing officers involved assisting RAAF Medical Officers at the daily clinics held at both the Runnymede Hotel and the Australian Hostel on Penang Island, nursing duties associated with day and night shifts at the wards of No.4 RAAF Hospital, duties associated with urgent aero-medical evacuations to either Kuala Lumpur, Singapore or Australia, as well as the routine transport of patients to other medical facilities for specialist non-urgent surgical procedures. Within these rigidly assigned roles, Australian female nurses contributed the only uniformed female presence at the RAAF base at Butterworth up until the mid-1980s.[55]

If the organisational structure of the RAAF/RAAFNS/WRAAF systematically limited the professional opportunities for women during most of the Australian deployment to Penang, a far less formal system based on race similarly restricted the choices and working conditions available for local Asian employees. Like other Australian military units at Butterworth, No.4 RAAF Hospital employed local Asian workers predominantly to perform basic labour tasks. Duties for the fourteen 'Asian civilian labourers' at No.4 RAAF Hospital included the daily cleaning of toilets, wards, verandas and storm drains. A full-time gardener

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[53] The WRAAF was a direct descendent of the wartime Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force, formed in March 1941, which was the first Australian women's service to be established in the Second World War. The RAAFNS was formed slightly earlier in July 1940, though civilian nurses has been employed on some RAAF bases prior to this date.

[54] Minute 4/2/AIR/1 (94) – "Amendment to the Manning Establishment No.4 RAAF Hospital, Medical Officers", A703 635/2/509 Part 2, NAA.

[55] According to the *RAAF News*, Jan-Feb 1985, for the first time, the RAAF posted eight RAAF women overseas. Six airwomen were posted to Butterworth, two, Corporal Deborah Wesley and Corporal Alanna Kennedy were married to serving RAAF members posted to Butterworth at the same time, while the others were four single airwomen, LACW Michelle Blakeman, Corporal Carolyn Forday, LACW Kerry Grant, and Corporal Anita Hirschfeld. Two other RAAF airwomen posted overseas at the same time, Corporal Diane Kelly and Corporal Michelle Angove, who were attached to the Australian Contingent in the Sinai Desert. See *RAAF News*, Jan-Feb 1985, Vol. 27, No. 1 – 'First Airwomen go Overseas'.

was also employed 'to establish lawn and gardens and to beautify the surroundings of the Hospital'.[56] In addition to cleaners and gardeners, the RAAF hospital engaged up to thirty 'Asian nurses' as 'assistant nurses' and 'ward assistants'. 'These Asian Nurses', one report noted, 'have received 2 years training in a civilian hospital to qualify for registration as Assistant Nurses'.[57] Although No.4 RAAF Hospital employed both male and female 'Asian nurses', the female Asian nurses were generally restricted to duties in either the 'Female and Children's Ward' or the 'Surgical Ward', rather than in wards containing Australian male patients.

Limiting the employment opportunities of local workers based on purely racial considerations occurred for much of the British colonial period in Malaya. Drawing on this established practice, the Australian military presence in Penang similarly failed to provide opportunities within its organisation for suitably qualified individuals from the local population. One particular exchange in the late 1950s typified the general attitude regarding locally qualified Asian personnel. 'Group Capitan Trudinger', wrote SQNLDR Harrison,

> was not impressed by the writer's suggestion that one or two Asian medical orderlies could be employed in lieu of Australian medical orderlies. In view of the chronic shortage of medical orderlies in the RAAF one feels that in a small way this may assist the manning position. The local newspaper this week reports that no less than 137 unemployed hospital assistants are registered with the Penang Labour Exchange. It is certain that from this throng one could select at least one man who would be of great value in the Station Sick Quarters.[58]

Although categorising local Asian workers as inherently less capable than their 'European' counterparts was an established principle long before the formation of No.4 RAAF Hospital in 1965, senior Australian medical officers continued to tacitly support its validity for the majority of the RAAF presence at Butterworth.

At times, organisational racism at No.4 RAAF Hospital spilled over into daily interactions between RAAF officers and locally employed civilians. In 1976, without any direct evidence of theft, Australian officers at No.4 RAAF Hospital suspected that a local Asian employee, Mr Neoh, was responsible for the repeated loss of pharmaceutical goods. Instead of calling in appropriately trained Service Police to assist in questioning the suspect, Australian medical officers proceeded to interrogate Mr Neoh continuously for 11 hours in

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[56] Minute 4/2/AIR/1 (94) – "Amendment to the Manning Establishment No.4 RAAF Hospital, Medical Officers".
[57] *Ibid*.
[58] Monthly Medical Reports and Medical Aspects No.2ACS – Monthly Medical Report – February 1958.

what the Director of RAAF Legal Services, GPCAPT M.K. Bannister, later described as 'disturbing conduct'.[59] Deprived of food, two officers from No.4 RAAF Hospital repeatedly questioned and re-questioned Mr Neoh to the point 'where a medical officer thought an attempt of suicide by the defendant was a possible event'.[60] Having obtained by such duress 'amounting to oppression' a confession from Mr Neoh, the Civil Labour Office terminated the employment of Mr Neoh.

In purely practical terms, the incident involving the loss of pharmaceutical goods and Mr Neoh's subsequent confession and dismissal, emphasized the relative authority Australians exercised over locally employed Asian workers. In the absence of any direct evidence of theft, Mr Neoh's confession provided the only foundation for his dismissal. A later review by the RAAF's senior legal officer, GPCAPT Bannister, concluded that, given the circumstances, Mr Neoh's confession 'would be excluded by any court as being inadmissible', including courts such as a RAAF court-martial. According to Bannister, this left no basis for any legal or administrative action by RAAF officers at No.4 RAAF Hospital against Mr Neoh. That an Australian serviceman, of any rank, would be subjected to such treatment – the lack of a proper caution, detention for 11 hours without food, repeatedly being interrogated by officers to the point of mental breakdown and subsequently discharged from the services on the basis of an inadmissible and illegal confession – is inconceivable. In terms of race, the circumstances surrounding the interrogation and dismissal of Mr Neoh emphasized the vagaries and fragility of employment within Australian units for locally employed Asian civilians.

No.4 RAAF Hospital

The first few years after its official opening on 1 March 1965 proved busy for the new Australian hospital at Butterworth. On 12 May 1965, about ten weeks after the hospital opened, No.4 RAAF Hospital admitted an Australian Service Policeman from the Base Squadron, Corporal K.D. "Keith" Austen, who later admitted to doctors that he suffered from lymphocytic leukaemia. Twelve days later, at approximately 1345 hours on 24 May 1965, Corporal Austen died at the Butterworth Hospital, the first person to do so, from a previously undisclosed disease which, if known to Australian officials, would have prevented his posting

[59] Minute DAFLS 56/76, 12 February 1976, A703 629/1/35 Part 1, NAA.
[60] *Ibid*.

to Malaysia in the first place.[61] One month later, on 25 June 1965, an 18-year-old Greek seaman was aero-medically evacuated from the ship he was sailing on to No.4 RAAF Hospital. Admitted in the early morning with serious injuries, the young seaman died later that same day.

For the most part, however, serious medical cases among the Australian community in Penang were transferred to hospitals in Australia. On 27 April 1972, Sergeant J. Spalding was medically evacuated to Australia in a RAAF Hercules aircraft for admission to No.3 RAAF Hospital and then subsequently transferred to the General Hospital at Concord in Sydney due to a very serious long-term illness. In a rare exception to this practice, SQNLDR J.W. Potts spent most of April and May in 1970 at No.4 RAAF Hospital fighting off a serious viral infection. Sadly, on 21 May 1970, SQNLDR Potts died of bronchial pneumonia while being treated in intensive care for viral encephalitis.[62] In general, however, perhaps due to the population of mostly healthy, and active, Australian adults and young families being cared for by No.4 RAAF Hospital, cases of serious long-term illness, such as those involving Corporal Austen and SQNLDR Potts, were atypical.

Far more common at No.4 RAAF Hospital were the seemingly constant admissions of British and Australian servicemen suffering injuries sustained in motor vehicle accidents. At the more serious end of this spectrum were accidents involving young Australian servicemen riding motor cycles. A number of examples will suffice: in the early hours of 29 September 1970, Leading Aircraftsman (LAC) D.W. Spinks died of head injuries received in a motor cycle accident; on 8 April 1972, Sergeant G.A. Harris died in a motorcycle accident which occurred on the roads of Penang at about three in the morning; on 18 April 1974, LAC N.R. Harris died in a motorcycle accident which occurred at approximately three in the morning. In one further example, on 15 April 1972, a week after the death of Sergeant Harris, LAC J.E. Wesley was seriously injured in another motorcycle accident on the roads of Penang. After three days in intensive care at No.4 RAAF Hospital, LAC Wesley passed away as a result of complications which developed from injuries sustained in the accident.[63]

Instances of Australians sustaining serious injuries in accidents on the roads of Penang also provided a constant source of patients for the Butterworth hospital. In

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[61] RAAF Unit History Sheets, No.4 RAAF Hospital - March 1965 – June 1987.
[62] A funeral service for SQNLDR Potts was conducted at the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Penang on 23 May 1970, followed by a Service burial at the Western Road Cemetery in Penang; RAAF Unit History Sheets, No. 478(M) Sqn – May 1970.
[63] RAAF Unit History Sheets, No. 478(M) Sqn – April 1972.

November 1970, RAAF Base Butterworth Police investigated ten serious traffic accidents, three of which involved Australian airmen on motorcycles. In one case, an Australian soldier and an Australian airman suffered head injuries and abrasions after falling from a motorcycle while attempting to negotiate a corner in Georgetown. In another, Base Police reported that an airman, 'riding a motorcycle at a speed of about 50mph collided with a goat which was crossing the road'.[64] The airman was later treated for serious lacerations at No.4 RAAF Hospital. The following year, in 1971, RAAF Butterworth Base Police section investigated a total of over 150 road accidents involving members of the Australian community in Penang. In March 1976, Commandant Kathleen Sutton, the Australian Red Cross (ARC) Field Force Officer attached to No.4 RAAF Hospital, noted that 'numbers were up again this month … we had quite a few patients who were confined to bed through injuries sustained by motor and road accidents'.[65]

Throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, motorcycle accidents involving young Australian airmen continued unabated, further causing concern among both Australian medical staff at No.4 RAAF Hospital and senior military officials. In August 1977, severe injuries were sustained by LAC J.S. Mason due to a motorcycle accident; in January 1979, LAC M. Sell spent over two weeks as a patient at No.4 RAAF Hospital after sustaining serious injuries after coming off a motorcycle; and in April 1983, No.4 RAAF Hospital attended to the broken leg and serious lacerations of LAC Cothenet due to a motorcycle accident at Bukit Mertajam. On 8 October 1982, LAC T.J. Green of No.75 Squadron died after a motorcycle accident at the intersection of Siram Sungai Nyor and Heng Choon Thian roads in the town of Butterworth.[66]

While this list of motorcycle accidents is itself indicative rather than exhaustive, the list would grow significantly if less serious motorcycle accidents were also taken into account. Although the nature and frequency of these accidents provides a certain glimpse into some of the lifestyle choices and activities of Australian airmen in Penang, as far as No.4 RAAF Hospital was concerned, motorcycle accidents among this cohort of mostly young Australian servicemen provided a significant and seemingly regular medical challenge.

[64] RAAF Butterworth Commanding Officers' Monthly Reports, November 1970, A9435 74, NAA.
[65] Australian Red Cross Field Forces Officer's Report, March 1976, Box No. 33 (18), ARC Society Archives, Melbourne (hereafter ARCS Archives).
[66] Headquarters Butterworth Unit History Sheets, October 1982, A9186 #196, NAA.

Not all road accidents in Penang, however, involved motorcycles. Motor vehicle accidents also contributed significantly to the patient list of No.4 RAAF Hospital during its twenty-two year existence. In 1966 alone, no less than four deaths and two cases of serious injuries resulted from road accidents. These include a serious accident involving LAC Brodi Less, who died on 21 July 1966 after suffering head and chest injuries in what was reported by service police as simply a 'traffic accident'. Nearly two years later, on 25 April 1968, Warrant Officer B. "Bill" Chapman died in a car accident near the Penang Swimming Club on Tanjong Bungah Road at approximately 1830 hours.[67] Although alcohol clearly played a role in some of the early morning motorcycle accidents, it is unclear whether ANZAC Day commemorations contributed to the accident involving Chapman. On 30 April 1968, the CO of No.478 Squadron, along with over 250 Australian servicemen and civilians, attended a funeral service at St. George Chapel on Penang Island for Warrant Officer Chapman.[68]

Respiratory illnesses in young children also featured prominently in the medical files of the Butterworth hospital. From 1965 to 1967, for example, at least six children under the age of seven passed away at No.4 RAAF Hospital from what doctors recorded as 'acute Tracheo-Bronchitis'. Medical officers at No.4 RAAF Hospital also treated numerous seriously injured children as a result of household accidents. After taking an overdose of *chloroquine* tablets on the morning on 18 May 1966, the two-year-old daughter of an RAF airman from No.60 Squadron was admitted to No.4 RAAF Hospital. Sadly, doctors at the hospital were unable to save the little girl who died of internal injuries shortly after admission. A month later, Carol Russel, the daughter of another RAF airman, was admitted to No.4 RAAF Hospital with extensive burns as a result of an accident at home. In short, the Australian military medical officers posted to No.4 RAAF Hospital treated an extensive range of medical conditions that would not have been seen by many of their military counterparts back in Australia.

By August 1965, in addition to the local British, Australian and Asian patients, a steady stream of injured Australian Army personnel staged through No.4 RAAF Hospital while being aero-medically evacuated back to Australia from the war in Vietnam. In October 1965, two Australian Privates from 1RAR arrived from Vietnam with 'multiple fragment wounds' and fractures to both legs. The extent of the injuries forced surgeons at No.4 RAAF

[67] RAAF Unit History Sheets, No. 478(M) Sqn, April 1968.
[68] Following the service, WOFF Chapman was cremated at Penang's Batu Gantong Ceremony.

Hospital to amputate the right leg, at mid-thigh, of Private A. Jones and the left leg, again at mid-thigh, of the other injured solider, Private R. "Ross" Mangano. A third Australian Private from 1RAR, Private R. "Ronald" McLean, who arrived at the same time with gunshot wounds to the left hip and abdomen, also required extensive surgery.

Although the number of arrivals from Vietnam declined during the early 1970s, No.4 RAAF Hospital remained an integral part of the vast medical organisation supporting Australia's contribution to the Vietnam War. As late as 5 April 1975, for example, a medical team from No.4 RAAF Hospital escorted approximately 215 Vietnamese children being evacuated from Saigon to Australia. Ranging in age from new-borns to ten year olds, the children suffered from a variety of medical conditions, including dehydration, chickenpox and measles.[69] Two weeks later, on 16 April 1975, No.4 RAAF Hospital staff again conducted a similar operation for another 77 Vietnamese orphans being evacuated from the war-zone to Australia.

As busy as the hospital was in the late 1960s, by the beginning of the 1970s, No.4 RAAF hospital became even busier still. As part of the final British withdrawal 'East of Suez', the closure of the British Military Maternity Hospital at Minden Barracks on Penang Island forced the RAAF to further expand the medical facilities at the Butterworth base. By December 1971, a new maternity wing of twelve beds had been established alongside the existing hospital at Butterworth. Built in the shape of a "H", one arm of the building housed the admission room, examination room, labour room and delivery theatre, while the other arm of the "H" housed the recovery wards. The baby nursery was located in the middle.[70]

In 1972, in its first year of operation, the new maternity wing of No.4 RAAF Hospital delivered a total of 197 Australian babies, including one instance of twin girls.[71] The high volume of maternity patients continued throughout the rest of the early 1970s - in 1973, a total of 188 Australian babies arrived at Butterworth including, on 16 December, another instance of twins, but this time two little boys. In 1974, the number of deliveries at Butterworth was 158. But due to the difficulties of maintaining appropriately qualified 'Australian' obstetricians at Butterworth, by 1975, only 85 babies were born at No.4 RAAF Hospital, while 78 Australian babies were born at civilian facilities on Penang Island.

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[69] RAAF Unit History Sheets, No.4 RAAF Hospital - March 1965 – June 1987.
[70] *RAAF News*, Vol.13, No.11, December 1971 – "First Maternity Wing".
[71] Registers of citizenship by descent - Register of births - No 47 Kuala Lumpur (Malaya), 1956-1984, A10842 Volumes 1-3, NAA.

With specialist obstetric surgeons visiting Butterworth from Australia only sporadically during the late 1970s, Australian women were forced to travel across to private hospitals in Penang via the ferry for the births of their babies. Indeed, from January 1976 to December 1979, only twenty-six babies were born at Butterworth, while 540 Australian babies were delivered at civilian facilities on Penang Island. In the majority of these cases, the Australian mothers and their new babies were transported back to Butterworth soon after delivery for post-natal care at No.4 RAAF Hospital. In 1980, however, the number of deliveries at Butterworth again rose to 110 babies. Before the maternity ward ceased delivering babies altogether in 1983, Wing Commander W.K. "Warren" Harrex, the last Commanding Officer of No.4 RAAF Hospital, estimated that 'about 500' were delivered at the hospital in the early 1980s.[72]

In his report of June 1959, GPCAPT Trudinger had expressed concern regarding 'the wisdom of sending wives already pregnant to Malaya'.[73] At the very least, Trudinger cautioned,

> the conditions to be encountered in Malaya should be explained to those wives before they leave Australia and the pros and cons of the move discussed with them. This way much heartburning and dissatisfaction can be prevented.[74]

But as the number of Australian babies delivered on Penang Island and at the RAAF base at Butterworth attests, Australian women themselves seemed little concerned with either the vagaries or potential hazards of local conditions in Malaya.

Based on married quarter accommodation figures, approximately 1150 Australian families lived in Penang at any one time during most of the 1970s.[75] Taking into account the two to two and a half year posting cycle, the total number of babies delivered to Australian wives during the whole of the 1970s roughly meant that, on average, four out of every ten Australian women in Penang were pregnant at any one time while accompanying their husbands on a posting to Butterworth. In contrast to initial predictions by Trudinger, these figures suggest that Australian women were overwhelmingly comfortable with both their surroundings in Penang and the medical treatment available at local military and civilian hospitals.

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[72] *RAAF News*, October 1987, Vol. 29, No.9 – 'No.4 RAAF Hospital – We Did it Our Way'.
[73] Report on Organisation of Medical Facilities … Malaya and Singapore, June 1959.
[74] *Ibid*.
[75] Commanding Officers' Monthly Reports – Base Squadron, Butterworth, (1973-1978), A9435 - 75, NAA.

Interaction with Asian patients at No.4 RAAF Hospital also illustrated the degree to which face-to-face contact could, at times, transcend both official and organisational dictums on racial hierarchy. In terms of the philanthropic work undertaken by staff at No.4 RAAF Hospital, Australian doctors at Butterworth often treated the children of locally employed Asian civilians in an altruistic spirit of generosity and compassion. In 1976, two especially sick children, Stella Subramanium, aged 6, whose father worked as a locally employed civilian at No.3 Squadron, and Vigneswaran Nayar, aged 3, whose mother worked as an amah for a RAAF family, were, in preference to the local hospitals, brought by their parents to No.4 RAAF Hospital.[76]

As both children suffered from acute cardiac problems, something beyond the medical capacity of the base hospital, arrangements were made for them to be transported by RAAF aircraft to Sydney, where they were operated on at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital by an Australian cardiac specialist, GPCAPT Sandy Grant, a reservist doctor with the RAAF.[77] Although Stella's operation proved completely successful, Vigneswaran's condition failed to improve and he was again flown back to Sydney in 1979 for further treatment. Despite extensive surgery, Vigneswaran died on 6 January 1980 at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in Sydney.[78] Following the repatriation of Vigneswaran and his family back to Penang, the staff at No.4 RAAF Hospital raised all the necessary funds to cover the full costs of Vigneswaran's burial.

Instances of philanthropic endeavour and kindness went far beyond the realm of medical assistance to the children of locally employed Asian civilians. Both the staff at No.4 RAAF Hospital and indeed the entire Australian military community regularly rendered acts of assistance to the poor, the orphaned, the crippled and the needy people of Penang. In February 1961, the RAAF Butterworth Sergeants' Mess organised and paid for a local blind boy, Peter Chin Peng Kong, to study for two years at the Adelaide Church of England Guild of Service to the Blind.[79] In June 1962, Australia's No.114 Mobile Control and Reporting Unit (MCRU) raised the necessary funds to pay for leg braces for a local eleven year old boy suffering from polio.[80] Five years later, when it was discovered that Jaganathan had outgrown the leg braces bought by No.114 MCRU, Australian servicemen from No.478

[76] *RAAF News*, December 1976, Vol.18, No.11 – 'Hole-in-the-Heart'.
[77] 'Sky High: a radio documentary on the experience of the RAAF at Butterworth', Item# 582284, NFSA.
[78] *RAAF News*, July 1980, Vol.22, No.6 – 'A Time to be Sad'.
[79] *RAAF News*, February 1961, Vol. 3, No. 2. – 'Sergeants Aid Blind Pianist'.
[80] *RAAF News*, June 1962, Vol. 4, No. 5. – 'Butterworth Aids Cripples'.

Squadron designed and constructed a new pair.[81] Numerous similar such examples of generosity by Australian units and organisations occurred throughout the entire duration of the RAAF presence in Penang.

Over the years, Australians in Penang generously donated time, money and equipment to a number of local schools, charities and orphanages. Local schools regularly received gifts of books, sporting equipment, and, in one case in 1977, an industrial lawn mower when a group of Australians noticed local children attempting to play football in knee-high grass. At the Convent of the Infant Jesus on Penang Island, for example, Australian women volunteered to help local Sisters with the care of over 250 local orphans. Ten Australian wives worked at the orphanage in late 1961 for five days a week, four hours a day, cleaning floors, bathing babies and feeding children.[82] When special occasions arose, the Australian women donated money to help buy new clothes and birthday presents for the children at the orphanage.

In instances where physical assistance proved impractical, or indeed impossible, Australian personnel often established funds to provide financial support to needy locals. In June 1962, a fund was established to help support Miss Lai Yoke Heong after the 18-year-old had lost both her arms in a road accident near the Butterworth base. In March 1977, members of the Australian Women's Sports Club in Penang provided financial support for Tan Lye Huat, a four-year-old local boy suffering from cerebral palsy.[83] Through the Penang Spastic Association Centre, the Australian women paid for the cost of specialist physiotherapy, speech training, meals and transport for Tan.

