



*The headquarters building
at Butterworth*

THE ROADRUNNER GOES TO ASIA

1982 will be a year long remembered by the members of D Coy, particularly between the month of February and May. In that year D Coy and attachments were let loose on an unsuspecting Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore, and those places plus the soldiers who took part in the tour, will never be the same again. But let us go back and start at the beginning.

In early 1981 D Coy, which had only been formed in September '80, were informed that they had been earmarked for a tour of duty at Butterworth Air Base on the Malaysian mainland, so the young company was faced with a daunting task, to mould themselves into an effective sub unit capable of completing a 3 month tour of duty away from the "big brother" of the remainder of the Battalion. Their efforts and successes of 1981 proved them capable and so the scene was set for the contingent to disappear into the sunset on one fine February day.

The preparation for the tour began about the middle of 1981 with the admin staff, in particular the Coy 2IC, growing bolder by the week. The soldiers were subjected to some wonderful times including numerous visits to the dentist during which teeth were filled, removed, cleaned and generally tampered with, visits to the RAAF to play pin cushions by receiving various injections, and to the dreaded spy cell for passport photographs, the subjects of which were so ugly that they were likely to be looked up rather than sent overseas. Despite all the problems, the preparations rolled on and the magical date for the departure of the Advance Party arrived and Capt McGowan led an intrepid band of explorers off into the never never.

The Advance Party arrived on a warm Tuesday afternoon to be greeted by the OC of the 1 RAR Company that D Coy were to relieve. The following two weeks were taken up with visiting the people they would be working with, getting the lay of the land and generally settling in and preparing for the arrival of the main body. It was at this stage, that the terrible phrase "social life" reared its ugly head. It did not take long for the advance party to realize that both the standard and quantity of the after hours life was somewhat better than they were used to in Townsville. As a matter of fact it was like comparing Charters Towers to Sydney. The ways to spend their spare time ranged from Bars, International Hotels, Discos, Restaurants and Lounges and the wonderful thing about it was the local population were so willing to chat and make them feel welcome.

The touchdown of the RAAF 707 heralded the arrival of the main body who were just a little bit late to witness the explosion of a bus outside the main gate, the bus had broken down the day before and with the normal avant garde attitude of the Malaysian towards motor vehicles it just happen to blow up early one morning, anyway back to the main body, after going through normal Customs routine and the normal RAAF briefings the boys were led off wide eyed, to enjoy the pungent odour of the Malaysian countryside and the wonderful taste of a cold Anchor beer. The next morning they waved goodbye to the 1 RAR chaps as they departed for good old Australia.

The next three days were taken up with orientation training in which the soldiers were shown what a Mirage fighter looked like, what a Hanger looked like and all those things that are pertinent to RAAF life, like runways, control towers and buildings, so many buildings and from these buildings came the term Key Point (or KP) all of which were attacked with great gusto many many times during the three month tour.

The weather turned out to be a pleasant surprise with there being very little change from Townsville, the only difference being that it didn't get light until 8 o'clock in the morning, which is understandable when you consider that Malaysia time is 2 hours behind Townsville time.

The basic reason for being in Malaysia was to work, and work they did. The Quick Reaction Force (QRF) was required to be manned 24 hours a day seven days a week which meant that each platoon was on a 24 hour duty every 3 days. The first engagement outside of QRF was the Air Defence Exercise which basically meant that the company was put in the hands of the RAAF Ground Defence organization to counter any ground threat to the air base. Well to say that the exercise was different would be an understatement, and there were many inter service negotiations between the GD Commander and the OC, ZIC and CSM who were working in the defence HQ. The CSM was often seen, after returning from his 4 hours on duty officer, holding his head in his hands and mumbling "why me lord". The highlight of the week was when a platoon commander became geographically embarrassed while responding to a call out. He forgot the ocean was on the opposite side of the compass to the one in Townsville. The exercise came to a climax when the entire company was reacted to a simulated crash of a C130, the performance of CPL (Block) Giltman as the pilot of the crashed plane would have earned an Academy Award if only they had been able to capture it on film. Well done Gilly (Billy) you left a lot of people wondering whether or not it was an act or were you really insane.

A couple of weeks after the Air Defence Exercise, the company went to a place called Hobart Camp where they prepared for the Joint Exercise with a Malayan Battalion. They all came back with one leg shorter