These examples of charity and assistance speak not only to a general reaching out by the Australian community to the needy and poor but also serve to illustrate a real intimacy in some of the day-to-day dealings between individual Australians and local Asian people in Penang. For all the contemporary prejudices that governed the official encounter between Australians and Asians, and for all of the racial and cultural barriers that were ultimately not overcome, there can be no doubt that many individual Australians did engage with both the peoples and places of Penang in a number of very open and intimate ways. By recognising need within the local community and then taking steps to address those needs, a number of Australians in Penang demonstrated an empathy with and an understanding of the local

[81] *RAAF News*, May 1967, Vol. 9, No. 4. – 'Kindness Shown on Three Fronts'.
[82] *RAAF News*, October 1961, Vol.3 No. 10. – 'Volunteers Care for Penang Orphans'.
[83] *RAAF News*, March 1977, Vol. 19, No. 2. – 'Helping Hand for a Spastic Child'.

people that they encountered in Penang that clearly transcended many of the other more negative racial narratives of the time.

Conclusion

In the late 1980s, with the Australian presence in Penang winding down, the *RAAF News* ran a series of reports on the history of Australian forces at Butterworth, including significant coverage of the disbanding of No.4 RAAF Hospital. These articles avoided reporting on many of the racist assessments of local Asian doctors and nurses at Penang General by senior Australian medical officers in the late 1950s and early 1960s that led directly to the establishment of No.4 RAAF Hospital. Instead, one *RAAF News* article in July 1987 noted that, with the disbandment of No.4 RAAF Hospital, a small medical flight was being formed to provide out-patient care to the small number of Australian servicemen and their families remaining at Butterworth.[84] Henceforth, the article continued, serious medical cases among the Australians remaining at Butterworth will be sent to local civilian medical facilities on Penang Island which, by any standards, 'are rated first class'.[85]

In many respects, the experience of No.4 RAAF Hospital epitomized the broader experience of the RAAF at Butterworth. Throughout the mid-1960s, even though the British military presence in Malaya was winding down, Australian military officials continued to draw on many aspects of British colonial culture. Indeed, these colonial-type attitudes and behaviours led directly to the establishment of No.4 RAAF Hospital. Once opened in 1965, the organisational structure of No.4 RAAF Hospital continued to reflect many of the early colonial conceits that framed the overall RAAF experience in Penang. Indeed, hierarchies of race and gender continued to play important roles in determinations of employment, pay and general worth within the working environment of the hospital until it closed in the mid-1980s.

In subtle ways, however, the nature of actual day-to-day contact between individual Australians and the local peoples and landscapes of Penang encompassed a much richer experience than that suggested by the organisational structure of RAAF units or the pervasive colonial rhetoric and behaviour of some senior military officials. In terms of philanthropic endeavour, a large section of the Australian community intermingled with local peoples in

[84] RAAF News, July 1987, Vol.29, No.6 – 'Butterworth – Down to the Basics'.
[85] *Ibid*.

ways that reveal intimacy, empathy and genuine understanding. Although some of these undertakings were not without their own particular strains of colonial reckoning, they nevertheless provide a strong counterpoint to the thinking of some senior officials.

Although the influence of British colonial culture never entirely disappeared from the Australian experience in Penang, over time, some of the harder edges of racism and 'European' superiority did soften. As the next chapter begins to explore, the British withdrawal from Malaysia in the late 1960s and early 1970s significantly impacted on how Australians framed their own experience in Penang – resulting in a more 'Australian', and less 'European', experience once the British had finally left.

Chapter Seven

Educating Australian Children in Malaya: RAAF School Penang

On 5 February 1969, two young girls bravely waved goodbye to their parents before setting off for their first day of school.[1] Wearing a uniform of all white, Deidre Abbott and Wendy King, both only four and a half years old, managed to smile as they turned away from their mothers to begin the short walk to school. Like thousands of children that year, Deidre and Wendy no doubt felt both a little excited and a little nervous at the prospect of what might be awaiting them at their new school that morning. And like many other mothers in 1969, Mrs Abbott and Mrs King must have felt the anxious melancholy experienced by all parents on sending their small children to school for the very first time. But as the daughters of two RAAF airmen based at Butterworth, and unlike the overwhelming majority of Australian schoolchildren, Deidre Abbott and Wendy King left their homes that day to attend an Australian school, with Australian teachers, teaching an Australian curriculum - in northern Malaysia.

British colonies, noted Buettner, could 'easily appear as a man's world, not only because of an imbalanced sex ratio among the British community but also due to the homo-social culture stemming from this'.[2] But many historians, including Buettner herself, reject this premise and have instead highlighted the integral role played by women and children in colonial settings. Indeed, many of colonialism's exclusivities relied in large part on the quotidian choices and distinctions made in the personal and family lives of members of European colonial societies. As European women and children increasingly ventured out to the colonies throughout the nineteenth century, as Stoler has often argued, the management of sexuality, parenting and children became a central theme of 'the late imperial project', shaping the very boundaries of the overall colonial encounter.[3]

Throughout many of the colonies of the British Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including the British colony in Malaya, choices associated with

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[1] A brief story of Deidre Abbott and Wendy King's first day appeared in *RAAF News*, March 1969, Vol.11, No.2.

[2] Elizabeth Buettner, *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 4.

[3] See Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

education and schooling for the 'children of the Empire' often played important roles in establishing and reinforcing social hierarchies. In other words, in colonial settings, children mattered – by whom they were raised, where they went to school and how they were educated. The colonial setting into which Australian forces arrived in the mid-1950s proved no exception to this rule.

This chapter explores the establishment of both the 'RAAF School Penang' as well as a small primary school at the RAAF base at Butterworth. In doing so, this chapter seeks to shine a light on an important focal point of the Australian military community in Penang - namely the large RAAF School on Penang Island. Although the establishment of Australian schools in Penang again drew heavily on past British colonial culture and practice, this chapter also continues to explore the impact of the British departure 'East of Suez' in the late 1960s and early 1970s on the attitudes and behaviours of the Australian military community in Penang.

The British Army Children's School and the Royal Air Force (RAF) Children's School

On 12 November 1955, the Chief Education Officer at Headquarters FARELF in Singapore, British Army Colonel E.E. "Eric" Lowe, warned Australian military officials not to entertain the idea of utilizing the local school system in Penang. 'Civilian schools in MALAYA', wrote Lowe, 'are NOT entirely satisfactory for non-Asian children and, in any case, are difficult to enter since there are insufficient places to cater for the local population'.[4] In accordance with this thinking, the Services/Treasury team report of July 1955 had already recommended that 'arrangements be made for the children of Australian servicemen to be educated at the British Army and RAF schools in the Singapore/Malaya area'.[5] 'In due course', the Services/Treasury recommendation continued, 'when the number of Australian children in the area warranted, consideration should be given to bringing Australian teachers to the theatre to conduct school/schools to the Australian syllabi'.[6] Accordingly, as the families of No.2 ACS and the Australian Army began to arrive in Penang in late 1955, Australian military authorities and their British counterparts in Malaya began a series of

[4] Minute CRFE/30024/28/EDN, 12 November 1955, A89/1/117, NAA.
[5] Report of the Combined Service/Treasury team on conditions of service for Australian Service Personnel of the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve, 28 June 1955, A5954 1463/6, NAA.
[6] *Ibid*.

discussions on how best to integrate Australian children into the two existing British military schools in Penang.

On 16 November 1955, the RAF Command Education Officer, FEAF, GPCAPT E.A. Stockwell, the Principal Education Officer of the RAAF, GPCAPT H.C. Pratt and the Australian Director of Army Education, Major A.W. John met to discuss the incorporation of Australian children into the British military schools in Penang.[7] Notes from the meeting indicate that British and Australian officials agreed to proceed in two distinct stages. Due to the immediate exigencies associated with the imminent arrival of families in Penang, British and Australian officials agreed to enrol the first cohort of Australian children at either the British Army Children's School on Penang Island or the Royal Air Force (RAF) Children's School at Butterworth.

In November 1955, the British Army Children's School made forty positions available for Australian children living on Penang Island. In addition, to further boost the capacity of the school in order to cater for future arrivals, arrangements were made to construct two additional classrooms by no later than April 1956. On the mainland at Butterworth, the existing capacity at the RAF Children's School allowed the small number of Australian children living near the Butterworth base to be readily absorbed into the existing school facilities without the construction of further accommodation. By the end of 1956, the British Army Children's School on Penang Island had enrolled 130 Australian children - 44 from RAAF families and 86 from the families of Australian soldiers. A further six Australian children attended the RAF school at Butterworth.[8]

Stage Two of the plan for the education of children in Malaya envisaged the construction of two Australian schools, one on Penang Island and the other at the RAAF base at Butterworth, each catering for approximately 150 primary school children.[9] Because officials estimated that between 300 and 450 children would require schooling in Penang by early 1957, the senior British and Australian education officers who met on 16 November 1955 all agreed that Australian authorities would eventually need to provide 'Australian schools … staffed with Australian teachers'.[10] With more on-base housing expected to be made available to Australian servicemen at Butterworth over the coming years, GPCAPT

[7] Notes of discussion on 16 November 1955 on "Children's Education in Malaya", A89/1/117, NAA.
[8] Report by the Headmaster of the British Army Children's School on Penang Island, Mr R.F. Bartos, A11353 – 59/3/AIR Part 2, NAA.
[9] Notes of discussion on 16 November 1955 on "Children's Education in Malaya", A89/1/117, NAA.
[10] *Ibid*.

Pratt agreed that a second primary school at the Butterworth base was essential. Pratt reasoned that it was 'not considered practicable to take young children daily across the ferry', something that parents would complain about for over a decade from the early 1970s onwards before a primary school was eventually built at the Butterworth base in early 1984.[11]

For their part, Australian military officials largely ignored the agreements made with their British counterparts at the meeting on 16 November 1955. Under sufferance, the British Army Children's School on Penang Island and the RAF Children's School at Butterworth continued to enrol an ever increasing number of Australian children up until the end of 1958. Discontent on the part of British officials, however, was apparent from the very beginning. Initially, overcrowding and inadequate staffing, caused by the sudden influx of over one-hundred Australian children in early 1956, severely strained the existing daily routines of the British Army Children's School in Penang. Indeed, the arrival of Australian students in 1956 had more than doubled the school population in a matter of months.

Not only did the recruitment of additional staff to handle this large increase in students lag behind the Australian arrivals by over a year, but the overwhelming majority of student accommodation in both of the British military schools in Penang was not of an appropriate standard in the first place. Accommodation at the British Army Children's School consisted of makeshift classrooms built within the confines of a large 'Chinese' house in the centre of Georgetown. While far from ideal, the situation at the RAF primary school at Butterworth was much worse. The RAF Children's School at Butterworth utilized buildings that were originally erected for, and later used as, horse stables.[12]

According to the Australian education officer at Butterworth, FLTLT H.S. Evans, in addition to overcrowding issues, 'very real differences' existed between the education children received in Australia and that offered to students at the British military schools in Penang. On entering the British military school system, Australian children from each of the different state education systems often joined with children whose educational backgrounds may have begun in schools in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, or indeed, in any of the other numerous schools associated with British military garrisons around the world.

With such varied backgrounds, added to the already frequent turnover of pupils in the military school system, British teachers in Penang often rejected 'normal' lesson formats and

[11] See *RAAF News* Vol.29 No.8 – "School's Out in Malaysia".
[12] Report into RAAF Children's Education in Malaya by Flight Lieutenant H.S. Evans, January 1957, A11353 – 59/3/AIR Part 2, NAA.

instead attempted to tailor educational programs designed to meet the needs of individual students. Despite these efforts, the British primary school system in Penang delivered a syllabus designed to prepare children for the 'II plus' examinations on which selection for the Grammar, Modern or Technical streams in England was based.[13] Consequently, much of the content taught had an English bias, especially in areas such as literature and social studies.

Having a wealth of experience in transient student populations, the headmaster of the British Army Children's School, Mr. R.F. Bartos, had anticipated some of the difficulties that faced Australian students entering the British military school system. In an effort to compensate for these difficulties, the headmaster wrote to Australian authorities in early 1957 urging them to utilize the absence of television in Malaya to encourage more reading at home.[14] Mr Bartos also noted that Penang Free Library had an excellent selection of children's adventure books, such as 'The Ascent of Everest', 'The Kon-Tiki Expedition' and 'The Cruise of the Conrad' which could profitably be brought to the attention of junior boys rather than the comics 'which so many of them read'. The headmaster, however, although a champion of adventure literature, frowned somewhat on poetry for young boys, especially poems involving 'fairies and elves' which he strongly argued were 'not liked by junior boys and they should not be expected to suffer them'.[15] In the same letter, Mr Bartos failed to recommend any reading material for junior girls.

In addition to adventure literature, Mr Bartos explained to education officers that 'Radio Malaya Schools Broadcasts' could also be 'profitably used for music, literature and nature study' at home by students.[16] These broadcasts provided the opportunity for Australian children in Penang to explore 'music, literature and nature' at their own pace and in their own time and were seen by the headmaster as a great complement to the material offered by the local British schools. But because the Radio Malaya Schools Broadcasts were 'designed for Asian children', Mr Bartos advised Australian authorities to ignore the 'ages and standards' published in the programmes as these were entirely inappropriate for the more advanced 'European' children. Instead, the British headmaster recommended that parents seek advice from local British teachers with 'previous experience of the broadcasts', in order to determine the exact programmes and levels appropriate for Australian children.

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[13] Report – "Education of Dependent Children- Malaya", NAA A705 – 208/30/550.
[14] Notes forwarded to RAAF Education Officer from The Headmaster of the British Army Children's School, A11353 – 59/3/AIR Part 2, NAA.
[15] *Ibid*.
[16] *Ibid*.

Despite the combined efforts of the headmaster, the teachers at the British Army Children's School and the greater attention and help by parents in Malaya - mothers without 'house-hold chores' and fathers without the 'pub at 5p.m.' as FLTLT Evans put it - many Australian children found it extremely difficult to adjust to the British military school system. After just one year at the British Army Children's School in Penang, one Australian airman, LAC Thomas Bruce, withdrew his son, Peter, after finding that he could simply not cope with the many changes. Towards the end of 1956, in a letter to the principle of a correspondence school in Brisbane, Bruce noted that his son had previously done very well at Garbutt School in Townsville prior to attending the British Army Children's School in Penang but had since become 'completely lost' within the British system.

One additional limitation of the British military school system in Malaya further exacerbated the already difficult circumstances facing Australian parents with school aged children in Penang. Because the British schools on both Penang Island and at Butterworth only catered for lower level primary school children, most students over the age of nine were left with only two options - remain in a boarding school in Australia for the duration of their parents' tour of duty in Malaya or otherwise undertake distance education courses provided by an Australian correspondence school.[17] Although six secondary schools in Penang did conduct classes solely in English, these schools taught a British curriculum to British standards. In any case, few vacancies existed in these local secondary schools even if Australian parents had wished to pursue this avenue for their older sons and daughters. This left boarding school back in Australia or distance education as the only two viable options for older school children residing in Penang with their parents in the late 1950s.

The lack of secondary school facilities caused considerable angst among families in the first two years of the Australian presence in Penang. In previous incarnations of the British Empire, especially in the late-nineteenth century, sending older children back to England for their education was 'seen to purify them from the terrible sin of being reared and taught' in one of the far-flung colonies of the British Empire.[18] As Buettner notes for the case of the British in India, schooling in Britain removed the opportunity for children to absorb the tainted cultural, behavioural and class markers characteristic of either permanently

[17] Minute 59/3/AIR, 9 July 1957 from T/CO No.2ACS, Wing Commander G.H. Purdy, to The Secretary, Department of Air, A11353 – 59/3/AIR Part 2, NAA.
[18] Buettner, *Empire Families*, p. 97.

domiciled Europeans or local Indian society, instead creating a *bona fide* member of 'the white middle classes – either pure "sterling metal", or at least one sanctioned as "genuine"'.[19]

In the late 1950s, however, Australian families in Penang cared little for protecting their children from the racial and class implications that previous colonial generations had associated with education in colonial environments. Instead, Australian mothers and fathers preferred to have their children remain with them. As the education officer with No.2 ACS wrote in May 1958, the overwhelming majority of families in Penang simply do not wish 'to send their teenagers away to boarding schools' back in Australia.[20] Above all, Australian families wished to remain together for their 'tours of duty' in Penang.

By the beginning of 1958, the situation regarding school facilities in Penang for Australian children had reached a critical juncture. Having agreed with their British counterparts in late 1955 to build two primary schools in Penang by the end of 1956, over two years later, in early 1958, Australian military authorities had still not begun to even plan for the establishment of any such schools. Instead, they continued to rely on the largess of the British Army Children's School in Penang and the RAF Children's School at Butterworth for the primary education of Australian children. At the same time, facilities for older school children remained non-existent.

On 19 May 1958, with the British military schools experiencing severe overcrowding due to the continual influx of ever more and more Australian students, Headquarters FARELF in Singapore instructed the headmaster of the British Army Children's School in Penang, Mr Belson, to not accept any further Australian children, effective immediately.[21] In early 1958, to further reinforce their frustration at the ever-increasing demands associated with catering for Australian children, British officials informed the Department of Air that from September that year the British Army Children's School on Penang Island would henceforth accommodate a maximum of only 59 Australian children.[22] In mid-1958, the RAAF estimated that approximately 180 Australian primary-aged children lived on Penang Island and another large increase was expected in early 1959 as the final flying squadrons relocated north to the Butterworth base.[23]

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[19] *Ibid*.
[20] Loose Minute from the Education Officer, No.2ACS, FLTLT H. Kelly, to the RAAF Principal Education Officer, Department of Air, May 1958, A11353 – 59/3/AIR Part 2, NAA.
[21] See Notes by No.2 ACS Education Officer, FLTLT H. Kelly, A11353 – 59/3/AIR Part 2, NAA.
[22]Report on "School for Dependent Children of RAAF Members, Penang", A705 -208/30/556 Part 2, NAA.
[23] *Ibid*.

Combined pressure from both frustrated families and the *fait accompli* presented by British officials finally forced Australian military authorities to act. In June 1958, within the forum of the Australian Air Board, senior RAAF officers and Department of Air officials met to consider the future education of children in Penang. With the British veto in mind, senior officers from Butterworth informed the Air Board that 'the situation has now arrived where the RAAF should … accept responsibility for the organisation of its own children's schools at Penang and Butterworth'.[24]

The Air Board agreed that 'the RAAF should immediately assume responsibility for the education of RAAF dependent children in the Penang-Butterworth area' and that two Australian schools staffed by Australian teachers be established in Penang – one on Penang Island and one at the Butterworth base.[25] Further, the Air Board suggested that school facilities 'should cover a full primary course and the first two years of a secondary course'.[26] By endorsing the provisions of Agendum No.27A in June 1958, the Air Board formally approved the establishment of Australian school facilities at both the Butterworth base and on Penang Island. But with the September 1958 deadline fast approaching, work on the actual establishment of an Australian school in Penang had yet to even begin.

An Australian School on Residency Road

Although the Air Board approved the establishment of school facilities in Penang in June 1958, parents faced the prospect of their children receiving no formal education for some considerable time unless suitable accommodation could be found almost immediately. Efforts to build and staff new Australian schools on both Penang Island and at the Butterworth base involved lead times estimated to be in the order of at least twelve months, probably longer. In July 1958, to avoid the possibility of children being left without any school facilities, the Minister of Air, F.M. "Frederick" Osborne, directed that some temporary arrangement be devised 'immediately' in order to allow children in Penang to be able to continue their schooling in 'as normal a fashion as possible'.[27] Based upon an estimate of one child within the age range of 5 to 13 years per RAAF family posted to the RAAF base at Butterworth, senior RAAF officers estimated that school facilities needed to be provided,

[24] Air Board Agendum No.27A – "Education of Dependent Children – Malaya", A705 – 208/30/550, NAA.
[25] *Ibid*.
[26] *Ibid*.
[27] Minute 208/30/556, from the Secretary, Department of Air, to the Secretary, Department of Defence, 5 November 1958, A1945 – 63/4/8, NAA.

almost immediately, for at least 270 children on Penang Island and 35 children at the Butterworth base.[28]

With the Georgetown Municipal Council experiencing severe financial difficulties, the Australian Air Board approved an arrangement negotiated by local RAAF Commanders at Butterworth for the lease of the local Mayor's house for a period of twelve months.[29] Consisting of a large colonial type mansion set on approximately two acres of land on Residency Road in Georgetown, the Mayor's house was only a short distance from the majority of Australian married quarters at Tanjong Tokong. Further enquiries initiated by local RAAF Commanders revealed that an additional large private home next to the Mayor's house, at No.8 Residency Road, was also available for long term lease, as was another similar sized council building at No.10 Residency Road. With certain minor structural alterations in mind, including the building of specialist classrooms, the erection of partitions in larger rooms, the installation of fluorescent lighting and the construction of additional toilets, the RAAF leased all three of these buildings with a view to housing infant children in one building, while primary and secondary children would attend classes in the two buildings next door.

Before any school could be opened at the newly leased properties on Residency Road, appropriately trained Australian teachers needed to be recruited and brought to Penang. As an interim measure, until such time as teachers could be organised and relocated to Malaya, the RAAF education officer at Butterworth was forced to utilize all available local teaching talent. In practice, this consisted of hiring any and all 'European' teachers currently residing in Malaya as well as relying on the 'academic' expertise of the wives of Australian servicemen. When these measures failed to adequately satisfy the full requirement of teachers needed, wives with 'at least some experience in teaching' were recruited to make up the shortfall.[30]

Although it became clear that some of the wives hired to teach at the new RAAF School were 'not fully trained' and 'accepted the appointment only to assist' the RAAF overcome their 'current emergency', few other options were available at the time.[31] As a temporary arrangement which authorities clearly realised did not 'fully meet the requirements

[28] Air Board Agendum No.27A.
[29] Report on "School for Dependent Children of RAAF Members, Penang", A705 -208/30/556 Part 2, NAA.
[30] Minute 208/30/556, 5 November 1958.
[31] *Ibid*.

of teaching children to a standard that they could expect in Australia', the first RAAF School in Penang, officially known as the RAAF Interim School, opened in the Mayor's home in September 1958 with an initial enrolment of 150 Australian children.

On 20 October 1958, a conference between the Principal Education Officer of the RAAF, the Victorian Education Department and the New South Wales (NSW) Education Department considered several long-term proposals for the staffing of the RAAF School in Penang. Because it was anticipated that over eighty per cent of students would return to a school in either Victoria or New South Wales, RAAF officials sought to minimise the impact of transitioning from Penang back to Australia for as many students as possible by combining the curriculums of both of these states.[32] One consequence of this arrangement was that a combination of teachers from Victoria and NSW would work together on the same staff at the RAAF School.

The conference agreed to a total of fifteen teachers, which included a head teacher and two specialist teachers - one for domestic science, art, handicrafts and one for physical education.[33] All parties agreed that the Victorian Education Department would provide the headmaster of the school. On the understanding that the Department of Defence would reimburse the states for the full cost of salary, allowances and each state's contribution to superannuation, both Victoria and New South Wales formally agreed to send teachers to Penang for the start of the 1959 school year.

In addition to providing teachers, the Victorian and New South Wales Education Departments both insisted on an annual inspection visit to the RAAF School in Penang by their respective Chief Inspectors - paid for by the Department of Air. Rather than the two and a half year posting to Butterworth outlined in the conditions of service for Australian servicemen and the one year tour of duty for female nurses of the RAAF Nursing Service, both male and female teachers were appointed to the RAAF School in Penang for a period of three years.[34] Married teachers were provided with subsidised housing and two domestic servants, fully paid for at public expense - conditions roughly equivalent with the scale provided for junior officers. Single teachers received one domestic servant at public expense if they lived alone in a flat or a house. If two or more single teachers shared a flat or house,

[32] Loose Minute, from CAA the Minister for Air, 15 May 1959, A705 -208/30/556 Part 2, NAA.
[33] Minute 208/30/556, 5 November 1958.
[34] See notes from inaugural meeting of Parents Association held on 25 March 1959, A705 -208/30/556 Part 2, NAA.

then a maximum of only two domestic servants were provided.[35] And like their service colleagues, to compensate for the 'tropical climatic conditions' and their perceived enervating effect on the 'European' constitution, teachers received two free travel warrants each year for local holidays.[36]

Difficulties arose almost immediately after the 'temporary' RAAF School on Residency Road welcomed students in February 1959. The structural alterations required to make the Mayor's residence suitable for accommodating primary school classes, even on a temporary basis, failed to eventuate. As reported by the Minister of Air, F.M. "Frederick" Osborne, amidst the 'emergency' nature of finding school accommodation in mid-1958, RAAF officers acted on 'information from European officers of the Penang Council who told them in good faith that the council would agree to alterations' within the buildings.[37] But very soon after the beginning of the school year in 1959, the RAAF received further advice from the local council that no major alterations to the existing council buildings would be permitted.[38] The decision to forbid internal alterations within the existing buildings, as well as a ban on the erection of additional temporary classrooms within the grounds of the Mayor's home or at No.10 Residency Road, forced the new RAAF School to operate in entirely unsatisfactory conditions.

Without permission to undertake any significant alterations to the buildings, rather than settle into their new surroundings, conditions at the RAAF School on Residency Road grew steadily worse as the 1959 school year progressed. For the most part, overcrowding meant that classes jostled with each other within the open, dark rooms of the leased buildings. High numbers of teachers and students worked in close proximity without adequate classroom dividers. On their first visit to inspect the new RAAF School on Residency Road, Victorian Education Department officials grumbled at the 'impossibility of conducting class' in an area with such 'exorbitantly high noise' levels.[39]

Without the installation of additional lighting, even on the brightest days, classes suffered from a lack of adequate light within the dark rooms of the buildings. The lack of

[35] Minute 208/30/556 (134A) from the Secretary, Department of Defence to HQ RAAF Butterworth, 6 January 1959, A705/30/556 Part 2, NAA.
[36] B.A. 58/3261 – Minutes of Standing Committee of Overseas Allowances, 24 April 1959, A705 -208/30/556 Part 2, NAA.
[37] Letter from the Minister for Air to the Treasurer, 29 June 1960, A1945 – 63/4/8, NAA.
[38] Report on "School for Dependent Children of RAAF Members, Penang", A705 -208/30/556 Part 2, NAA.
[39] Letter from the Secretary, Department of Air, to Mr H.L. Port, Department of Defence, 15 November 1960, A1945 – 63/4/8, NAA.

specialist rooms for home economics and science prevented efficient instruction in these subjects, while restrictions on new construction meant that playground equipment and permanent sporting facilities remained almost non-existent. The school also lacked facilities for school assemblies, parades, presentation nights and school social events. After a visit to the school in early 1960, the Australian Chief of the Air Staff, Air Marshal F.R.W. "Frederick" Scherger, described the RAAF School on Residency Road as 'a disgrace'.[40]

The most distressing consequence of the council's ban on construction at the properties on Residency Road centred on the inability of the RAAF to improve the toilet facilities. This left the existing rudimentary ablutions as the only facilities available for both the teachers at the school and over 250 students. In the infants' building, toilets consisted solely of pans. Toilet facilities were equally primitive in the buildings housing primary and secondary students. Although girls were afforded the use of two 'sewered' toilets attached to one of the classrooms, toilet facilities for primary and secondary boys consisted simply of an open room with a six foot urinal trough and three pans.[41] Referring to the boys' facilities, teachers at the RAAF School commented that there was simply 'no vestige of privacy in this place'.[42] The situation became so dire that, in late 1960, the Victorian Department of Education 'firmly believed that the present inadequate school accommodation' at the RAAF School on Residency Road constituted 'a menace to the health of pupils and teachers and urgent attention should be given to the provision of a new school building'.[43]

The lack of direct supervision and support for secondary students in the final three years of high school further complicated matters. In 1960, thirty-one Australian secondary students undertaking correspondence courses regularly attended the RAAF School on Residency Road where they were provided with only basic classroom facilities. Lack of available teachers meant that this group of students remained largely unsupervised and without teaching assistance. As a result, teachers reported that, left to their own devices, many of these students did 'little or no work', and indeed regarded themselves 'as a separate school', 'with a separate code of dress, behaviour and discipline'.[44] With these senior students having an increasingly 'adverse disciplinary effect on the other children' at the school, RAAF authorities at the Butterworth base were forced to place the RAAF education

[40] Letter from the Minister for Air to the Treasurer, 29 June 1960.
[41] See Letter of complaint by teachers, A705 -208/30/556 Part 2, NAA.
[42] *Ibid*.
[43] Letter from the Secretary, Department of Air, to Mr H.L. Port, Department of Defence, 15 November 1960.
[44] See Letter of complaint by teachers, A705 -208/30/556 Part 2, NAA.

officer in charge of the correspondence students in an attempt to curb their increasingly disruptive behaviour.

As the final RAAF units arrived at Butterworth in 1959, enrolments at the RAAF School continued to rise. By August 1959 the student population at the school numbered 345.[45] By the end of 1960, school enrolments had further grown to 450 students and by the end of 1961 the total student population had reached 587 with an extra 40 children still awaiting kindergarten enrolment. Although the Departments of Education in both Victoria and New South Wales sent more teachers to manage each successive expansion, accommodation within the leased buildings making up the 'temporary' RAAF School failed to cope with the rapid growth of the school.

Prior to the commencement of Term II in 1961, new enrolments in the Infants' department resulted in a temporary refurbishment of the garage at one of the buildings to further accommodate an additional kindergarten class. The Infants' Mistress, Miss J. Woodhall, made way for yet another new kindergarten class by vacating her office and moving her desk into a small kitchen pantry.[46] Under similar pressures for space, senior students in one of the buildings next door had to utilize a garage as a make-shift science laboratory.

With space at a premium, the school's headmaster began to transform all available rooms within the infants' building into new kindergarten classrooms. As with most buildings associated with the RAAF base at Butterworth, the RAAF School on Residency Road allocated separate rooms and facilities for Australian teachers and locally employed 'Asian' civilians. In the case of the Infants' building in 1961, even these segregated spaces were taken over to house new kindergarten classes. In May 1961, alterations to the 'Asian Kitchen' provided an additional temporary kindergarten classroom to accommodate another 19 new enrolments. Further enrolments in the same month forced the Infant's Mistress to convert the 'Asian Pay Office' in the Infants' building into yet another temporary classroom.

Despite the overcrowding, the lack of adequate toilet facilities and the complete lack of appropriate teaching spaces, the RAAF produced a promotional film in the early 1960s showing kindergarten children playing in the front yard of one of the leased buildings on Residency Road. The accompanying narration triumphantly declared that in Malaya,

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[45] *Austral: RAAF School Penang,* 1960, "Development of the School", by Deputy Headmaster, Mr C.L. Smith, pp. 6-8.
[46] *Austral: RAAF School* Penang, 1961, "Development of the School", by Mr C.L. Smith, pp. 10-11.

‘schools for the children of the RAAF families are … just like home’ and that ‘a first class kindergarten caters for the little ones’.[47] This portrayal of the facilities on Residency Road was in complete contrast to the ‘disgrace’ referred to by Air Marshal Scherger after his earlier visit.

In 1960, the Victorian Education Department wrote a letter to the Secretary, Department of Air, complaining about the teaching conditions at the RAAF School on Residency Road. ‘It is both disappointing and discouraging to find that two years after the establishment of the school, it is working in most unsatisfactory temporary buildings’, the Victorian Education authorities noted.[48] The letter continued that,

> the increased number of pupils in attendance has accentuated the problem and the conversion of garages for classroom purposes was a necessary but doubtful procedure. It is again stressed that, unless an adequate and suitable building is provided, the school cannot function properly and the scope and type of education to which these children are entitled cannot be provided despite the fine and unselfish work being done by the staff at present.[49]

After further mentioning that working conditions at the school were ‘intolerable’ and ‘a menace to the health of the pupils and teachers’, the Victorian Education Department threatened to withdraw Victorian teachers from the school if conditions failed to improve.[50] ‘Should a new school be not available by the beginning of the 1962 school year’, the letter warned, ‘the advisability of providing teachers beyond the end of 1961 would have to receive full consideration’.[51]

Forced into action yet again, the Department of Air considered several options for relocating the RAAF School to more suitable accommodation. At the request of the Minister for Air, senior RAAF officers at Butterworth examined the possibility of leasing other, more suitable, buildings in the area. One option even canvassed the possibility of taking over the British Army Children’s School in Georgetown. Each of these choices, however, failed to deliver accommodation any better than the over-crowded and inadequate facilities already in use on Residency Road. On 29 June 1960, the Minister for Air informed the Treasurer of a proposal to build a new school to house the RAAF School on Penang Island. Although the ‘proposal to build a school is a departure from the general policy of renting accommodation

[47] “This is Butterworth”, 1961, Item# 26140, NFSA.
[48] Letter from the Secretary, Department of Air, to Mr H.L. Port, Department of Defence, 15 November 1960.
[49] *Ibid*.
[50] *Ibid*.
[51] *Ibid*.

in Penang', the Minister wrote that all the alternatives had been 'fully considered, and in the circumstances, I suggest that it is the only satisfactory solution'.[52]

With the Treasurer's approval, the RAAF purchased three and a half acres of land at the 'Hillside Estate', a privately owned housing development next door to the majority of RAAF housing on Penang Island at Tanjong Tokong and Tanjong Bungah. Construction began on a new RAAF School in 1961. When completed in early 1962, the Officer Commanding the RAAF Base Butterworth, Air Commodore N.P. "Norman" Ford, proudly described the new RAAF School in glowing terms – 'the rooms are airy, cool and pleasant, the buildings and their surroundings are attractive, and features not normally provided in Australia may be seen in the Assembly Hall and Canteen'.[53] Despite the Department of Air delaying the project for over six years and continually investigating cheaper and often substandard alternatives, Air Commodore Ford also added for good measure that the RAAF had 'spared neither cost nor effort in equipping the school to a very high standard'.[54]

The RAAF School Penang

On 4 April 1962, the new RAAF School, consisting of three large two-storey classroom blocks, an open-sided assembly hall, a fully-equipped science laboratory, a cookery centre, a manual arts room, appropriate office space for school administrators and, as opposed to the premises on Residency Road, adequate toilet facilities, opened for Australian students at Hillside on Penang Island. On 9 May 1962, the Australian High Commissioner for Malaya, T.K. "Tom" Critchley, officially opened the newly built RAAF School at Hillside. Before a large crowd which included senior officers of the RAAF and prominent members of the local community, the Australian High Commissioner emphasized the part which the RAAF was playing in fostering a 'better understanding and good fellowship among the Asians and residents from overseas' in Penang, a comment which presumably referred to the Australian community.[55]

Despite the provision of new facilities, the number of children enrolling at the RAAF School continued to grow rapidly. Lack of accommodation at the new school at Hillside in its first year of operation in 1962 forced a large group of pupils from the Infants' Department

[52] Letter from the Minister for Air to the Treasurer, 29 June 1960.
[53] *Austral, RAAF School Penang*, 1962, p. 6.
[54] *Ibid*.
[55] RAAF Unit History sheets, Base Squadron Butterworth, Jan 58 - May 66, A9186 #198, NAA.

to remain behind at Residency Road until temporary 'attap' classrooms could be erected on the new school grounds.[56] By June 1962, all Australian children living in the area had been relocated to the new RAAF School, including all the infant classes as well as a total of twelve children who had chosen to continue to attend the RAF Children's School at the Butterworth base rather than attend the RAAF School on Residency Road.[57] At the end of 1962, the headmaster of the RAAF School, Mr C. Nott, reported a school population of 619 children, of whom approximately half were enrolled with the Infants' Department.[58]

By November 1965, RAAF School enrolments had reached 736, a total which included 342 infants, 267 primary and 127 secondary students.[59] In 1967, to accommodate the ever increasing numbers, a RAAF School Annexe was established to house the Kindergarten and Infants' classes separately from the older children.[60] Work on the buildings at the new RAAF School Annexe in Jalan Chenghai, approximately 3 kilometres from the main school, continued for the next three years until, in April 1970, the RAAF School Annexe accommodated all children attending Infants' classes. On completion, the RAAF School Annexe housed fourteen classrooms, a large hall, a well-equipped library, staffrooms and offices for both the Infant Mistress and Deputy Mistress.

By the beginning of 1970, the RAAF was operating two large schools at the northern end of Penang Island. In February 1970, the total school population stood at 1019 Australian students spread across 400 kindergarten and infants at the RAAF School Annexe and 619 primary and secondary students at the main school. The original complement of just fifteen teachers had now grown to forty-seven, with an additional two education assistants, a full-time school secretary and an appropriate number of supporting 'Asian staff'.

In an echo of earlier overcrowding problems, each successive increase in the number of students translated directly into an increased financial burden for the RAAF as well as further competition for physical space within the grounds of both schools. But as the RAAF commitment to the Butterworth base continued to increase throughout the late 1960s, construction of new Australian housing estates began to take place – but not on Penang Island. Despite initial concerns regarding the suitability of Butterworth for 'whites', a

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[56] *Austral, RAAF School Penang*, 1962, p. 16.
[57] RAAF Unit History sheets, Base Squadron Butterworth, Jan 58 - May 66.
[58] *Austral, RAAF School Penang*, 1962, p. 17.
[59] Commanding Officers' Monthly Report, November 1965, A9435 – 74, NAA.
[60] Minute 569/6/819 from the Secretary, Department of Defence to the Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 11 September 1969, A703 569/6/724 Part 1, NAA.

number of new housing estates were built on the mainland at Butterworth throughout the 1960s, creating an altogether different set of pressures for the two RAAF schools on Penang Island.

In August 1969, an aggrieved group of seventy-nine 'service wives' led by Mrs Margaret Leighton and Mrs Margery Brough forwarded a signed petition to the Minister for Air, G.D. "Dudley" Erwin, requesting a primary school be built on the Butterworth base to accommodate the children of the approximately 250 Australian families living on the mainland.[61] The mothers argued that young children, especially those only five and six years old, suffered excessively on the daily return journey from Butterworth to Penang Island. According to the petition, children at Butterworth boarded a RAAF bus at 7.15am for the hour long journey over to Penang Island via the ferry. When classes finished at 2.30pm, children repeated the journey in the reverse direction, often arriving home after 4pm. In instances of serious traffic congestion, children could be as late as 5.45pm, having sat for long periods on 'extremely hot buses' with no toilet facilities. The mothers pointed out that five and six year old children were often away from home for longer periods than their husbands, who left for work at 8am and usually had arrived home by 4.30pm.

In addition to the 'mainland' children having a much longer and more arduous journey to school each day than their 'Penang Island' counterparts, the mothers of children residing at Butterworth also found themselves isolated from the social and administrative aspects of the RAAF School. Because of the time and cost of travel involved, most parents of children residing on the mainland experienced more difficulties in trying to attend events such as P & C meetings, school open days, sporting carnivals and teacher interviews. 'Mainland' parents also had far fewer chances to discuss their children's progress with teachers or socialize with other parents in the informal atmosphere of before and after school social encounters. From their point of view, mothers of Australian children travelling to and from school via the ferry each day not only had to deal with sons and daughters who were 'hot, tired and irritable' after each school day, but they additionally found themselves excluded from one of the most significant social environments for parents of young children - namely the local school.

[61] 'Petition by Service Wives for Mainland Educational Facilities for Australian School Children at RAAF Base Butterworth, Malaysia', A703 569/6/724 Part 1, NAA.

Responses to a questionnaire sent out by concerned mothers living on the mainland in early 1970 strongly hinted at the general disquiet about the effect of excessive travel times to and from the RAAF School on Penang Island. One mother responded that,

> My child (aged six) does not eat breakfast as she is too tired. She is not eating at all well, and when she comes home from school she just drops her port in the doorway and falls on the lounge. She also has come home with dirtied pants as she could not wait until she gets home to go to the toilet. She gets very upset about this. She gets upset at any little thing.[62]

Another mother complained that 'I am not happy about a five-year old travelling that far each day' to attend classes in 'an attap hut'. Another mother noted that 'my child is going from bad to worse' and 'has not got one good school report since I arrived here compared with the reports in Australia'. Yet another mother commented that 'Jeff just seems to be overtired and irritable and the children fight at any little thing … all our nerves are frayed when this happens'.

In dismissing the petition by Mrs Leighton and Mrs Brough, the Minister for Air, Senator T.C. "Tom" Drake-Brockman, responded that 'the existing arrangements had operated at Butterworth since the inception of the school' and that at no time until recently had they 'been the subject of complaint by parents'.[63] Additionally, citing attendance records and comparing performances with similar aged children in Australia, the Minister noted that annual reviews of schooling arrangements for the RAAF School had indicated that 'the travel and conditions generally' had not 'had any ill-effect on the children'. Although publically the Minister remained uncommitted about the provision of a primary school on the mainland at Butterworth, in private correspondence, the Minister noted that the 'provision of teaching staff', the 'availability of suitable facilities' and the 'possible heavy capital expenditure' of building a new school clearly out-weighed the representations made by the mothers at Butterworth.[64]

In June 1970, a delegation of four women representing the group working for a school on the mainland met with the Victorian and New South Wales school inspectors on their annual visit to the RAAF School in Penang. The New South Wales Schools' Inspector, Mr J.E. Fairbrother, noted that the women working for an additional school on the mainland had

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[62] Responses were included in a letter to the Minister for Air from the Provisional Parents' & Citizens' Association, RAAF School Butterworth, 3 July 1970, A703 569/6/724 Part 1, NAA.
[63] Minute 569/6/819 from the Secretary, Department of Defence to the Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 11 September 1969.
[64] *Ibid*.

presented arguments based on travel hardships for the younger children similar to those already outlined in previous correspondence, with the only exception being 'the emotional overtones of the speakers'.[65] Their arguments, Fairbrother noted, were 'not soundly based on facts as ascertained by Mr Prictor and myself'.

The OC of the Butterworth base, Air Commodore R.T. "Ronald" Susans, the NSW Schools Inspector noted, had instead presented 'a more forceful argument based on the effect the neurosis of the women was having on the efficiency of the husbands who were attached to his command (underline in the original)'.[66] The 'force' of this argument by Susans, coupled with the fact that there were 'now sufficient children of infants and primary age … to make a school a viable proposition', prompted Fairbrother to recommend, in late 1970, 'that a school on the mainland be established at the earliest possible time'.[67]

Pressure to build a new school on the mainland continued from 'The Provisional P&C Association, RAAF School Butterworth' throughout all of 1969 and 1970. Although a Department of Air report in late 1970 still failed to accept the argument that the detrimental effects of traveling to and from the mainland to Penang Island each day warranted building another school at Butterworth for the younger children, constant pressure did eventually yield some results. In the jargon typically used to justify military expenditure, the Department of Air noted that the absence of a mainland school was 'a continuing source of discontent at Butterworth among the parents living on the mainland' which 'in turn could have a detrimental effect on the operational efficiency of the Base'.[68] On 18 December 1970, the Acting Secretary, Department of Air, G.E. "Gordon" Blakers, wrote to the Australian High Commission in Kuala Lumpur directing that, as the 'Minister has agreed that a primary/infants school be provided at Butterworth', the High Commissioner was directed to seek 'the approval of the Malaysian authorities' for the erection of a new RAAF school and associated facilities on the mainland.[69]

In an effort to reduce the effect of noise associated with the military operations of the airbase, Defence authorities choose a parcel of land down by the water next to the Officers'

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[65] Letter from NSW Staff Inspector, Mr J.E. Fairbrother, to the Secretary, Department of Air, 5 August 1970, A703 569/6/724 Part 1, NAA.
[66] *Ibid*.
[67] *Ibid*.
[68] Report by Department of Air – "Establishment of a Mainland School at RAAF Base Butterworth", A703 569/6/724 Part 1, NAA.
[69] Letter from the Acting Secretary, Department of Air, Mr G.E. Blakers, to Australian High Commission, Kuala Lumpur, 18 December 1970, A703 569/6/724 Part 1, NAA.

Mess as the proposed site for the new school at the Butterworth base. Designs for the school released in April 1971 envisaged two classroom wings, an Assembly Hall, Administrative buildings and toilets as 'centrally located' as possible. And as with most Australian units at Butterworth at the time, an 'Asian Rest Room' was proposed for local employees separate to the 'Staff" Rest Room to be used by the Australian teachers.[70]

Calculated as just one measure to reinforce the physical segregation of the 'teaching staff' and the Asian support staff, the 'Asian Rest Room' proposed for the new Butterworth school included a 'toilet provided within a cubical', 'one ceiling fan, one light, two power outlets' and room for a table and chairs. This contrasted with the Australian 'Staff Room', which included 'seating for a minimum of 16 persons', a sink, bench cupboards and an urn to cater for tea-making and the 'Staff Toilet', which included numerous cubicles, a coat cupboard, two hand basins and a shower which allows for 'disrobing in complete privacy consistent with use by either sex'. To what extent this continued racial segregation in the early 1970s conformed to the spirit of 'good fellowship' mentioned by the Australian High Commissioner at the school's opening in 1962 is not at all clear.

On 31 July 1971, the Secretary-General of the Malaysian Ministry of Defence, formally advised the Australian High Commission, Kuala Lumpur, of their agreement to the construction of a new school at the Butterworth Air Base.[71] But with all the necessary approvals finally obtained for the construction of a new school on the mainland, the Department of Air decided to again review the proposal for a new school. Taking into account the 'costs involved in setting up a school', the general trends developing at the base whereby 'the numbers of Malaysian Service personnel and dependents on base are increasing', and 'a general reluctance to commit ourselves to a project of this nature at a location where there is an element of uncertainty', the Department of Air decided, in November 1971, that 'the mainland school proposal should be deferred indefinitely'.[72] With further representations by the 'mainland' mothers expected, the Department considered that 'the decision to defer' should be publically 'justified on the grounds of economy'.[73]

[70] Letter from the Area Manager, Mr A. Potter, to the Secretary, Department of Air, 22 April 1971, A703 569/6/724 Part 1, NAA.
[71] Letter from the Secretary, Department of Air, to the Minister for Defence, 10 November 1971, A703 569/6/724 Part 1, NAA.
[72] *Ibid*.
[73] *Ibid*.

In a strange epilogue, almost twenty-nine years after first being mooted by the Principal Education Officer of the RAAF, GPCAPT Pratt, in November 1955, an Australian primary school on the mainland at Butterworth catering for kindergarten through to grade six did eventually open on 9 February 1984. At the end of 1987, only four years after opening, the primary school at Butterworth closed as the RAAF withdrew from Malaysia.

The Experience of School in Penang for Australian Children

Each year, advice from the visiting school inspectors from both Victoria and New South Wales urged students at the RAAF School Penang to make the most of the unique educational opportunities afforded them in Malaya. During his inspection of the RAAF School in 1972, the Victorian Assistant Director of Primary Education, Mr E.L. Ryan, told students how 'fortunate' they were to be attending an Australian school on Asian soil and that their 'overseas experiences and associations' in Malaysia would enrich their 'whole lives' and in turn 'the lives of others' around them.[74]

Messages from senior officers at the RAAF base often echoed these sentiments. In 1964, Air Commodore Ford advised students to appreciate 'the broadening experience of living overseas'.[75] Gaining first-hand knowledge of other peoples, the Officer Commanding further noted, 'should not only lead to an understanding of their way of life but should also deepen your concept of our own'. Similarly, in 1976, Air Commodore R.E. "Raymond" Trebilco wrote about the 'invaluable exposure' students at the RAAF School had 'to new cultures, to different religions, ethnic and social values' and 'to new languages and their impact'.[76]

In parallel with these encouragements to observe and appreciate the foreign landscapes around them in Penang, school inspectors and senior officers also reminded students to remain aware of the fundamental differences between what they experienced in Malaysia and the Australian 'way of life'. By reminding students of this distinction, school inspectors and senior officers sought to reinforce the dichotomy between the 'foreign' landscapes of Malaysia and the 'familiar' landscapes of home. In 1968, the Victorian Assistant Director of Primary Education, Mr J.B. Prictor, expressed his happiness 'that your

[74] *Austral, RAAF School Penang*, "Victorian Inspector's Message", 1972, p. 9.
[75] *Austral, RAAF School Penang*, "Message from Officer Commanding", 1964, p. 5.
[76] *Austral, RAAF School Penang*, 1976, p. 4.

youthful experiences are adding to your knowledge and understanding of other peoples, other places, other customs and other ways of life'. Prictor then added that students should 'remember, however, that your manners, your customs and your ways of life are being observed by others who will profit from their observations'.[77]

In 1968, the same year that Prictor wrote his message, the New South Wales Assistant Director-General of Education, P.W. "Percy" Beckenham, penned a similar missive underscoring the differences between 'us' and 'them'. After urging pupils and staff to make 'the most of your opportunities to learn from travel and life in another country', Beckenham wrote that he was 'proud to know you because you are showing to the people of South-East Asia that even young Australians can be worthy people, people who face the world with courage but who are friendly, helpful and sympathetic to other people, people who respect and appreciate others with their own special problems'.[78] The overall message was clear: the opportunity to observe and learn about other cultures, religions, languages and values while in Malaya should reinforce rather than undermine perceptions of fundamental racial and cultural difference.

The basic belief in the racial, cultural and ideological differences between Australians and the local Asian populations influenced the first RAAF School song, penned in 1963, by the headmaster, Mr C.E. Jenkins. The author selected the words specifically 'to inculcate in Australian children remembrance of their homeland, awareness of the role being played by their fathers on today's page of history, and pride in the way of life of the particular society from which they stem'.[79] Although quick to acknowledge that the words did not 'infer that Australia's democratic ideals are in any way superior to those of any other racial group', the new school song clearly paints a picture of Australia's military presence in Malaya as one which seeks to paternalistically guide the development of democracy, and thus civilisation, in Asia.[80]

The RAAF presence in Malaya, according to the song, provided 'freedom's outstretched hand' to the local Asian peoples of Penang. Similarly, the children of the RAAF School were 'inculcated' to 'proudly … present to Asians, democracy's ideals of freedom'.[81]

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[77] *Austral, RAAF School Penang*, 1968, p. 8.
[78] *Austral, RAAF School Penang*, 1968, p. 8.
[79] *Austral, RAAF School Penang*, 1963, p. 23.
[80] *Austral, RAAF School Penang*, 1963, p. 23.
[81] The words of the RAAF School song read:

Youth of Aussie in the tropics,
Tho' we're parted from our homeland,

To what extent those democratic ideals of 'freedom', 'goodwill' and 'brotherhood' mentioned in the school song should be put into practice, rather than merely 'presented' while the RAAF remained in Penang, were, however, not expounded upon within the song's verses.[82]

Despite the 1963 version of the school song's exhortations to 'proudly … present to Asians, democracy's ideals of freedom, goodwill and brotherhood', Asian staff at the school only ever occupied marginal positions within the school's administrative and social hierarchies. Indeed, segregation based on race within the confines of the RAAF School only further reinforced messages of fundamental racial difference between Australian students and the local Asian peoples. In 1969, the RAAF School employed a gardener, Ismail bin Mohd, an amah for the Infants' Department, Che Con Kassim and an assistant to help prepare and distribute lunches from the school canteen, Tan Beng Goid.[83] Despite urging Australian children to observe and learn from their local surroundings, not once did Australian officials use the advantages of being in Malaysia to employ a local Asian teacher, language or otherwise, to complement the school's teaching staff. Instead, local employees only ever occupied low-paid, menial positions at the RAAF School in Penang.

We remember scenes of childhood,
Australia's coasts around.
Now we're joined to RAAF School Penang,
Which from Asian soil has sprung,
While our fathers man the forefront,
Freedom's outstretched hand!
With blazing skies above us,
Or thunder storms around us,
In tropic school, we work and play,
Just as our mates down under.
Proudly we present to Asians,
Democracy's ideals of freedom,
With twin torches to enflame us,
Goodwill, Brotherhood."

[82] The RAAF School song changed in 1966 to the following:

The oceans at our doorstep, the mountains too are near.
We still can see the Southern Cross at night when skies are clear.
The seasons too are different, the monsoon and the dry
And though our lessons are the same, beyond our classrooms lie,
A world of many languages, so rich in history.
A world of different people, like us both proud and free.
Our RAAF schools, like Malaysia, made up of many strands.
Of interwoven loyalties to States instead of lands.
From all points of the compass, we've travelled here to find,
A country to be learning from like that we left behind.
Our school book is the whole wide world, may RAAF School be one page,
We will remember gladly, when we are come of age.

[83] *Austral, RAAF School Penang*, 1969, p. 22.

Staff photographs in the annual RAAF School magazines adhered to the school's policies and practices of racial segregation. In the 1969 magazine, a photograph of nine local civilian employees appeared on page twenty-two under the caption 'RAAF School Asian Staff'.[84] An image of the Australian staff, including teachers, library assistants and administrative personnel, appeared separately on another page. Indeed, separate photographs for Australian staff and Asian staff appeared in RAAF School annual magazines from 1961 until the early 1970s. The last explicit use of the label 'Asian Staff' occurred in the 1972 RAAF School magazine in which the Main School 'Asian Staff' and the RAAF Annexe 'Asian Staff' appeared in two separate photographs on page thirty-three while the 'Australian Staff' photograph appeared on page thirteen.[85] In the early 1970s, the practice of separate photographs for 'Asian Staff' and 'Australian Staff' continued but the caption 'Civilian Staff' began to be used rather than the caption 'Asian Staff'. The practice ceased altogether in the 1977 magazine, when the school typist, Mrs R. Chew, appeared in the same staff photograph as the school's Australian staff.

Student Perspectives

Although collective references to 'Asian Staff' at the RAAF School ceased in the early 1970s, the use of the term 'European' to designate Australia's racial character had already disappeared several years earlier. Throughout most of the 1960s, in what are most certainly echoes of their parents' perceptions, Australian children often distinguished between the local 'Asian' races and themselves by employing the term 'European'. In 1962, Barbara McLean of Form IV wrote that the people along Penang Road were 'of many races, dressed in their brightly coloured traditional costumes of saris, sarongs, sam-foos, cheong-sams, or the European in western dress'.[86] When describing her family's house in Malaya, Gail Bridle wrote that 'most of the European houses here are very big because they have additional car ports and patios'.[87] Similarly, in the 1962 edition of the RAAF School magazine, Lorraine Dowley noted that 'the Malayan Chinese have houses like Europeans' except that 'they have a different bathroom, kitchen and toilet'.[88]

[84] *Austral, RAAF School Penang*, 1969, p. 22.
[85] *Austral, RAAF School Penang*, 1972, p. 33.
[86] *Austral, RAAF School Penang* – "Penang Road", 1962, p. 108.
[87] *Austral, RAAF School Penang* – "Our House", 1962, p. 57.
[88] *Ibid*.

For the next few years, writing by students in the annual RAAF School magazines continued to reflect this convention of labelling Australians as 'Europeans' in matters involving some form of racial differentiation. In 1963, Jennifer Jenkins, undertaking correspondence courses at Form V level, described the differences between shopping in Penang and Melbourne by distinguishing between the eating habits of 'Asians' and the eating habits of 'Europeans'.[89] In 1964, Natalie Sutton of Grade Six wrote: 'I think that living in Penang is good for Europeans because it will encourage them to respect people of other races'.[90] And when describing an experience in a 'typical Chinese shop' in Penang in 1965, Gillian Davies wrote that 'it would take a long time for a European to become accustomed to the strange methods of storing and handling goods' that occurred in Malaysia.[91] Up until 1969 the word 'European' continued to be used when contrasting the Australian presence in Penang with that of the local Asian peoples. In his annual message to the school, Air Commodore Susans, reflected upon the RAAF presence in Malaysia by describing Australia as a nation with 'a European culture but … set in close geographical proximity to Asia'.[92]

References to Australians as either culturally or racially 'European' largely ceased around the time of Air Commodore Susans' message in the 1969 RAAF School magazine. From 1969 onwards, students began to see themselves as 'Australians' rather than as members of the 'European' race. Descriptions of the smells in the streets were no longer described by students as being offensive to 'European' nostrils, but rather as offensive to 'Australian' nostrils; Asian food no longer remained foreign to 'European' tastes, but rather foreign to 'Australian' tastes.

Acknowledging this transition, in 1973, Joanne Challender of Grade Five contrasted some of the different funeral ceremonies she had witnessed in Penang with the funeral ceremonies of 'Australians' rather than the funeral ceremonies of 'Europeans', who she considered 'somehow didn't put as much loving care into them' as the locals did.[93] Similarly, in 1974, Elizabeth Berlin of Grade Six wrote about a class excursion to Penang Hill in which the train carriage was packed with 'Chinese, Malays and Indians … we were the only "Australians" in the whole train'.[94] Only a few years earlier, Elizabeth Berlin would

[89] *Austral, RAAF School Penang* – "Some Differences Between Shopping in Penang and Melbourne", 1963, p. 101.
[90] *Austral, RAAF School Penang* – "Living in Penang", 1964, p. 76.
[91] *Austral, RAAF School Penang* – "A General Store in Penang", 1965, p. 76.
[92] *Austral, RAAF School Penang* – "Message from the Officer Commanding", 1969, p. 5.
[93] *Austral, RAAF School Penang*, 1973, p. 19.
[94] *Austral, RAAF School Penang* – "Penang Hill", 1974, p. 73.

no doubt have described herself and her class-mates as being the only 'Europeans' on the train, rather than the only 'Australians'.

These shifts in perception not only coincided with the British withdrawal 'East of Suez' but also mirrored many of the larger cultural changes occurring in Australia. In looking at the demise of 'Britishness' in Australian political culture, Stuart Ward has convincingly suggested that the ties of imperial sentiment holding Australia within 'the British Embrace' began to deteriorate in the early 1960s with the Macmillan Government's decision to seek membership of the European Economic Community (EEC).[95] More importantly, Ward argues that, rather than the independent emergence of an Australian nationalism, it was actually the actions of the British which prompted Australia to begin to define the new contours of nationhood and national identity in the late 1960s.

In the analysis of the Australian military community in Malaysia throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Ward's argument is eminently valid. It was only following the British withdrawal 'East of Suez' that Australians began to discard some of the colonial conceits which had previously framed their experience in Penang. And it was only after 1969 that Australians began to discard the 'European' label in matters of racial differentiation and instead refer to themselves simply as 'Australians'.

Inter-School Sport

After moving into the new school at Hillside in 1962, the headmaster, Mr C.E. Jenkins, announced that it was now possible 'to carry relations with other schools in Penang to a stage further'.[96] In practice, this amounted to the RAAF School becoming affiliated with the Penang Schools Sports Council (PSSC), a venture which the headmaster hoped would maintain and extend 'inter-racial contacts' in both the sporting and cultural spheres.[97]

From 5-7 July 1962 at the Penang City Stadium, the PSSC held its Ninth Annual Athletic Championships, the first championship to include a team fielded by the RAAF School. In furthering their sporting connections with other local schools, later in the same year, the RAAF School participated in the Combined School Swimming Sports Carnival held at the Chinese Swimming Club in Penang. As these events drew competitors from over 34

[95] See Stuart Ward, *Australia and the British Embrace: The Demise of the Imperial Ideal* (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 2001).
[96] *Austral, RAAF School Penang*, 1963, p. 14.
[97] *Ibid*.

primary and secondary schools in Province Wellesley, Australian children intermingled with, and competed against, rivals from New Zealand and Britain, as well as students from the various Asian communities of the Penang region.

The RAAF School's participation in inter-school sporting events in Penang provided an opportunity for interactions in a formalised environment where cultural relativities, social inequalities and racial distinctions were largely subsumed under the official strictures of the various sports' codified rules and regulations. Tight schedules, strict instructions and set competition formats characterised most inter-school sporting carnivals, leaving little time or opportunity for genuine inter-school contact. At the completion of competition, each school team retreated safely back to within the confines of its own school grounds, with as much or as little social interaction with other competitors and schools as desired.

In this way, athletics and swimming carnivals provided the RAAF School with a brief and highly regulated window through which to interact with the other schools and students of Penang, without any ancillary risk of intimate social contact or genuine cultural exchange. As the headmaster, Mr C.E. Jenkins, proudly summed up the situation in 1964, 'all inter-school contacts that go to build up the corporate life of the school are with Asian schools, causing the tussles that take place on the sports field to take on an international flavour'.[98] But in these formative years of sporting engagement, contact largely remained on the 'sports field'.

In 1963, in a letter home to a friend, RAAF School student Miriam Foley from Form III described some of the inter-school contact that the headmaster of the RAAF School had described at the various regional sporting competitions. 'For the amount of time we've been here you'd think we'd have many Asian friends', wrote Miriam, 'but the fact is – we don't'.[99] 'Only last Thursday', the letter continued,

> did I have the opportunity of meeting some Asians. All the schools from Penang and Province Wellesley (directly opposite Penang on the mainland), were competing in a Combined Schools' Meet, which was held for three days at the Georgetown City Stadium. Most of the competitors in my races were Chinese … There was one Indian girl who followed me around everywhere and although her English was not perfect, I could understand her quite well … Before the races the girls would be called up to go to the starting point to wait. While we were there I would sit with the Chinese girls, and when the Indian girl came over, I asked her if she would like to sit with us, but

[98] *Austral, RAAF School Penang* – "A School with a Difference", 1964, p. 12.
[99] *Austral, RAAF School Penang*, 1963, p. 95.

> she always refused and sat just a short distance away, because Indians and Chinese do not mix.[100]

Although, at least in the initial stages, inter-school sports carnivals did provide an avenue for Australian children to interact with Asian students from other schools, their brief, formal and infrequent nature limited their effectiveness in breaking down inter-racial perceptions of difference. But as participation in successive inter-school sports meetings and carnivals continued, the cumulative effect of regular contact and interaction did indeed normalise some elements of student exchange. The RAAF School's rather prodigious successes at the various inter-school sporting carnivals further boosted the scope and quantity of inter-school contact.

Success at the various combined schools' sporting competitions allowed students from the RAAF School to represent the state of Penang at the national level of competition. The first such instance of this occurred in August 1962 when two Australian girls from the RAAF School, Barbara Ward and Cheryl Pitman, joined with seven other girls and twenty boys of Indian, Malay and Chinese backgrounds to represent Penang at the Federation of Malaya's 4th School's Athletic Championships held in Kuala Lumpur. For three weeks prior to the carnival, the state team attended regular training practices together, providing an opportunity for the two Australian girls to freely intermingle with the other children representing Penang. At the Championships, Cheryl Pitman finished unplaced in both the 100 and 220 yards sprint races while Barbara Ward won the open discus event. In doing so, Barbara set a new Malayan Schools' record.[101] Similar sporting successes throughout the late 1960s only further added to the momentum of inter-school contact.

In addition to athletics, the RAAF School steadily built up a strong reputation in the pool. On 5 June 1969, *The Straits Echo* reported a story on the school's achievements under the sub-title "RAAF School Bags 10 'Golds' at PSSC Swim Meet".[102] Having won twelve gold medals the previous day, the RAAF School won four out of the five relays swum on the final day of the PSSC swimming carnival. Success in the pool continued throughout the next two decades, with students from the RAAF School regularly being selected to represent Penang at the National Schools' Swimming Championships.[103]

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[100] *Ibid*.
[101] *Austral, RAAF School Penang*, 1962, p. 24.
[102] *Austral, RAAF School Penang* –"Swimming", 1969, p. 34.
[103] In 1972, after the RAAF School led the medal tally at a swimming carnival known as the Penang Combined Schools Championship, nine individual Australian students were selected to represent Penang State at the

As the RAAF School further established its sporting credentials in local competitions, the school began to enter an increasing number of teams in both local school and non-school sporting leagues. During the 1966 season, the RAAF School entered a team in the local Penang B Grade Cricket competition. This exposure of Australian students to members of the Penang Cricket Association resulted in the selection of two boys, Richard Pickering and John Horner, to play for the Penang Combined Schools' team in two inter-state matches.[104] Similarly, in 1968, and although still only high school students at the time, Michael Coleman and David Adams played alongside other local men after being selected for the Penang State under-23 cricket team. By 1969, the RAAF School cricket team had become the Penang Inter-school champions for the year. In that same year, Mr Hart, a RAAF School teacher playing for the RAAF School team in the local cricket competition and a former Sydney 'A' grade player, had the honour of being selected to play for Penang in the national cricket competition.

In 1972, in a narrative similar to that of the school cricket team, the RAAF School entered a team in the Penang school-boys rugby union competition. The following year, in 1973, nine students from the RAAF School were selected to play in the Penang State Rugby under-16 team. By the end of the 1960s, Australian students from the RAAF School in Penang were regularly representing Penang State teams at the various national championships, with Chinese, Indian and Malay students as both fellow team members and competitors.[105]

The extent to which these interactions fostered friendships, empathy and understanding among both the individual students involved and the larger Australian community in Penang is difficult to determine. But the fact that sport played a significant role in establishing a platform for the Australian community to connect with a number of otherwise distant aspects of the local Asian landscape is, however, undeniable. In 1971, for

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national level. The students from the RAAF School who competed at the Malaysian National Schools' Swimming Championships in 1972 returned home from the meeting held in Ipoh with seven gold medals, thirteen silver and eleven bronze - *Austral, RAAF School Penang* – "Malaysian Schools Championship", 1972, p. 59.

[104] *Austral, RAAF School Penang* – "Cricket", 1966, p. 37.

[105] Sean Brawley has noted the significant role played by Australian-Asian sporting contexts in the 1920s and 1930s: Sean Brawley, "Australia's Asian Sporting Context", *Sport in Society, Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics*, 15:4 (2012): pp. 421-427. In their recent works on the infamous Changi prisoner-of-war camp, both Kevin Blackburn and Roland Perry continued highlight the role played by sport in the lives of Australian POWs in Singapore during in the Pacific War, including its significant role as a catalyst prompting interaction between different groups: Kevin Blackburn, *The Sportsmen of Changi* (Sydney: NewSouth, 2012); Roland Perry, *The Changi Brownlow* (Sydney: Hachette Australia, 2012).

example, the RAAF School primary girls netball team travelled to Island Glades Girls School to play the current Penang Schools' Champion team. One of the RAAF School students, Sandra MacKenzie of Grade 6, noted that after the game, 'our hosts very kindly offered us some mukan, e.g. Chinese coloured cakes … a lot of the girls had some but found the taste too unusual'.[106] As a conduit for interaction, sport was pivotal; as a catalyst for engagement, sport was vital.

Perhaps the best example of the role sport played in opening up new vistas for Australian students in Penang is not by considering interactions that resulted from the traditional sporting pursuits of athletics, swimming, cricket, rugby or netball, but rather, by considering sports that many students would have little understood in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1971, RAAF School teams played both badminton and table tennis in competitions against some highly talented children from the Han Chiang School and the Island Glades Girls' School. The RAAF School's sports report for 1971 noted that the local children 'showed their superiority at these games by completely outclassing us'.[107] Grade Six student Bob Hudson noted that 'the Chinese badminton players were far better at badminton and although we tried hard we could not possibly win'. Bob Hudson concluded that 'all in all, we had a very enjoyable outing'.[108] At the end of 1971, the RAAF School purchased new table tennis and badminton equipment, with table tennis reportedly becoming 'very popular among the secondary school students'.

For all this inter-school sporting interaction and increasing 'corporate' familiarity with the local surroundings, a fundamental tension nevertheless continued to exist in the degree to which the overwhelming majority of students at the RAAF School were prepared to engage with the local environment in Penang. Indeed, commenting on the situation in 1976, Anna Trencher of Grade Ten wrote that she felt 'sick and very sorry for the people who visit here and are guests of this country and choose to look down on the people, treat them like dirt and have nothing better to do but mock and complain the whole time'.[109] 'I feel sorry', Anna continued, 'for the people who refuse the opportunity to learn about a whole new country and so many different people and instead stick together'. Anna Trencher clearly aimed her rhetorical scorn at some of the particularly insular sections of the Australian community. But however accurate Anna's assessment may have been for some individuals, there were a

[106] *Austral, RAAF School Penang* – "Netball", 1971, p. 53.
[107] *Austral, RAAF School Penang* – "Table Tennis – Badminton", 1971, p. 52.
[108] *Ibid*.
[109] *Austral, RAAF School Penang* – "Malaysia", 1976, p. 112.

number of areas, especially in the arena of sport, in which the experience of attending the RAAF School in Penang did provide a number of significant opportunities for meaningful interaction with the local landscapes of Asia.

Observations on Life in Penang by Students at the RAAF School

Some of the writing recorded in the RAAF School annual magazines by students in Penang accords directly with comments and observations on life that could be found in almost any contemporary Australian school magazine. In 1963, Trevor Dunhill of Grade One, wrote of his ambition to 'be a millionaire bachelor', while Janet Lindsay, also of Grade One, wrote of her desire to be 'a bus escort' when she left school because it was 'a good thing to do'.[110] In 1965, Kerri-Lyn Meers of Grade Three wrote that, 'when I grow up I am going to be an ordinary mother with three children … I am going to have two girls and one boy … my eldest shall help with the washing and wiping up'.[111] On the other hand, Vicki Johnson in Grade One in 1965 simply wanted to be a nurse so that she could 'fix up people's legs and arms'.[112]

In contrast to their Australian-based counterparts, however, students at the RAAF School also wrote copiously about what they observed around them in Penang. In 1963, the RAAF School annual showcased a variety of writing by students on the subject of their surroundings in a twenty-six page section titled 'Malaysia Project'. Likewise, the 1964 edition of the school magazine dedicated over twenty-two pages to 'the life and customs of the local people … recorded in words and pictures as seen through the eyes of pupils'. In 1965, the RAAF School magazine included a section titled 'Focus on Penang', as well as another twenty page section called 'Internationally Speaking' designed specifically to showcase writing by students on 'their experiences and opinions of foreign countries and other parts of Malaysia'. Up until the school closed in 1988, the RAAF School continued to dedicate significant space in the annual school magazine to showcasing stories written by students about the local peoples, religions and festivals that they encountered in their daily lives in Penang.

In the early 1960s, Australian students wrote voluminously about the various Chinese and Malay 'men' who sold items from the backs (or sometimes the fronts) of elaborately

[110] *Austral, RAAF School Penang* – "Writers' Corner", 1963, p. 72.
[111] *Austral, RAAF School Penang* – "When I Grow Up", 1965, p. 63.
[112] *Ibid*.

outfitted tricycles - from the 'Brush Man' who sold brushes, mops and pans to the 'Balloon Man', the 'Butcher Man', the 'Mee Man' and the 'Fish Man'. Other numerous Makan seller 'Men', as well as trishaw drivers, cleaners, beggars and shop assistants also featured prominently in student observations about what they saw around them in Penang. In 1964, Penny Barrett of Grade 6, described the 'Magnolia Man' as being the man who,

> comes around every day ringing his bell on a bike with a box on it and … in his box he carries all sorts of 'goodies'. They are very tasty and cheap and that is why we buy them. What a curious character![113]

Another Australian student from 1964 described the 'Butcher Man' as the man who comes around 'every morning at about 8 o'clock … blowing a bull horn'.[114] On the back of his bike, the description continued, the 'Butcher Man' carried raw meat for sale which 'in European eyes, it is hard to understand how the meat does not deteriorate in the hot sun'.[115]

Figure 7.1. An Australian woman buys from one of the many local 'trishaw men' who regularly visited 'Kampong Australia' with their wares (author's image).

Australian students also often wrote about school excursions to such places as local coconut, banana and rubber plantations, the Penang Botanical gardens, the Kek Lok Si Chinese Temple, the Snake Temple, the Ayer Itam Temple, the Khoo Kongsi clan house in Georgetown and the almost compulsory annual trip up Penang Hill. In 1972, students wrote

[113] *Austral, RAAF School Penang* – "The Magnolia Man", 1964, p. 83.
[114] *Ibid*.
[115] *Austral, RAAF School Penang* – "The Butcher", 1964, p. 88.

about their experiences on a school excursion to a 'native' fishing village at Batu Feringgi, a local market place at Pulau Tikus and the Penang Batik Factory. In 1974, Deanne Barber in Grade Four wrote about a class excursion to a local kampong, full of 'dogs, cats, geese, ducks and birds'.[116] In 1973, the entire Form Two class caught a train down to the Wisma Loke Art Gallery in Kuala Lumpur, while in 1975 pupils from Form Four undertook a weekend long 'ecology' study on Bidan Island to the north of Penang.

Descriptions of local places by students reflected many of the broader attitudes and opinions of the Australian community in Penang. After most school visits to local kampongs, the overwhelming majority of students, like Tony Patman in 1977, uniformly described them as 'chaotic', 'dirty' and 'smelly' places.[117] Shawn Crowell of Grade One simply noted that 'I do not like the Kampongs because they smell'.[118] Student writing also often commented on the physical differences which marked the local environment out as significantly different from the treasured concepts and routines which governed home life within the Australian community. Only rarely were the peoples and places of the local environment viewed as anything but curiously different.

In addition to the peoples and places of Penang, Australian students also wrote about their many encounters with the various local religious festivals and cultural events of the region. In 1964, Robyn Farmer of Grade Four observed that in addition to praying for 'health, luck and riches in the coming year', Chinese New Year celebrations were always a happy time for children as 'aunts, uncles and visitors give them "ang pows" – little red envelopes containing money'.[119] In 1962, the RAAF School Form Three class studied the Hindu 'Thaipusam' festival. 'As the sickly smell of incense and smoke of the burning coconut shells pollute the atmosphere', the class observed, 'the priests transfix the jaws of some of the penitents with silver needles; skewer the tongues of others, hook pins shaped like fish hooks into the backs of a few'.[120] 'The penitents then take up their "kavadis" and begin walking wildly, running, shuffling and jumping to the temple', the description continued. In the same year, Carol Rayner wrote about 'Hari Raya', a national holiday in Malaya celebrating the end of thirty days of daylight fasting in the Muslim calendar.[121]

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[116] *Austral, RAAF School Penang* – "Our Excursion", 1974, p. 73.
[117] *Austral, RAAF School Penang* – "Life in Malaysia", 1977, p. 141.
[118] *Austral, RAAF School Penang* – "Our Thoughts", 1977, p. 34.
[119] *Austral, RAAF School Penang* – "Chinese New Year", 1964, p. 97.
[120] *Austral, RAAF School Penang* – "Hinduism", 1962, p. 73.
[121] *Ibid*.

Throughout the RAAF School annuals, students also frequently wrote about encounters with local foods and eating practices. The smell of durians, wrote Carl Payne in Form One in 1973, 'stank like a swamp'.[122] For those bold enough to actually taste the local fruit, 'the taste was disgusting', noted Chris Nunan in Grade Seven in 1977. He went on to describe the experience as being like eating 'stewed peaches in a public loo'.[123] In 1974, after studying Frances Letters' book, *The Surprising Asians: A Hitch-hike through Malaysia, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam*, the RAAF School class of Form Four decided to copy her habit of eating 'the way Asians eat their food'.[124] Intending to eat with either their hands or chopsticks, the class visited a local restaurant and sampled 'an enormous amount of spicy food', including curried chicken, curried prawns, curried beef, fried chicken, murtabar, chappatties, cuttle fish, curried fish and huge banana prawns. By looking at the expressions on the faces of some of her fellow classmates, Janeen Brown observed that many students had 'probably never seen half of the strange sorts of dishes' that were sampled that day.[125]

The writings above by Australian students about what they observed and experienced in Malaya highlights a range of physical and social spaces in which the students of the RAAF School elected to engage with the local peoples and cultures of Penang. Australian students readily observed, explored and interacted, however imperfectly, with many areas of local 'Asian' life that differed remarkably from their normal routines and experiences back home in Australia. Even during the late 1950s and early 1960s, a period during which Australia's 'European' perspectives distanced them further from their colonial 'Asian' surroundings than at any other time, students at the RAAF School still returned home with stories of eating food from makan carts, of observing penitents carrying 'kavadis' and of the strange smells and tastes of a variety of local fruits. Indeed, as many of the student perspectives of life in Penang confirm, engaging with the unfamiliar and foreign environments of Malaya, to at least some extent, proved largely inescapable for the vast majority of Australian children at the RAAF School.

[122] *Austral, RAAF School Penang* – "A Place Called Malaysia", 1973, p. 19.
[123] *Austral, RAAF School Penang* – "The Durian", 1977, p. 159.
[124] *Austral, RAAF School Penang* – "Makan", 1975, p. 93.
[125] *Ibid*.

Conclusion

In the late 1950s, military officials resisted pressure to establish a school staffed by Australian teachers in Penang. Instead they preferred to utilize the existing British military school system in Malaya for the education of Australian children. Sending students to British military schools offered the Department of Defence a low cost option for educating Australian children as well as avoiding the entanglements and commitments that constructing a school would inevitably involve. But as the British withdrew their support for the education of Australian children, military officials established their own facilities on Penang Island - the RAAF School Penang.

Culturally and racially, the attitudes and behaviours of students, teachers and military authorities at the RAAF Schools in Penang reflected the overall arc of Australia's engagement with Malaya, from one decidedly 'colonial' in nature in the late 1950s and early 1960s, to an engagement gradually more tolerant, accepting and empathetic. Segregated toilet and staffroom facilities for 'Asian Staff' as well as separate 'Asian Staff' photographs in the annual RAAF School magazines revealed practices and behaviours that failed to match the lofty rhetoric of 'brotherhood' and 'goodwill' contained in the school song. That these practices ceased in the early 1970s, after the British had withdrawn 'East of Suez', largely confirms Ward's argument that British actions did much to initiate Australia's changing cultural attitudes towards the 'mother country' rather than vice versa.

The gradual disappearance of many of the more overt racial distinctions around the mid-1970s also reflected the development of a changing sense of interaction with the local landscapes of Penang based on increasing racial tolerance and acceptance. These changes mirrored a combination of similar nascent developments in the attitudes and behaviours of the whole Australian population towards Asia and Asian people during this period. Indeed, highlighting this change was the very fact that, by the late 1970s, the student population of the RAAF School in Penang itself contained a number of Australian children of Asian descent.

Despite a pervasive reluctance to engage with the local peoples and cultures of Penang in the early years of the Australian presence in Malaya, Australian school children, much like their parents, proved keen observers of local festivals and customs, enthusiastic explorers of local places and curious samplers of local cuisine. Further, from the early 1960s onwards, the RAAF School in Penang, again like most of the Australian military community

in Malaya, readily engaged in sporting competitions with teams made up of local Asian competitors. For Australian students at the RAAF School, this meant competing both against and with students from other schools in Penang at regional, state and national level competitions. As the RAAF School's 'corporate' experience of inter-school rivalry and cooperation developed, these sporting engagements inevitably led to a degree of familiarity and fraternity with the local school environment in Penang. However imperfect Australia's engagement with the local peoples and cultures of Penang may have been from 1955 till 1988, the writings of students at the RAAF School highlight how interactions through sport, food and general observation were always at the forefront of the Australian experience.

Chapter Eight

The Whole Works: Life for Australians in Penang

In 1975, John J.F. Lee, a Malaysian playwright who immigrated to Australia in 1971, received a grant from the Australian Literature Board to write a play about the experiences of the Australian military community in Penang. The resulting work, *Sarong Aussies*, played briefly in 1975 at two separate drama conferences - one at the Australian National University in Canberra and the other at Flinders University in Adelaide - but has remained almost unheard of since.[1]

Sarong Aussies features three characters: Alan, a RAAF Signals Officer, Wendy, Alan's wife and the couple's Chinese servant, Ama. Both Alan and Wendy have been unfaithful while in Malaysia. Wendy is having an on-going affair with a local Chinese man, Cheng, while Alan has had a number of affairs with both local Asian women and the wives of work colleagues. The most recent of Alan's relationships is with one of his former domestic servants, who, towards the end of Act One, is in Penang General Hospital giving birth to Alan's baby.

The first act of the play provides a glimpse into the author's take on life in Penang for the majority of Australians. Having already extended his posting to Malaysia on two previous occasions, Alan has requested a further extension of another two years. Clearly, Alan loves the lifestyle in Penang and wishes to stay. The play opens with Alan sitting by the phone at his married quarters on Penang Island awaiting a response from Canberra to this latest request. In the midst of his anxiety over the pending decision, and after drinking beer all afternoon, Alan reflects on his experience in Penang by complaining to Wendy. 'I've put in seven years in the topics already', Alan grumbles,

> bashing it out in the blazing sun, suffering the heat and the mosquitoes and learning the native language, Bahasa Melayu, in my spare time to cement a good relationship between the RAAF and the natives.[2]

Rather incredulously, Wendy retorts,

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[1] John J.F. Lee, *Sarong Aussies*, unpublished manuscript, Fryer Library, University of Queensland.
[2] *Ibid*.

> Chrissake! Will you stop kidding yourself? You're not suffering man, you're having a whale of a time here in Malaysia. Beer, women, massage and song – the whole works!

At the end of Act One, Wendy also reflects on the prospect of returning to Australia. In turn her thoughts are drawn to comparisons of the lifestyles available in both Melbourne and Penang. 'Just when I feel like a woman', Wendy muses,

> back to curlers and dressing gowns and slippers potting around a flat, dumping soiled linen into washing machines, making beds, sweeping floors, running up and down to milk bars like a petty servant.[3]

Although *Sarong Aussies* largely focuses on the role that socialising and alcohol played in filling the extra leisure hours afforded to Australians by the availability of domestic help, the reality for many Australian men, women and children was far more complicated, nuanced and compartmentalised than John Lee's play suggests.

For the overwhelming majority of Australian families, a two year posting to Butterworth disconnected them almost completely from their more familiar family and community support networks back home. Indeed, adjusting to the new and different environments of Penang often increased family stress, while significant changes to social structures and domestic stability for Australian servicemen, their wives and their children, frequently led to feelings of isolation and loneliness. This is not to suggest that a posting to Butterworth was an overwhelmingly negative experience. What it does suggest, however, is that within the artificial social milieu of Penang, where lifelong friends and complete strangers were thrust together in equal measure to forge a permanent Australian community on foreign soil, life for many consisted of a wide range of experiences, both positive and negative, that intermingled in unfamiliar and complex ways. So while a posting to Butterworth cultivated expectations of adventure and excitement, the reality was often much more compartmentalised - experiences of excitement and enjoyment existed unnervingly alongside experiences of isolation and disorientation.

This chapter explores the experience of daily life in Penang for both servicemen and their families. In doing so, it focuses primarily on the social lives of Australians in Penang. As well as the particular circumstances of married and single servicemen, this chapter also examines the domestic sphere in which Australian women often experienced a range of

[3] *Ibid*.

confusing emotions as a direct result of the changed conditions within their households in Penang. Adding to this domestic dissonance, many Australian housewives further felt burdened by a heightened sense of expectation regarding their comportment as 'unofficial ambassadors' in Malaysia. This tension between Penang as a site of compartmentalised experiences - some adventurous and exciting, others formal and panoptic, and yet others isolating and lonely - is the focus of this chapter.

By exploring the day-to-day interactions between the Australian military community and the local peoples and cultures of Penang, this chapter further differentiates between the colonial rhetoric and practices that dominated the early thinking of officials and the far more complex and nuanced experiences of individual Australians in Penang.

Life and Death for Australians in Penang

With no elderly component, death touched the Australian community in Penang only in the most tragic of circumstances. At the RAAF base at Butterworth, the inherent dangers of military aviation caused a number of deaths among the Australian community. The deaths of FLGOFF M.V. Curtis in June 1961 and FLTLT R.E. Orford in September 1962 have already been noted in the preface of this work. On 4 May 1972, almost ten years after these first two fatal aircraft crashes at Butterworth, FLGOFF L.M. "Lloyd" Smith failed to return to base at the expected time in his *Mirage* fighter after a routine night flying exercise.[4] Two days later, on 6 May, a search and rescue helicopter located the wreckage of the *Mirage* on Gunung Tahan, or Mount Tahan, the highest mountain on the Malay Peninsula, where it was confirmed that Smith had not ejected prior to impact.[5]

On 6 July 1976, FLGOFF P. "Perry" Kelly of No.3 SQN was killed just prior to take-off when his *Mirage*, A3-26, was struck by another *Mirage* as it was coming in to land. Because this accident occurred on the base during working hours, a number of Australian airmen and officers witnessed the accident first-hand. As such, the tragedy of Kelly's death had a significant emotional impact on the whole community. On 29 October 1982, another Australian pilot from No.75 SQN, FLGOFF C. "Cliff" Simmonds, was killed after his *Mirage*, A2-32, crashed into the sea off Penang during a night flying exercise.

[4] No.3 Squadron Unit History Sheets, May 1972, Box 4, A9186, NAA.
[5] *Ibid*.

Figure 8.1. Gravestone of FLTLT R.E. Offord at Western Road Cemetery on Penang Island (author's image).

In all of these cases, the aftermath of the crashes emphasized the vagaries of isolation in Penang for Australian families. In addition to tending to the crash-site, formally investigating the events of the accident and arranging for the burial or repatriation of the pilot's body, the family of the pilot required significant on-going financial, administrative and emotional support. If a pilot was married, his wife faced a range of added administrative details and physical burdens which further complicated an already difficult experience. Over and above the normal grieving process, children needed to be withdrawn from school in Penang and the family needed to be physically relocated back to Australia.

Other serious aircraft accidents at Butterworth, while not fatal, serve to highlight the nexus between the dangers of military flying and the relaxed, almost festive, nature of the Australian lifestyle in Penang. On 22 July 1960, two *Sabres* from No.77 Squadron collided at 42,000 feet.[6] One aircraft, A94-961, flown by FLGOFF Bartrop, exploded soon after the pilot had safely ejected, while the other aircraft, A94-976, hit the ground 'reasonably intact' after its pilot, FLTLT Worth, had also safely ejected. Search and Rescue aircraft quickly located both pilots but, as Worth had come down in dense jungle, they were only able to pick up Bartrop. As a ground party could not reach Worth until the following morning, it was decided that food, torches, a sleeping bag, beer and cigarettes would be dropped by helicopter to the downed pilot. After ejecting from an aircraft following a mid-air collision at 42,000 feet and spending two nights in the jungle, No.77 Squadron unit history sheets recorded that 'Flight Lieutenant Worth was transported back to Base by chopper. He was found to be 100 per cent fit and was soon sampling the ale in the Mess'.[7]

[6] No.77 Squadron Unit History Sheets, July 1960, Box 106, A9186, NAA.
[7] *Ibid*.

Another serious incident occurred some three years later which elicited a similar nonchalant response. On 19 December 1963, after experiencing multiple system failures, including the loss of hydraulic pressure, electrical failure, and finally a total loss of control of his aircraft, FLGOFF Norworthy was forced to eject from his *Sabre*, A94-947. Recording the day's activities in his unit's historical record, the chroniclers at No.3 Squadron, perhaps rather illuminatingly, chose to record the two important events that occurred that day. No.3 Squadron's unit history sheet for the day noted that following his safe ejection, Norswothy's aircraft 'crashed into the sea approximately 10 miles north of Penang … the pilot was uninjured … the Squadron Christmas Party was held in the flight hut during the PM hours'.[8]

While aircraft accidents, and the tragic deaths that accompanied them, were an inherent component of military aviation, other instances of loss owed their causes to the specific circumstances and environment of Penang. By far and away the most dangerous activity for Australians living in Penang involved driving on the roads of Malaysia and Singapore. Several motor vehicle accidents, especially those involving young Australian males riding motorcycles in the early hours of the morning and their subsequent impact on the work-load of No.4 RAAF Hospital, have already been discussed in Chapter 6. But before the RAAF hospital had even opened in March 1965, serious road accidents had already taken the lives of a number of Australians in Penang.

On 26 July 1959, two young Australian airmen, Leading Aircraftsman (LAC) W. Duffy and LAC J. Lawson, died of head injuries as a result of a motorcycle accident at twenty past three in the morning.[9] The senior medical officer noted that 'had they been wearing helmets at least one would not have been severely injured'.[10] Only six months prior to the deaths of Duffy and Lawson, another road accident had taken the lives of three Australians. On 14 December 1958, on the road between Butterworth and Taiping, a car driven by Australian Army Sergeant M. Ryan crashed into an electric light pole in the early hours of the morning. Of the six Australians in the car, Sergeant Ryan, his wife and the wife of Private Muscat died instantly while the remaining three passengers, Lance Corporal Wheway, his wife and Lance Corporal McKellar were admitted to the British Military

[8] No.3 Squadron Unit History Sheets, December 1963.
[9] Monthly Medical Reports and Medical Aspects – No.2 ACS Malaya, July 1959, A705 – 132/2/960 Part 1, NAA.
[10] *Ibid*.

Hospital in Taiping with serious injuries. The funerals for Sergeant Ryan, Mrs Ryan and Mrs Muscat were held at the Taiping Military Cemetery the next day.

From 1955 to 1988, base police at Butterworth also reported on a number of serious traffic accidents involving Australian servicemen which resulted in the deaths of local civilians. In one particularly intense period, between February 1971 and August 1971, Australian servicemen were involved in at least six serious road accidents in which local civilians either died or suffered severe injuries. In February 1971, for example, base police noted that,

> twelve reports of traffic accidents were submitted. No RAAF members were seriously injured in any of the incidents however one report concerned the death of an Asian on a bicycle after a collision with an airman in a car at the Butterworth traffic lights.[11]

Three months later, base police again reported on the death of a local civilian after being involved in an accident with a RAAF airman. This time the report noted that 'charges of reckless driving and driving without a license are being brought against' the airman involved.[12] Less than two months later, in July 1971, another report recorded that 'in one accident' this month, 'an Asian was killed when two motorcycles collided … no fatalities or serious injuries were received by RAAF members and only minor damage occurred to the vehicles involved'.[13] A few weeks later, in August 1971, base police investigated a 'traffic accident involving a RAAF member' and an 'Asian pedestrian' in which the 'Asian was killed'.[14]

A number of Australians also lost their lives in road accidents whilst deployed away from Butterworth. In one incident in March 1980, two *Mirage* fighter pilots from No.75 Squadron died in a car accident in Singapore whilst both were on temporary attachment to the Royal Singaporean Air Force Base at Tengah. The brother of one of the RAAF pilots, who had suffered serious injuries in the accident, passed away a week later in hospital. A third Australian pilot and two women travelling in the same car were also seriously injured, but managed to survive. Following the death of her husband, the wife of one of the deceased pilots was repatriated back to Australia from the family married quarters in Penang.

[11] RAAF Butterworth Commanding Officers' Monthly Reports, February 1971, Box 75, A9435, NAA.
[12] RAAF Butterworth Commanding Officers' Monthly Reports, March 1971.
[13] RAAF Butterworth Commanding Officers' Monthly Reports, July 1971.
[14] RAAF Butterworth Commanding Officers' Monthly Reports, August 1971.

According to the official record, between 1955 and 1988, at least 20 members of the Australian military community, eighteen of them servicemen, lost their lives in motor vehicle accidents on the roads of Penang. Hundreds more sustained serious injuries. With a number of gaps in the official record, it is almost certain that the actual number of Australian deaths on the roads of Malaysia and Singapore is considerably higher than the above figures. It is also almost certainly the case that the number of locals killed or seriously injured as a result of accidents with Australians on the roads of Penang is significantly higher than the limited number of examples available in the official record.

Away from the roads, a number of Australians lost their lives in other difficult circumstances while on a posting to Butterworth. The popularity of water activities, such as swimming and boating, saw several accidental deaths occur as a result of drowning. In the mid-1960s, one RAAF LAC and one RAF LAC drowned after their boat ran out of fuel and capsized in choppy conditions as it was returning to the RAAF Yacht Club. Both of the men who died had only flimsy ski jackets for buoyancy and neither could swim. The sole survivor of the incident, another RAAF airman, swam to shore as quickly as he could but by the time he had returned with another boat, the other two men had already drowned.

In November 1970, another Australian airman died in a boating accident while participating in the annual Pesta Pulau Pinang festivities.[15] In yet another case, on 6 November 1976, LAC M.I. Smith of No.478 Squadron was reported missing after falling from a fishing vessel off Penang Island.[16] Less than a week later, and after an exhaustive search, Smith was officially declared 'Missing Presumed Dead'.[17] And at the very popular Penang Swimming Club, not far from where the majority of Australians lived on Penang Island, tragedy struck on 6 February 1972 when Nicole Anne Wood, the two year old daughter of Sergeant B.J. Wood, drowned in a heart-breaking accident at the pool.[18] A funeral for Nicole was held a week later in Sydney on 12 February 1972.

When the decision was made to permanently garrison a large military force on the Malay Peninsula in 1955, Australian politicians and senior military commanders approached the deployment with many of the same anxieties that had plagued past generations of colonial 'Europeans' bound for Asian shores. As discussed in Chapter 2, the 'enervating' effects of

[15] RAAF Butterworth Commanding Officers' Monthly Reports, November 1970.
[16] No.478 Squadron Unit History Sheets, November 1976, Box 156, A9186, NAA.
[17] *Ibid*.
[18] No.478 Squadron Unit History Sheets, February 1972.

the tropical climate on the 'European' constitution, the prevalence of diseases not common in Australia and a lack of hygiene and general cleanliness all concerned senior officials eager to quarantine the Australian community from the perceived potential dangers arising from residing in an Asian environment. But in contrast to these initial fears, very few Australians succumbed to the enervating effects of the tropical climate, died of strange tropical diseases or experienced any particular 'health' problems adapting to the changed circumstances of hygiene and cleanliness in Penang. Although, as the above examples suggest, life in Malaysia was not without its own unique dangers for individual Australians, they were often not the ones originally anticipated by the colonial reckonings of senior officials.

Sport, Clubs and the Experience of Australian Men in Penang

In many colonial discourses, men often appear as the most conspicuous beneficiaries of the vast array of largely masculine opportunities offered by colonial lifestyles. In 1912, speaking of the British experience in Malaya, Noel Walker wrote that 'there is no doubt that as soon as a man arrived in Malaya his ideas of what he cannot do without becomes very much enlarged'.[19] To an American visitor to British Malaya in the late 1930s, the noticeable thing was not so much 'how few Europeans lived luxuriously, but how few did not'.[20] In accordance with this colonial discourse, most Australian men posted to Butterworth from 1955 onwards continued to draw upon these traditional colonial concepts of adventure, opportunity and 'old boy' homo-social culture.

Of all the different sectors of the Australian community that rotated through Penang, married men had the least number of adjustments to make in the new environments of Malaya. Indeed, for the majority of married men posted to Butterworth, all of the benefits bequeathed by the 'colonial' legacies of life for a 'European' in British Malaya blended seamlessly into their quotidian working schedules to make life in Penang an overwhelmingly rewarding and enjoyable experience. In general, Australian married men not only retained much of their personal sense of identity and purpose through their continued employment stability as either an officer or airman in the RAAF, but they additionally enjoyed a working

[19] John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya 1880-1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 84.
[20] Margaret Shennan, *Out in the Midday Sun: The British in Malaya, 1880-1960* (London: John Murray, 2000), p. 114.

environment at the Butterworth base that was more operationally focused than at home and, at the same time, one that was both more relaxed and friendly.

For some Australian airmen, a posting to Butterworth provided them with unique workplace experiences and satisfactions that were not available back in Australia. One striking example is that of members of the RAAF Police. In Australia, most RAAF policemen were treated with 'caution', the terms 'spits' and 'screws' being just two of the derogatory descriptions which other RAAF personnel often used to label them.[21] Consequently, as one RAAF policemen recalled, on Australian bases most RAAF policemen felt the need to isolate themselves from other RAAF personnel and instead often socialised solely among themselves.

In Penang, however, more positive perceptions of RAAF policemen enabled them to more fully integrate into the wider RAAF community. The higher profile duties of a RAAF policeman in Penang, including acting as a liaison between RAAF families and the local police, sorting domestic disputes, killing snakes that strayed into married quarters, patrolling housing areas day and night, and removing drunken airmen and soldiers from local bars and clubs, all enhanced the profile and status of RAAF policemen at Butterworth. The change in perception, one RAAF policeman recalled, was so 'profound' that it was only whilst posted to Butterworth that he felt comfortable 'freely mixing' with other RAAF personnel and their families.

Professional stability and workplace satisfaction while at Butterworth provided a solid platform from which most Australian married servicemen were then able to enjoy the added benefits that life in Penang offered. The experience of workplace camaraderie, perhaps heightened by the opportunities provided for after work refreshments in the tropical climate, provided a measure of social and cultural stability for Australian men that was not available to other members of the Australian community. With their professional satisfaction left relatively unchanged, or indeed enhanced, by their posting to Butterworth, the majority of married Australian servicemen were then able to sample the tourist experiences on offer in Penang in their own time and with a general feeling of self-control. Whether it was after work drinks at a local bar in Georgetown, a social function at the Australian Hostel, a weekend drive around Penang Island, a visit to local temples, beaches, restaurants or just a quiet Sunday afternoon at home with the family, a posting to Butterworth for most married

[21] Questionnaire Response, CPL, Base SQN: Jul 1981-Dec 1983.

servicemen combined a large degree of domestic stability and professional satisfaction with all the added 'touristic' benefits of living on Penang Island.

Absence from the familiar sporting landscapes of Australia also proved to be of no particular loss for the majority of Australian servicemen. As the *RAAF News* reported in June 1962, the 'Australians who have lived on Penang during their tours here since the RAAF moved its jet fighters and bombers into Butterworth in 1958' have embraced the 'world of the sporting clubs around which revolves much of the social life in this tight-knit community'.[22] RAAF members and their families, the article continued,

> who joined the clubs during their time here have replaced most of the European membership lost in the normal process of Malayanization [sic] of Government and commercial posts since the forming of the Federation of Malaya in 1957. And they have embraced club life not only as active members but as committeemen. Main arenas for this Australian drive and enthusiasm are Penang's Swimming Club, Golf Club and Sports Club.[23]

Given the cohort of Australian men most likely to have pursued careers in the RAAF in the first place, ready access to the sporting facilities and clubs of Penang made a posting to Butterworth a much more appealing prospect for the majority of Australian men.

Australians not only became valued members of existing sporting clubs in Penang, but they also began establishing a number of their own clubs and facilities. In the mid-1960s, on a section of reclaimed swamp land on the Butterworth base, a number of enthusiastic golfers constructed a nine-hole golf course and clubhouse. The RAAF Butterworth Golf Club, in addition to the Cricket Club and Rugby Club, continued to grow in popularity throughout the three decade Australian presence in Penang. Volunteers drawn from the Butterworth base also established a tennis club, a squash club, a motor club and, at the airport on the southern tip of Penang Island, a flying club.

By the early 1970s, Australians from the Butterworth base had established the only lawn bowls club in Malaysia: the Sergeants' Mess Bowling Club. With a small clubhouse and bowling facilities, the club hosted both competition and social lawn bowls events up to five days a week.[24] Perhaps the most successful sporting club, however, was the RAAF Butterworth Yacht Club. Established in 1958 by No.2 Airfield Construction Squadron, the club began renting a small shack on the Butterworth beach front just to the north of where

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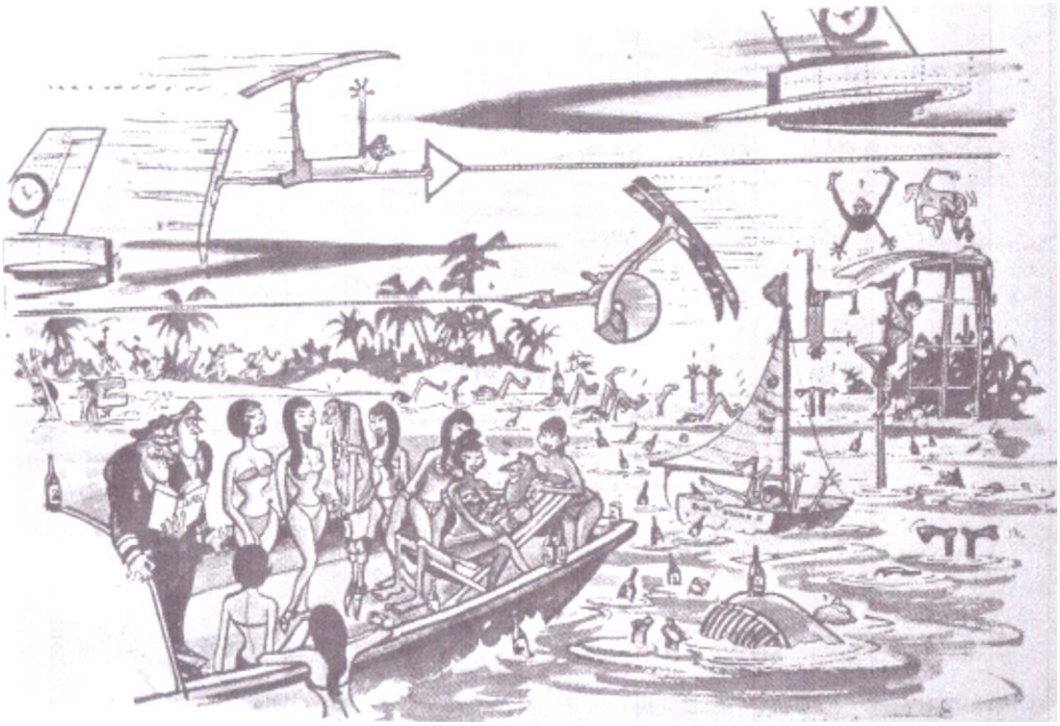
[22] *RAAF News*, June 1962, p. 4.
[23] *Ibid*.
[24] *RAAF News*, March 1981, Vol. 23, No. 2, p. 7.

No.4 RAAF Hospital was eventually established. By 1973, the beachside clubhouse of the Yacht Club, or 'The Boatie' as it was affectionately known, had surpassed the combined revenues of both the Officers' Mess and Sergeants' Mess.[25]



Impressions of 'The Boatie' at Butterworth by famed Australian cartoonist 'Rigby'. The original sketch hung in the clubhouse – although most members of the club 'modestly' averred that life in Penang was 'not quite like this'. (*RAAF News*, March 1973, Vol. 15, No. 2, p. 6.)

Alongside enabling Australian men to better cope with the adjustments of life in Penang, sporting and recreational clubs provided an opportunity to interact with similarly minded people from the local area. Although most of the clubs established by the Australian community catered predominantly to the sensibilities of an Australian membership, many clubs did invite guests from the local Asian communities. In 1964, the Penang Flying Club had 36 members, only half of whom were RAAF personnel, the rest being RAF personnel and interested local civilians.[26] In 1968, the RAAF Butterworth Motor Club organised a number of motor vehicle activities, such as motorcycle and car races, rally days, go-kart events as well as 'film nights, barbecues and beach picnics' for its membership of 'about 150' which included 'over 50 Malaysians'.[27] Some clubs not only invited local Asian members but instead depended entirely on them for the club's successful operation. In the early 1960s,

[25] *RAAF News*, March 1973, Vol. 15, No. 15, p. 6.
[26] *RAAF News*, November 1964, Vol. 6, No. 10.
[27] *RAAF News*, January-February 1968, Vol. 10, No. 1.

several Australian airmen formed the RAAF Butterworth Ju-Jutsu Club with a Malayan instructor, Kam Hock Hoe. Although most servicemen had no Ju-Jutsu experience prior to their Butterworth posting, by 1962, a total of six Australian members of the RAAF Butterworth Ju-Jutsu Club had returned home with Black Belts.[28]

As Australian led sporting clubs entered local sporting leagues or arranged social competitions with local organisations, the frequency and familiarity of interactions with the local Asian communities of Penang expanded. In 1966, the RAAF Butterworth Tennis Team concluded a successful year when they captured the Heah Swee Lee Cup from the previous year's champions, the Chinese Recreation Club.[29] In another example, once a year, at the invitation of the Perak Yacht Club, members from the RAAF Butterworth Yacht Club sailed over 100 miles south to Lumut to take part in the annual Lumut Pesta Laut or Lumut Water Festival.[30] The two day festival at Lumut culminated in a 26 mile race around Pangkor Island, won in 1972 by an Australian officer, Wing Commander Peter Scully, in his boat *Valkyrie*.

The effectiveness of sport as a catalyst to encourage interaction between the Australian community and the local Asian communities of Penang led to a number of high profile competitions being established. Beginning in 1969, the RAAF Butterworth Golf Club organised an annual 'home and away' competition with a team from the Kelab Golf Club of Perlis, the most northerly state in Malaysia. From the mid-1970s, with his son as the club president, His Royal Highness, the Raja of Perlis often played in the annual fixture against the Australians.[31] Indeed, in 1972, the RAAF Butterworth Golf Club team took lunch at the Palace of the Raja of Perlis prior to being beaten on the golf course by a team lead by the Raja himself. To what extent the Raja's pre-match hospitality influenced the performance of the Australian golf team in this instance can only be imagined, but certainly references to pre-match tactics do feature in several accounts of this annual fixture.

Sport not only played a pivotal social role for the majority of Australian men posted to Butterworth, but additionally, for a few gifted athletes, excelling on the sporting fields of Penang also translated into national honours. In 1961, Sergeant (SGT) Ray Milner, of Highett in Victoria and a former Melbourne 'A' grade cricket player, became the captain of

[28] *RAAF News*, May 1962.
[29] *RAAF News*, January-February 1966.
[30] *RAAF News*, March 1973, Vol. 15, No. 15, p. 6.
[31] *RAAF News*, October 1972, Vol. 14, No. 9.

the Penang State Cricket side in the Malayan national competition.[32] In 1961 the *RAAF News* also reported that SGT Larry Wright and SGT Ron Pflugrath had won the Penang Lawn Tennis Men's Doubles, the 'first time since 1928 that two Europeans had won the title'.[33] In another such example, in 1968, the RAAF Butterworth squash team emerged victorious in the All-Malaysian squash championships played at Ipoh. And much to the mirth of all concerned, in 1974, in a trisha bought to take back to Australia as a souvenir, LAC Steve Taylor of Toowoomba in Queensland became the celebrated runner-up in the local Penang Trishaw Grand Prix conducted around the island.

By joining, establishing, operating and, at times, controlling clubs that reflected their sporting and recreational interests, Australian men at Butterworth consciously fashioned an environment in Penang that met the majority of their own personal, social, sporting and recreational needs. In doing so, Australian men not only demonstrated the possibilities available to them to create and govern their own social lives in Penang, but, more importantly, it highlighted their ability and determination to successfully explore those opportunities. Just as professional stability and increased workplace satisfaction enabled Australian servicemen to more easily adjust to living conditions in Penang, the opportunity to liberally indulge in a variety of sporting and leisure pursuits further enhanced the chances that their overall experiences were largely positive.

Even with the benefits of organised sport and social clubs, however, unmarried Australian servicemen posted to Butterworth, without the support of a stable domestic situation, faired considerably worse than their married counterparts. The difficulties faced by the single servicemen of No.2 ACS, posted to Butterworth to build the airstrip in the late 1950s, have already been noted in Chapter Three. Although the overwhelming majority of RAAF airmen and officers subsequently posted to Butterworth in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s were married and accompanied by their families, a small number of single RAAF and Army personnel continued to reside within the Australian community. For some of these men, life in Penang continued to be a struggle with loneliness and boredom.

As late as 1984, the Commanding Officer of No.4 RAAF Hospital, WGCDR Rodney Fawcett, was still emphasising the added complications encountered by single servicemen, the majority of whom, he noted, 'often find it difficult to adjust to the lifestyle here at

[32] *RAAF News*, June 1961, Vol. 3, No. 7, p. 8.
[33] *RAAF News*, September 1961, Vol. 3, No. 10, p. 8.

Butterworth'.[34] Similarly, in 1985, the Australian Red Cross Field Force Officer attached to the RAAF Hospital at Butterworth noted that her duties often included visiting single RAAF and Army servicemen posted to Butterworth, who 'especially needed someone to talk to about everyday things as they have no family support and very little chance to make friends outside their work environment'.[35] While the difficulties for single servicemen were often manageable, at least one Australian airman, following the demise of a long-distance relationship, took his own life while posted to Butterworth.

The overall situation for married men, and to a lesser extent, single servicemen, on a two year stint in Penang, however, differed remarkably from that of most Australian women. For their part, Australian women sampled the adventures, pleasures and delights of Penang in much the same way as their husbands. They joined sporting and recreation clubs, they enjoyed the sights, sounds and foods of Malaya and they socialised with their husbands at both official and non-official functions while posted to Butterworth. In fact, many of the experiences which made life so enjoyable for Australian men in Penang also touched the lives of Australian women in largely positive ways. But the major difference between the experiences of men and women was that the positive experiences of life in Penang for Australian women were intertwined with a number of negative experiences that failed to trouble the lives of the vast majority of Australian servicemen. For the majority of women accompanying their husbands on a posting to Butterworth, the experience of life in Penang was much more compartmentalised, with the highs of socialising, adventure and travel mixing unnervingly with the lows of isolation, loneliness and, at times, depression.

Domestic Life in Penang for Australian Families

In an effort to underscore how imperial life allowed them to live 'in a manner well above the station from which they had sprung in England', Francis Hutchins went so far as to describe some sectors of the British community in India as constituting a 'middle-class aristocracy'.[36] Factors such as grander accommodations, a strict observance of haughty etiquette and social manners, exclusive clubs, and the presence of large retinues of servants in colonial environments not only served as physical and psychological mechanisms to reinforce notions of imperial prestige but also directly impacted on the manner in which women experienced

[34] Minute 4HOSP 12/1/AIR (27), 28 May 1984, Australian Red Cross Society Archives (hereafter ARCS).
[35] Loose Report, 28 March 1985, ARCS Archives.
[36] *Ibid*.

the colonial environment. As Stanford has pointed out of the British experience in India, 'the menial tasks of washing, cooking and cleaning, unheard of for any lady in Victorian England', were 'almost unthinkable' for *any* British woman in India.[37]

Like their British predecessors, Australian families received a number of advantages while posted to Butterworth which were not available on a normal posting back home in Australia. They received better access to medical and dental facilities than they would have received at home; they enjoyed membership to exclusive facilities, clubs and bars that in many cases did not even exist at home; and they were also paid a number of allowances that their military counterparts back in Australia did not receive. Many Australians also found that the purchasing power of their disposable income was much higher in Malaysia than back in Australia. In a short radio documentary on the experience of the RAAF at Butterworth, made for Sydney's 2SM radio station in the early 1970s, Jeffery James claimed that every single Australian adult he had interviewed had acknowledged that the standard of living for Australians in Penang was much higher than at home in Australia.[38] But for women in colonial environments, and in this case – Australian women in post-colonial Malaya, the addition of many of these 'lifestyle' luxuries did not always add up to an enhanced life.

Examples of both the physical and psychological hardships facing women in the colonies litter colonial discourse. In the late nineteenth century, the wife of a colonial administrator in the remote regions of western Malaya, Emily Innes, complained bitterly of 'the crushing monotony of her life'.[39] One British housewife living in Singapore in the interwar years expressed her predicament thus,

> Life, for the women, means sitting in the house, alone … How to fill the days, how to make life profitable and satisfying, how to adjust yourself to a climate from which there is no escape, no let up, no time ahead when it will be cooler, more bearable. It is the monotony, partly, that gets on your nerves.[40]

As Stanford has noted, women in the colonies always had 'a great deal of time on their hands in which to brood about the heat and the futility of their lives'.[41] And while life for Australian women posted to Butterworth in the post-war period offered far more

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[37] J.K. Stanford, *Ladies in the Sun: The Memsahibs' India, 1790-1860* (London: The Galley Press, 1962), p. 132.
[38] 'Sky High: a radio documentary on the experience of the RAAF at Butterworth', Item# 582284, NFSA.
[39] John Gullick, *Adventurous Women in Southeast Asia: Six Lives* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 147.
[40] Shennan, *Out in the Midday Sun*, p. 198.
[41] Stanford, *Ladies in the Sun*, p. 127.

opportunities for informal socialising, sport and recreation than the haughty social etiquettes of their British predecessors had allowed, the dual weights of idleness and futility still adversely impacted the lives of many of them.

On paper, many of the colonial legacies influencing the organisation of the domestic sphere appeared attractive, or at the very least novel, to Australia women. In practice, however, their actual impact on the way women experienced a posting to Butterworth was far more complicated. The compulsory allocation of a set number of domestic servants to each Australian household based on military rank stands out as one of the most significant adjustments for women in Penang. In 1977, Ruth Shultz of class 2P at the RAAF School Annexe explained her view of the domestic advantages of life with servants in Malaya:

> At home in Australia you don't have any amahs. Amahs are people who work for you, so mummy does not have to do all the work in the house. They strip the beds, sweep the floor and wash up the dishes, do the washing and cook the meals, and look after us, when mum and dad go out, so you don't have to go next door.[42]

Stephen White of 3B stated much the same thing when he simply noted that 'amahs help you clean the floor … they wash the dishes and get paid money … my amah's name is Mary'.[43]

Differences in the experiences of Australian men and women while posted to Butterworth largely stemmed from disruptions in the domestic sphere. Recognising the difficulties of relocation, the existing Australian community in Penang often went to great lengths to make the transition to life in Malaya as smooth as possible for new arrivals. As early as January 1962, the wives of RAAF members at Butterworth had formed a voluntary welcoming committee to greet Australian families. The brainchild of Mrs Ruth Bishop, who understood the 'problems of new arrivals' first hand, the 'Family Information Service' met new Australian families on arrival, took them to their new homes, introduced them to their neighbours and even provided a package containing food and other domestic necessities, including 'half-a-dozen coldies for dad' in the fridge.[44]

In later years, as the routines of relocation and settling-in became familiar to many within the RAAF, Australian families often received similar, albeit less formal, welcomes from friends and work colleagues already living in Penang. Long-time family friends already posted to Butterworth, one questionnaire participant noted, helped smooth their introduction

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[42] *Austral, RAAF School Penang*, 1977, p. 156.
[43] *Ibid*.
[44] *RAAF News*, April 1962, p. 2.

to the foreign environments of Penang in 1971. In addition to the rather essential 'half-a-dozen coldies for dad' in the fridge, at the time of their arrival, their friends had already enrolled all the children at the RAAF School, had organised a weekly delivery of groceries and had arranged for a 'quality' amah to begin work the next day.[45]

As beneficial as these formal welcomes were, they failed to completely alleviate the sense of strangeness felt by most Australian families arriving in Penang. For women, the idea of having domestic servants prompted as much disquiet as it did enthusiasm. In the late 1950s, newly married Beth Johnson, on hearing that each officer's family was obliged to have two servants, expressed her dismay at the thought of being 'cheated of the chance to keep house for the first time'.[46] In the early 1970s, one Australian woman spent her first two days in Penang sitting on the lounge, entirely unsure about what to do or how to interact with her allocated amah.[47] Although the very thought of servants and the awkward first few encounters unnerved some Australian women, the longer term reality of domestic help meant that many women felt a loss of privacy and control within a sphere that contemporary reckoning often dictated should be the source of much of their personal sense of identity and worth. In turn, this caused some women to feel physically lost within the very confines of their own home.

Strategies for dealing with the new realities of domestic servants in Penang varied from family to family. With domestic duties such as cooking and cleaning being largely completed by servants, many Australian women looked to keep themselves busy with other, non-domestic responsibilities. One group of Australian women formed the RAAF Wives Club, who occupied their time in Penang by 'doing voluntary work among the local community' and visiting 'handicap homes, crippled children's homes and the Malaysian Red Cross'.[48] In later years, many Australian women assisted teachers at the RAAF schools, either in the classroom, during sporting carnivals and social events or helping each day to make lunches at the school canteen. And from 1960 onwards, a significant number of Australian women contributed to the establishment and operation of the local RAAF Radio Station, the veritable 'voice of the RAAF' in Malaya.

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[45] Questionnaire Response, Wife, Sept 1972-Mar 1975.
[46] Len and Beth Johnson, *Malayan Adventure: An Australian Army Family in Malaya during the Emergency* (Brisbane: Longleat House Publishing, 2008), p. 52.
[47] Private conversation, Judith Radcliffe, 23 July 2011.
[48] ARC Field Force Officer's Report, February 1976, Box No.33, 107, ARCS Archives.

Attempts to occupy themselves by volunteering to help the less fortunate succeeded for some Australian women in Penang, but for others these forays into social work merely disguised more fundamental issues. In an interview on RAAF Radio Butterworth in the late 1970s, Dr Peter Gauvin, an Australian psychiatric consultant visiting the Butterworth base, commented on the number of Australian women seeking psychiatric treatment.[49] Dr Gauvin speculated that many of his female patients felt a lack of control, purpose and meaning in their lives in Penang. He noted that some of these women had given up employment in Australia to accompany their husbands to Malaysia, while others, stay-at-home mothers, felt a similar sense of dissonance at losing their sense of identity and purpose within the domestic sphere.

Other organisational and structural circumstances within the Australian community in Penang also contributed to a sense of personal loss for Australian women. Although most Australian military families were accustomed to the emotional upheavals associated with residential instability and frequent postings, the pervasiveness of the military's homogenizing character in Penang further worked to suffocate any sense of individualism or autonomy for women within the domestic sphere. Not only were most RAAF families in Penang forced to live within the RAAF housing estates, or married 'patches', but their children all attended the same RAAF schools. Further, shopping, social functions and leisure activities were mostly organised with members of other Australian families. Even the furniture found in RAAF homes was a standard military issue and therefore largely identical. In a community which prized conformity and regulation, the experience of a posting to Penang only further emphasized the pervasiveness of military influence within the domestic sphere for Australian women posted to Butterworth with their husbands.

One overall result of the domineering nature of military administration on the lives of Australian families was that women found themselves indirectly incorporated within the military structure, albeit only awkwardly. While living in Penang, Australian women were allocated identity cards which duly noted their marginalised status as 'dependents'. They discursively fell under the disciplinary structures of the military administration and they were largely expected to comply with both the social traditions and military etiquettes that governed the progress of their husband's service career. As semi-official ambassadors in a foreign land, women were also formally asked to support both the military objectives of the

[49] Interview by K Shmyt with Dr Peter Gauvin, Item #4608650, NFSA.

RAAF presence at Butterworth as well as to represent the Australian nation in more general terms. In other words, women occupied an uncomfortable position on the peripheries of the Australian military presence in Penang which required them to adopt a dutiful attitude in privileging and supporting the overall military needs of the RAAF while at the same time being afforded no official recognition or value for doing so.

In contrast to their husbands, the RAAF offered little structural support for Australian women in Penang. Despite being posted to a foreign environment, servicemen continued to *belong* in a variety of ways within the formal and informal structures of RAAF life that had no equivalent for Australian women. In the most general sense, servicemen wore a uniform and fitted into a rank structure within a military environment which signified their membership of the RAAF or Army. Within the official structure of the services, each servicemen *belonged* to unit or a section as well as to a mess with other men of an equivalent rank. Servicemen could equally identify other men of their chosen mustering or profession. In each case, material displays of this *belonging* were marked with badges, identification cards, rank slides, medals and other official military insignia. In other words, Australian servicemen *belonged* in a variety of formal ways within the general structure of service life.

Within the informal sphere of military life, servicemen also found spaces of *belonging* among their work colleagues that were not shared by their spouses. Unit and section social clubs not only held functions, parties and sporting events for their members, but offered a range of associated paraphernalia to further bolster the value of membership among incorporated servicemen. Informal badges, branded beer coasters and coolers, caps, shirts and any number of other items marking membership and belonging were sold within these informal groupings. Although these clubs were not entirely divorced from service life and military discipline, servicemen could chose the extent to which they wished to indulge in membership. In any case, service life involved a range of *belonging* which eased the shock of adjusting to new environments, including the foreign surroundings of Penang for Australian servicemen. Their wives, on the other hand, were offered no such supporting mechanisms.

While most Australian women performed their expected roles and duties with the stoic attitude generally associated with military life, others encountered more difficulty in coping with the added traumas of life in a foreign landscape. In 1981, a reservist psychiatric consultant visiting the Butterworth base, Dr R. Milton, provided the hospital's matron, WGCDR Dean, with basic training in two different forms of 'Relaxation Therapy' with the

sole aim of helping out the wives of Australian servicemen struggling to cope with adjusting to life in Penang. This training was deemed necessary so that WGCDR Dean could continue to help the numerous Australian women presenting at the hospital with mild anxiety issues after Dr Milton had returned home to Australia.

In short, many Australian women felt that, although a posting to Butterworth offered opportunities for travel, a comfortable lifestyle with domestic help and an almost endless list of social events to attend, they had simply 'lost control of their lives' in Penang. For some, this sense of a 'loss of control' translated directly into bouts of anxiety and nervousness. In 1982, one ARC Field Force Officer attached to No.4 RAAF Hospital observed that she saw 'numerous cases of wives unable to cope' due to having too much 'ample spare time' in Malaysia.[50] 'You find many depressives', continued the Red Cross Field Officer's report, who were 'basically suffering from fear of going out in a foreign country, boredom, and loneliness'.[51]

In an interview on RAAF Radio Butterworth, Dr Gauvin also speculated on a number of additional contributing factors that led Australian women to feel 'lost' in Penang. Dr Gauvin mentioned that every single Australian female patient that visited him had mentioned a lack of privacy as one of the more uncomfortable realities of life in Penang. The female interviewer noted that, from her own personal experience, 'life at Butterworth is like living in a fish bowl as everybody knows exactly what you're doing all the time'.[52] In December 1984, the ARC Field Force Officer attached to the No.4 RAAF Hospital similarly reported that,

> During the month I have been approached by two RAAF members with major problems. Thankfully I have been able to guide them towards professional help. I have had a number of sessions with members with minor problems who really just needed to talk to someone who is not seen as 'part of the system'. The isolation of this base causes problems and the fact there is no 'outside' help such as community groups, family and non-RAAF friends exacerbates the situation.[53]

So while a certain amount of bonding between women posted to Butterworth provided general succour in the face of practical problems such as, in the words of Beth Johnson, 'the illness of our children' and 'the loneliness of isolation in a strange country', the price to be paid was often in privacy and discretion. In other words, the exigencies of adjusting to the

[50] Loose handwritten notes, Box #33, 101, ARCS Archives.
[51] *Ibid*.
[52] Interview by K Shmyt with Dr Peter Gauvin, Item #4608650, NFSA.
[53] ARC Field Force Officer's Report, December 1984, Box #33, 209, ARCS Archives.

practical realities of life on a posting to Butterworth came with a parallel consequence of sacrificing a certain degree of privacy and identity to the whims of the tight-knit Australian community in Penang.

Lack of privacy and the overbearing influence of military administration on the lives of Australian families in Penang also involved an element of what Foucault referred to as 'panoptic discipline'.[54] In this slightly darker reading of what it means to be a member of a 'tight-knit' military community, social control and the forced normalisation of individual attitudes and behaviours is facilitated through an unrelenting and objectifying scrutiny, largely made possible by a complete lack of privacy. Panoptic discipline ensures that community members each conform to a particular way of life or risk the indignation of peers or the ire of military officials. While living in Penang, the wives of Australian servicemen keenly felt both a lack of real privacy and the subsequent pressure to strictly perform identities appropriate to their husband's rank and status within the military community. For some Australian women, these circumstances combined to produce a profound sense of disorientation.

As late as 1985, as the RAAF was in the process of drawing down its large operational presence at Butterworth, issues surrounding the lot of women in Penang still plagued the Australian community. 'Since my arrival', wrote ARC Field Force Officer, Commandant Peta Matchett,

> I have become increasingly aware of the problems encountered by the wives of servicemen. Often it is the husband who approaches me but the wives themselves are quite vocal. Of course, the pressures have a direct effect on home life and so it goes on.[55]

Two months later, Commandant Matchett further elaborated on her role in dealing with the stresses of life in Penang for some women. 'It can be very traumatic for the family of a serviceman to be plucked out of an extended family environment' and placed 'into a distant multi-cultural society', Matchett reported. 'The loneliness we see at times is unbelievable', Matchett explained, 'some people find it so hard to open the door and walk out into an alien society, which is hard for the average person to understand, but we don't judge, we just try to help'.[56]

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[54] Sue Jarvis, *Relocation, Gender, and Emotion: A Psycho-Social Perspective on the Experiences of Military Wives* (London: Karnac Books Ltd, 2011), pp. 18-21.
[55] ARC Field Force Officer's Monthly Report, January 1985, Box #33, 101, ARCS Archive.
[56] Loose report, March 1985, Box #33, 250, ARCS Archive.

Idleness, a lack of privacy and a general sense of disorientation in their own personal lives, the curses of colonial women and military wives for centuries, clearly impacted on the lives of women accompanying their husbands on posting to Butterworth for the entire duration of the three decade Australian presence in Penang. For the majority of women, these aspects of life in Penang intertwined with the other more enjoyable facets of their two year posting to Butterworth to produce a nervy kaleidoscope of emotional highs and lows that was usually dealt with in very private and circumscribed ways.

In a number of limited cases, however, the unique circumstances of life in Penang produced serious psychological difficulties for Australian women. In early 1967, the wife of one Australian airmen, finding it difficult to cope and seemingly unable to find the necessary help, took her own life. In another case, in October 1971, RAAF Butterworth Base Police section investigated 'an attempted suicide by a RAAF dependant'.[57] Another particularly tragic occasion occurred on 24 January 1980, when the wife of an Australian airman took her own life in the early hours of the morning.[58] Within a week, the husband, along with his two young children had been posted back to Wagga on compassionate grounds to be closer to their extended family. The next year, in August 1981, a visiting psychiatric consultant considered the circumstances of three Australian women so grave that he recommended they be immediately repatriated to Australia.[59]

Socialising, Adventure and Opportunity in Penang

Socialising for the Australian community in Penang largely conformed to the general military custom of celebrating often and with copious amounts of alcohol. Although there was substantial pressure to participate in social functions and events, many servicemen and their wives accepted the fact of formal and informal socialising as an integral part of life in the military. In Penang, however, socialising took on several new features over and above those facets generally associated with service life for military families in Australia.

With family and non-service friends so far away, Australian men and women often socialised with the same groups of people, variety only being injected by the continuous stream of arrivals and departures to and from Australia due to postings. In addition, the

[57] RAAF Butterworth Commanding Officers' Monthly Reports, October 1971.
[58] No.478 SQN Unit History Sheet, February 1980.
[59] ARC Field Force Officer's Report, August 1981, Box #33, 101, ARCS Archive.

strangeness of the tropical environment and the general adventurous feel of life on the frontier of Australia's 'northern border' in Malaya engendered a certain sense of 'making the most of life' in Penang while the opportunities presented themselves.[60]

Several mainstays appeared on the social calendar each year in Penang. Social gatherings held to both farewell departing members back to Australia and to welcome their newly arrived replacements often coincided with the hectic schedule of December Christmas functions. Christmas luncheons, section and unit Christmas drinks, a Christmas Ball and the ever popular RAAF Base Butterworth Christmas Draw – which, in 1978, offered a trip to Europe as first prize - not to mention the informal Christmas drinks and parties held by families and social clubs, ensured an endless list of social engagements and events from late November to late December. In April, alongside the usual public holidays and subsequent festivities held in accordance with the Easter period, formal ceremonies and social functions almost always accompanied ANZAC day commemorations. Public holidays in late January for Australia Day and early May for Labour Day also offered opportunities for either informal or formal social gatherings.

In addition to Australian public holidays, the Australian community in Penang also observed and celebrated many of the local public holidays on the Malaysian calendar. In January, or on a very few occasions in early February, Australians added a public holiday to their calendar to recognise the Hindu festival of Thaipusam, where, according to Kathleen Sutton, a '1,000 devotes carried their Kavadis on a six mile walk to the Nattukottai Chettiar Temple in Waterfall Road' where 'they received a blessing from the priest and the spears and hooks are removed from their bodies'.[61] Although most Australians viewed the Thaipusam parade as a spectacle to be observed from the sidelines, at least one Australian airman from the Butterworth base decided to completely immerse himself in the local festival. In both 1975 and 1976, Corporal Neil Element participated in Thaipusam by carrying a Kavadi the six miles along Waterfall Road as part of the Hindu ceremony.[62]

In February each year, the Australians in Penang also celebrated the Chinese New Year with two public holidays. Most Australians actively engaged in many of the customary traditions associated with the Chinese New Year, such as the giving of Ang Pows - decorated red envelopes with a small amount of money inside - to their Amahs, neighbours or even to

[60] Johnson, *Malayan Adventure*, p. 229.
[61] ARC Field Force Officer's Report, January 1976, Box #33, 58, ARCS Archive.
[62] *Ibid*.

some of the local children at the various orphanages in Penang. To celebrate the Chinese New Year in 1981, the RAAF Butterworth Officers Mess held a Chinese New Year Ball, which included an eight course Chinese dinner followed by a Chinese 'Lion Dance' and fireworks.[63] During the middle part of the year, the Australian community in Penang also observed and celebrated public holidays for both the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong's Birthday and, on 31 August each year, Malaysia Day, marking the anniversary of the granting of independence to the Federation of Malaya by the British in 1957.

Towards the end of each year, the Australian community also observed several Muslim days of significance, including a two day celebration for the end of Ramadan as well as Hari Raya Puasa and Hari Raya Haji - a public holiday to celebrate the conclusion of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. On 7 August 1981, members of the RAAF contingent at Butterworth showed their enthusiasm for celebrating these local customs by holding a Hari Raya Ball at the Officers Mess at the Butterworth Base. Late in each calendar year, the Australians declared yet another public holiday for Deepavali or the festival of lights celebrated by the Indian Tamil community in Penang to mark the overall triumph of good over evil. In all, by combining the calendars of the local Indian Tamil community, the local Chinese community and the local Malay community, and in addition to the extra leave allowances made available to counteract the 'enervating effects of the tropics', the RAAF at Butterworth observed and often celebrated no less than fifteen formal public holidays each year.

Visits to Butterworth by Australian military and civilian dignitaries added to the list of formal luncheons, balls, cocktail parties and dining-in nights held at the base. In 1959, the Australian Prime Minister, R.G. "Sir Robert" Menzies, made the first of several visits to the RAAF base at Butterworth, followed in later years by several of his successors. On 13 June 1968, Prime Minister J.G. "John" Gorton, himself a former wartime fighter pilot who had been based in Singapore and had flown operations over Malaya, and a large ministerial party toured the Butterworth base.[64] Exactly four years later, on 13 June 1972, Prime Minister William McMahon visited Butterworth, followed less than two years later, on 31 January 1974, by another Prime Minister and former RAAF officer, E.G. "Gough" Whitlam, accompanied by his wife Margaret and daughter Caroline.[65] Formal visits by other

[63] ARC Field Force Officer's Report, February 1981, Box #33, 58, ARCS Archive.
[64] No.478 SQN Unit History Sheets, June 1968.
[65] No.3 SQN Unit History Sheets, June 1972 & *RAAF News*, January/February 1974, Vol. 16, No. 1.

Australian politicians and senior military officers similarly provided occasion for the Australian community in Penang to host their temporary guests at either formal or informal social gatherings. In June 1978, a tour of the Butterworth base by the Australian Defence Minister, D.J. 'Sir Jim' Killen, himself a former Flight Sergeant in the RAAF, included a social luncheon at the RAAF Base Butterworth Golf Club hosted by the wives of Australian servicemen.[66]

Many of the extended family and friends of Australians posted to Butterworth also took advantage of the opportunity to visit Malaysia, most for the first time, by staying with an Australian relative or acquaintance living in Penang. Not only did a visit to an 'Australian household' in Penang offer free accommodation, but it also provided a measure of reassurance to many Australians visiting an Asian city for the first time by negating many of the 'unknowns' of traveling in a foreign country. When, in early 1963, Corporal J. Elshaw and his wife Barbara hosted Barbara's parents at their home in Penang for several weeks, they not only picked them up from the airport, but additionally showed them around the local attractions, took them to their favourite local restaurants as well as provided all the comforts of a typical Australian suburban home in between.[67] In later years, even as travel throughout Asia became more common, the Australian community in Penang continued to serve as an essential stopover point for tens of thousands of Australian tourists on their way to other destinations.

The convenience of a *bona fide* Australian community residing in Penang not only attracted friends and relatives, but also enticed other individuals and organisations desiring to draw on the benefits of an established, long-standing Australian presence on Asian soil. In July 1968, fifteen boys from Guilford Grammar School in Western Australia, led by one of the school masters, Mr Brian Wood, visited the Butterworth base during school holidays.[68] Six months earlier, in November 1967, 26 players and 35 officials from the Geelong Football Club spent several days in Penang as guests of the Australian Men's Sports Club.[69] During their stay, most of the visiting Geelong footballers were billeted in the homes of Australians living on Penang Island. In short, especially in the late 1950s and early 1960s when travelling abroad was, for the vast majority of Australians, not common, the Australian community in Penang provided a familiar and comfortable oasis for many visitors to

[66] ARC Field Force Officer's Report, June 1978, Box #33, 101, ARCS Archive.
[67] *RAAF News*, March 1963.
[68] *RAAF News*, July 1968.
[69] *RAAF News*, November 1967.

Southeast Asia. In turn, this influx of visitors, both official and private, placed added pressure on the already crowded social calendar of the Australian community.

In addition to the formalities of the military social calendar, such as unit dining-in nights and balls, celebrating the various local festivals and catering to the continuous stream of official and private visitors to the Butterworth base, the Australian community in Penang also indulged in a range of private social gatherings common to most suburban lifestyles. Celebrations for the birth of children, christenings, birthdays and the occasional wedding further added to the social scene for Australians in Penang. Towards the later part of the Australian presence in Penang, an Oktoberfest was held each year, with in 1981, entertainment provided by a band from a visiting ship, HMAS Swan.[70] And, of course, private social functions were also a significant component of the sporting and recreational clubs of Penang of which many Australians were members. In some cases, Australians in Penang even found time to celebrate some of the major sporting events being held back in Australia. In September 1978, in a lounge area decorated with team colours, the single living-in members of the RAAF Butterworth Airmen's Mess listened to the VFL grand final between North Melbourne and Hawthorn with Fosters Beer, 'Australian meat pies', hot dogs, sausage rolls and tomato sauce.[71]

In the late 1970s, one particularly enthusiastic group of thespians within the Australian community in Penang decided to form an amateur theatre group, 'The New Theatre' company or TNT. The group performed at the RAAF Centre on Penang Island. In April 1976, the TNT performed Alexander Buzu's *Coralie Lansdowne Says No!*, while later that same year, in September, they interpreted the Australian Comedy *Dimboola* while the audience enjoyed a three course meal.[72] Still going strong two years later, the group put on a production of *Little Nell of the Klondike*. One of the attendees, ARC Commandant Jean Martin, described the evening in glowing terms - 'the evening included a four course meal and the audience was encouraged to sing along with the band between the Acts. It was great fun, the play kept us all involved as we could boo and hiss at the appropriate moments'.[73]

At the heart of many of the formal and informal social functions attended by members of the Australian community in Penang was the rather immodest consumption of alcohol.

[70] ARC Field Force Officer's Report, October 1981, Box #33, 101, ARCS Archive.
[71] ARC Field Force Officer's Report, September 1978, Box #33, 10, ARCS Archive.
[72] ARC Field Force Officer's Report, September 1976, Box #33, 11, ARCS Archive.
[73] ARC Field Force Officer's Report, September 1978, Box #33, 10, ARCS Archive.

Not only did the overly masculine culture of the Australian military contribute to ostentatious displays of raucous revelry involving alcohol, but the unique circumstances of domestic help, lavish hospitality and a busy social calendar also conspired to expose many Australian women to the temptations of excessive indulgence. In the Commanding Officer's monthly report for December 1971, the CO noted that, after an inter-squadron sports day at the Butterworth base, 'no results of the games are as yet to hand, but the score in consumed kegs is believed to be creditable'.[74] In later years, issues surrounding alcohol prompted officials to explore avenues to identify and assist individuals who may have been particularly vulnerable to the more damaging effects of consumption. On 29 November 1979, GPCAPT N.R. "Norman" Wade, Commanding Officer of No.478 Squadron, specifically sought out the help of the visiting psychiatrist at No.4 RAAF Hospital in relation to his concerns over alcoholism within the unit.[75]

For the overwhelming majority of Australians posted to Butterworth, however, the social demands of life in Penang provided nothing more than an enjoyable and, at times, necessary form of entertainment. On 31 March 1971, No. 3 Squadron celebrated the unit's 50th Anniversary by holding a Ball at the RAAF Butterworth Officer's Mess. The unit's chronicler described the event thus,

> No effort was spared on the World War I theme of 3 Squadron's decorations which consisted of remodelling the main bar of the Mess as a bombed out chateau. A genuine hand-driven siren and recorded music of the World War I era interspersed with frequent artillery barrages were the finishing touches to give an excellent atmosphere.[76]

With 'too much champagne' being drunk on the night, according to the same source, the squadron's pilots were not considered fit for flying duties and so 'the next day's activities were restricted to dinghy drill' at the RAAF Butterworth swimming pool.

With functions often extending into the 'wee small hours' or being continued on at either a private residence or some other popular location - such as a 'midnight swim' at the base or Penang swimming pools - the effects of excessive alcohol consumption often lingered on past the immediate circumstances of a particular night. For some, such as the pilots of No.3 Squadron, this may have simply meant cancelling the flying program for the next day and conducting 'dinghy drill' in the base pool. For others, the provision of domestic

[74] RAAF Butterworth Commanding Officer's Monthly Reports, December 1971.
[75] No.478 SQN Unit History Sheets, November 1979.
[76] No.3 SQN Unit History Sheets, March 1971.

assistance greatly assisted in not only hosting and cleaning up after private events but also in helping to provide the necessary peace and quiet to recover from the inevitable hangover the next day.

In a number of cases, the combination of a busy social calendar and the over indulgence of alcohol in such a tight-knit community created an atmosphere which exposed Australians in Penang to particular temptations perhaps not experienced to the same extent back home in Australia. John Lee's play, *Sarong Aussies*, unambiguously laid bare his interpretations of this unique dynamic by having all the Australian protagonists in the play conducting affairs with either other Australians or local men or women. In the official record, some evidence exists to suggest that, at least to a limited extent, this interpretation was somewhat valid. While working at No.4 RAAF Hospital in 1976, Kathleen Sutton noted that October was a 'most depressive month' in which 'a lot of incidents have occurred concerning friends and members of staff' which 'has left of kind of "hush" around the place'.[77] In another example from early 1982, the performance of a particular Air Traffic Controller at the Butterworth base was being closely monitored after the junior officer was reported as being distressed after the 'breakup of his relationship with a married lady' who had returned to Australia with her husband at the end of his posting to Butterworth.[78]

The Broadening Nature of Travel

War and travel, Gerster and Pierce succinctly noted, 'go together'.[79] Soldiers on overseas campaigns, they further suggested, 'are the ultimate package tourists: large, highly organised groups of people who stake a claim on foreign turf'.[80] Bailey and Farber's 1992 study of the experiences of American servicemen in wartime Hawaii also focused on the nexus between tourism and the displacement of large bodies of soldiers, sailors and airmen due to the demands of war.[81] The pioneering studies of Australian soldiers in Egypt and Europe during World War I by White, as well as the emphasis on 'grog, guns and girls' during Australia's contribution to the Allied Occupation of Japan by Gerster, have additionally highlighted the

[77] ARC Field Force Officer's Report, October 1976, Box #33, 58, ARCS Archive.
[78] ARC Field Force Officer's Report, January 1982, Box #33, 101, ARCS Archive.
[79] Robin Gerster and Peter Peirce, eds., *On the War-path: An Anthology of Australian Military Travel* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004), p. 1.
[80] *Ibid*.
[81] Beth Bailey and David Farber, *The First Strange Place: Race and Sex in World War II Hawaii* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 10.

fact that 'for several generations of Australians, travel *meant* war'.[82] Indeed, in their Pacific War analysis of expectation, wartime experience and the so-called 'Dorothy Lamour Syndrome', Brawley and Dixon have noted that Australian military historiography is rather 'comfortable with the organising principle of the soldier as tourist'.[83]

Bereft of the spectre of war, an overseas posting to Butterworth for Australian servicemen and their families more closely mirrored Gerster and Pierce's depiction of overseas military duty as a form of 'organised tourist package' than perhaps any other overseas deployment by Australian military forces. As early as 1959, the Commanding Officer of No.77 Squadron noted that after returning 'from leave in Australia where he was married earlier in the month', FLGOFF N.B. Williams had 'brought his bride back' to Penang 'for an extended honeymoon'.[84] Some twenty years later, in the late 1970s, the OC of the Butterworth base, Air Commodore John Jacobs, similarly depicted a posting to Butterworth as more akin to a holiday than an arduous overseas military exploit. 'As for air defence in the theatre', Jacobs noted, 'I am sure that the local authorities knew we had no immediate capability of defending anyone as we had no munitions in store, other than a token supply at Butterworth. All the same, Butterworth was a darned good posting. There was hardly anyone in the RAAF who did not hope to get there on a posting, detachment or visit'.[85]

One popular motif commonly associated with travelling abroad revolves around the concept of travel as a broadening experience, both psychologically and emotionally. In this framing, to use the well-worn slogan, travel not only allows us to see different things, but at the same time forces us to see things differently. In this regard, a two year posting to Butterworth provided not only an opportunity to have an extended holiday in a foreign country, but additionally offered Australians a genuine chance to explore an Asian landscape and culture for the very first time. For those who took the opportunity to do so, Penang challenged many of the cultural myths, biases and prejudices that supported long-standing perceptions of the 'exotic East' in Australian society. For others, living in an Asian country

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[82] Richard White, "Sun, Sand and Syphilis: Australian Soldiers and the Orient, Egypt 1914", *Australian Cultural History*, no.9 (1990): pp. 49-64; Richard White, "The Soldier as Tourist: The Australian Experience of the Great War", *War & Society*, May 1987, pp.63-77; Robin Gerster, *Travels in Atomic Sunshine: Australia and the Occupation of Japan* (Melbourne: Scribe Publications, 2008).
[83] Sean Brawley and Chris Dixon, *Hollywood's South Seas and the Pacific War: Searching for Dorothy Lamour* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), p. 2.
[84] No.77 Squadron Unit History Sheets, June 1959.
[85] John Jacobs, *Up and Away: Memoirs of a Pilot in the Royal Australian Air Force, 1950-1981* (Canberra: Air Power Studies Centre, 1999), p. 178.

for two years proved to be a far less broadening experience. Instead, it merely reinforced some of the more enduring stereotypes of Asia and its people.

In 1961, some of the very first teachers sent to Malaya by the Departments of both New South Wales and Victoria wrote of their hope that, in the longer term, the Australian deployment would deepen the cultural empathy of Australian families posted to Butterworth. 'The memories we carry back to Australia will last for many years', one teacher wrote, adding that it was a privilege to 'open the RAAF School Penang' and have 'our years of service enriched by our experiences here'.[86] For good measure, some of the teachers then offered the Australian community several words of sage counsel. Included among these encouraging adages was the advice that: 'may you absorb all that is good and worthwhile from the cultures of the various races which comprise this newest of Federations', and 'may your sojourn in the Federation of Malaya have taught you that the pigment of your skin is of little moment'.[87]

The warmth and earnestness of these general sentiments by the six teachers from the RAAF School Penang on their return home in 1961 characterised a common tendency on the part of most Australians to at least recognise the didactic dimensions of a posting to Butterworth. For many, this recognition of the opportunity to experience genuine difference while living in Penang parlayed directly into a general willingness to attempt to understand the local environment on its own terms. In the early 1970s, the wife of an Australian airmen commented on the value of living in foreign environment by stating that 'going to different countries, seeing different cultures, it's very enlightening and educational'.[88] To various degrees and to various ends, this positive regard for utilizing a posting to Butterworth as an opportunity for personal growth was common to most Australians for the entire duration of the Australian presence.

While for the majority of Australians, the chance to explore and experience life within an Asian culture over an extended period engendered an increased sense of understanding and empathy towards Asian cultures and societies, a small portion of the Australian community simply failed, or perhaps were unable, to see beyond the outlooks and perspectives that they had brought with them to Penang. Reflecting on the management of the Officers' Mess at Butterworth in the late 1970s, the Officer Commanding noted the

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[86] *Austral, RAAF School Penang*, 1961, p. 11.
[87] *Ibid*.
[88] *Sky High*, NFSA.

disregard often shown to the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) officers, 'particularly those of the Islamic faith who did not drink alcohol' or 'would not eat pig meat in any form'.[89] 'I was embarrassed', recalled Air Commodore John Jacobs,

> when the stewards served a delicious Christmas meal of roast chicken, ham and vegetables to every diner, even to Colonel Fauzi and his wife sitting next to me. I would have expected that, after 20 years at Butterworth, we Australians should have shown more forethought and courtesy than to offend Malaysian nationals in that manner. Thenceforth I made a point of trying to minimise any 'ugly Australian' image by promoting correct behaviour from all our people.[90]

The clumsiness of the encounter does little to hide the fact that in some aspects of life, some Australians proved unwilling or unable to appreciate the nuances of local culture.

Other Australians posted to Butterworth recognised the didactic dimensions of the opportunity to learn from living in a foreign environment, but instead of an overall enriching, broadening experience, residing in Penang for two years only further narrowed their dialogue. Whilst many Australians no doubt experienced situations in which confusion, misunderstanding and miscommunication perhaps contributed to a certain amount of suspicion regarding the veracity of some Asian stereotypes, very few could lay claim to sharing the rather extreme perspectives of one wife of an Australian airman in the mid-1970s. In an interview with Jeffery James, one Australian woman explained that,

> I never thought that I would ever be prejudiced against people and I never thought that anyone could really live any differently to what we do, and it's certainly been an eye-opener for me up here, I've learnt that people do live differently to us and I've found that I can dislike people of another race just because they are of another race.[91]

By forcing an examination of some of her previously unquestioned assumptions on lifestyle, race and prejudice, the experience of a posting to Butterworth forced a recalibration of attitude and approach - albeit with a rather unfortunate result in this particular instance. In the overwhelming majority of cases, however, the broadening experience of travel produced largely positive images of the local environments and peoples.

More reflective of the typical experience of most Australians perhaps, are the comments of Peta Matchett, an ARC Field Force Officer at No.4 RAAF Hospital in the early

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[89] Jacobs, *Up and Away*, p. 179.
[90] *Ibid*.
[91] *Sky High*, NFSA.

1980s. Her parting observations reflect both a certain degree of warmth and empathy for the local environment, but also illustrate the character and depth of her own experience,

> It would be difficult for me to put into words my impressions of Malaysia. It is a fascinating, complex society made up of three distinct cultural and religious groups – Malay, Chinese and Indian. One of my favourite things to do is riding in a trishaw through Georgetown on Penang at about 7p.m. The sights, sounds and aromas that are all around make it a never to be forgotten experience … The local food is a joy, such variety, so delicious and cheap.[92]

Conclusion

A posting to Butterworth offered Australian servicemen and their families many positive experiences. Australian airmen, soldiers and their families joined a tight-knit, mutually supportive community, enjoyed opportunities to travel, and experienced an extravagant social life that included formal military functions, ceremonies and balls, as well as myriad informal social gatherings. With the vast Asian continent residing just beyond the picket fences of 'kampong Australia', a posting to Butterworth provided many Australian military families with an opportunity to explore the sights, sounds, foods and cultures of the surrounding Asian landscape in their own time and on their own terms. Sampling this Asian environment often mingled seamlessly into the daily lives of Australians. Interactions with amahs, dinners at a local restaurant, or even simply noticing the strange sights and smells of Penang while shopping or on the way home from school or work became staple elements of each and every day for members of the Australian community.

A range of seemingly incongruent attitudes and behaviours regarding life in Penang coexisted within the Australian community in Malaya. In a number of instances, Australians readily embraced the local Asian environment, especially in the areas of food, dining, travel and shopping. In other facets of life the Australian community remained defiantly isolated and aloof from the local Asian landscapes and peoples around them in Penang. Although the experience of life in Malaya differed in a variety of ways for different elements of the Australian community, a distinctly compartmentalised interaction with the local environment resulted for the overwhelming majority of Australians in Penang in which they sampled those elements of local life which directly appealed to them while largely ignoring those which did not.

[92] Loose report, March 1985, Box #33, 250, ARCS Archive.

For many Australian women, stripped of many of the sources of pride and dignity usually associated with meaningful and valued work within the domestic sphere of post-war Australia, life in Penang bounced between exciting social highs to dreary daily lows of isolation and boredom. Relegated to a largely invisible position within the Australian community, rather than critique the military administration that produced their marginal circumstances, many Australian women adopted a stoic attitude and dutifully performed their expected supporting roles. Although the tight-knit Australian military community in Penang offered some measure of emotional support for Australian women, the constantly changing composition of that community and their own fleeting place within it further precluded the formation of relationships that could offer genuine comfort in times of difficulty. For a small number of women, the traumas of isolation, loneliness and boredom produced serious psychological difficulties.

Examples of empathy and growth sat uncomfortably beside examples where racism and prejudice stubbornly prevailed throughout the entire three decades of the Australian presence in Malaysia. So while some Australians lived in Penang and interacted with the local peoples and cultures to only a limited extent, others instead made Penang their second home. In one of the more noteworthy examples of the changing nature of the Australian presence in Penang, in the late 1980s, one Australian airman requested his posting back to Australia be delayed to allow his wife, a local woman, to remain near her family and friends. With his wife unaware of her terminal prognosis following surgery for a pancreatic tumour, the Australian airman felt that she needed to be home in Malaysia, surrounded by the comforts and support of her immediate family, which in this particular case, of course, included him – an Australian airman.

Conclusion

In February 2006, *Washington Post* correspondent Thomas Ricks reported on the construction of five new mega-bases being built by the United States in Iraq.[93] One of these bases, the U.S. Air Force's Balad Air Base, just north of Baghdad, covers some 20 square kilometres and has several distinct suburbs, a shopping mall, a bowling alley, a Pizza Hut, a Subway and a Burger King. Ricks described Balad as a 'little America' in the heart of the Middle East. Indeed, Balad has so much of a 'small town' feel to it that many of the American airmen and women posted there never venture outside the perimeter of the base. With the ever-present threat of terrorist attacks on U.S. service personnel in the region, rather than travel via roads, direct flights connect the five new U.S. mega-bases in Iraq and Afghanistan, with additional flights also connecting the bases to the large fortified 'Green Zone' in downtown Baghdad.

Australia's recent contribution to the 'War on Terror' in the Middle East has also involved the establishment of an overseas military presence at Tarin Kowt in the Uruzgan Province of Afghanistan. Considered a 'Forward Operating Base' rather than 'mega-base', the Australian presence at Tarin Kowt nevertheless represents the very latest incarnation of overseas military duties for the Australian Defence Force. Like their American counterparts living in the 'little Americas' of places like Balad Air Base, Australian service personnel in Tarin Kowt have had little to no opportunities for social and cultural interaction with the local Afghan people surrounding the base. Security concerns have resulted in a complete lack of hybrid spaces or 'contact zones' between Australian service personnel the local peoples and cultures of Uruzgan. In turn, this has prevented any meaningful social and cultural interaction between Australian service personal their immediate surroundings in Afghanistan.

Christine de Matos and Rowena Ward have recently noted that 'the colonial model … continues to inform the hierarchical structures of power relations in situations of war, intervention, occupation and peacekeeping in the postcolonial era'.[94] In many cases, however, the lived experience within these on-going colonial structures of power for both individual service personnel and the receptor communities into which they have been deployed has changed significantly over the past few decades. Whether or not this latest

[93] *Washington Post*, "Biggest Base in Iraq has Small-Town Feel", 4 February 2006.
[94] Christine de Matos and Rowena Ward, "Analyzing Gendered Occupation Power" in *Gender, Power, and Military Occupations: Asia Pacific and the Middle East since 1945*, ed. Christine de Matos and Rowena Ward (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 7.

Australian military deployment to the Middle East heralds the future direction of overseas military duties for Australian forces or not, the Australian presence at Tarin Kowt differs remarkably from that of the Australian military presence in Penang. Indeed, in complete contrast to the operational focus of a tour of duty in Tarin Kowt, the overwhelming majority of Australian servicemen and their families instead approached a posting to Butterworth as an opportunity to tour Malaysia and interact with the local peoples and cultures of Penang. The balance between military operations and tourism, an essential component of almost all overseas Australian military deployments up until now, tipped decidedly towards leisure and travel in the case of a posting to Penang.

From the very beginning, Australian officials drew on a number of colonial legacies and stereotypes to define the social and cultural dimensions of the Australian presence in Penang. The racially loaded rhetoric of many of these colonial tropes, including those associated with the 'enervating effects of the tropical climate', the inherent physical and mental inabilities of the 'natives' and assessments related to the cleanliness of the local landscape, all contributed to reinforcing colonial social hierarchies which served to both define class boundaries as well as to elevate the Australian community above the local Asian populations. Taking these assumptions of colonial superiority to their logical conclusion led some within the Australian community, especially in the early years, to view their presence in Malaya as a modern form of *mission civilisatrice*.

But as the hard edge of many of these colonial conceits of the Australian deployment to Penang faded over the course of the thirty-three year deployment, most Australian servicemen and their families came to view a posting to Butterworth in slightly different terms. From the comfort and safety of 'kampong Australia', Australian servicemen and their families increasingly engaged with the local environment in a number of distinct arenas. While these webs of affiliation mostly focused on sport, food and leisure activities, contact with almost all aspects of the local landscape proved largely inescapable. Exposure to the foreign landscapes of Penang often led individuals to reassess many of the social and cultural assumptions that they had brought with them to Malaya. Although not all this self-reflection led to increased empathy and understanding, in a majority of cases it clearly did.

Strong social and cultural bonds with the 'Mother Country' in the early phases of the Australian presence also led many Australians to overtly identify with their 'European' heritage while in Penang. By referring to themselves as 'European' in the early years, in both 'official' and 'private' spheres, members of the Australian community in Penang racially

differentiated themselves from the local Asian population. Although this served to reinforce the colonial dimensions of the early years of the deployment, it additionally highlights the intimate nature of the social and cultural bonds that continued to bind Australia to Europe. In contrast to the number of scholars who have pinpointed Curtin's speech in 1941 as the moment when Australia began to emerge from the British embrace, the entire deployment to Malaya, not least of all the explicit use of the term 'European' until the late 1960s, speaks to the significant influence within the Australia military community in Penang of a certain 'British race patriotism' that continued well into the early 1970s.[95]

One of the major themes pursued throughout this thesis has been the tension that existed between the 'official' and 'private' experiences of the Australian military community in Penang. In terms of the 'official' experience, as an organisation, the RAAF embraced the privileging strategies of Britain's imperial past in Malaya to prompt, rationalise, enable and sustain a discourse of class that sought to place the Australian community above members of the local communities. Senior officials within the RAAF utilized the old colonial binaries of 'backward natives' vs 'enlightened Europeans', 'uncivilised' vs 'civilised' and ultimately, 'us' vs 'them', to attribute knowledge, feelings and attitudes to the Asian communities of Penang that placed them well beneath, at least in their reckoning, the Australian community. Although a carefully constructed veneer of racial and cultural sensitivity developed over time within RAAF officialdom, the deeply rooted sense of Australian superiority modelled along colonial lines that characterised the initial phases of the deployment remained a core perspective of the 'official' narrative of the RAAF at Butterworth. Although, a small number RAAF personnel incorporated some aspects of this garb of superiority into their quotidian lives, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, the overwhelming majority of Australian families in Penang did not.

In most cases, 'official' judgements of the local environment of Penang contrasted significantly with 'private' lived experience of many Australian servicemen and their families. In contrast to the 'official' censure of Penang General Hospital and its 'Asian' staff, the 'official' reluctance to provide appropriate education facilities for Australian children and perhaps, most significantly, the 'official' condemnation of intimate relations between Australian servicemen and local Asian women, the 'private' dimensions of the Australian presence in Penang showed a surprising liberal dimension from the outset. Australian wives

[95] See Peter Edwards, 'Curtin, MacArthur and the "surrender of sovereignty": a historiographical assessment', Australian Journal of International Affairs, vol. 55, no. 2, July 2001, pp. 175-85.

felt no objections to being seen by an Asian doctor, Australian parents spent years advocating for improvements to school facilities and Australian servicemen met, fell in love with and married local women, despite 'official' attempts to dissuade them from doing so.

In terms of Australian families, little 'official' support was provided for Australian women, although much was 'officially' expected of them. For Australian women posted to Penang with their husbands, there was no one single response to characterise their experience of life in Malaya. Instead, for many Australian women, a posting to Penang provoked a complex emotional reaction which involved, among other things, negotiating the very restrictive gendered dynamics of the military system. This led to women experiencing an emotional roller-coaster which including the many highs and many lows of military life in an overseas location. Their experience was far more complex, nuanced and compartmentalized than most other members of the Australian military community in Penang.

For some Australian servicemen, a similar lack of 'official' support also complicated their experience of life in Penang. When Australian servicemen of No.2 ACS, for example, suffered physical and mental breakdowns in the early years of the deployment, they were dismissively repatriated back to Australia by Australian medical staff with medical files stamped with a diagnosis of 'an inadequate type'. So although the 'private' experiences of individuals in Penang were not without their own gendered and racial vanities, the casual, inquisitive and engaging attitudes and behaviours of the majority of Australians in Penang differed significantly from the 'official' perspectives of the RAAF as an organisation.

In general, the history of the Australian military community in Penang has largely escaped the attention of Australian scholarship. Without the necessary political, strategic or military gravitas, Australian military historians have largely limited their analyses to either the Malayan Emergency or the later Confrontation with Indonesia. For their part, scholars interested in Australia's Asian context have likewise failed to consider the many social and cultural dimensions of Australia's three decade permanent presence in Penang. Although this thesis only begins to introduce the topic of Australians in Penang in the post-war period, it does highlight the significant contribution that the Australian military experience in Malaya and Singapore can make to several major themes in Australian history, most notably those associated with both Australia's Asian context and Australia's post-war relationship with Britain.

Indeed, it is one of the overall contentions of this thesis that although one of the most substantial and indeed on-going means of engagement with Asia in the post-war period has been via Australian military deployments to the region, the many and varied social and cultural aspects of these engagements remain largely unrecognised, under-appreciated and unexplored. This case study of the RAAF base at Butterworth highlights the need to further consider other Australian military deployments in the post-war period, including those to Malacca, Singapore, Hong Kong and Thailand to mention but a few. Indeed, it is the contention of this thesis that the social and cultural dimensions of nearly all Australian military deployments to Asia and Southeast Asia in the post-war period demand a far greater respect than has been afforded them in the extant historiography of Australia's Asian context.

Appendix A –

UNSW Human Research Ethics Advisory Panel B Approval for Butterworth Questionnaire

Human Research Ethics Advisory Panel B
Arts, Humanities & Law

Date:	06.11. 2013
Investigators:	Mathew Radcliffe
Supervisors:	Professor Sean Brawley
School:	School of Humanities and Languages
Re:	From Colonialists to Tourists: The Experience of the RAAF at Butterworth 1955-1988

Reference Number: 13 101

The Human Research Ethics Advisory Panel B for the Arts, Humanities & Law is satisfied that this project is of minimal ethical impact and meets the requirements as set out in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*. Having taken into account the advice of the Panel, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) has approved the project to proceed.

Your Head of School/Unit/Centre will be informed of this decision.

This approval is valid for 12 months from the date stated above.

Yours sincerely

Associate Professor Anne Cossins
Panel Convenor
Human Research Ethics Advisory Panel B

Cc: Professor Vanessa Lemm
Head of School
School of Humanities and Languages

* http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/

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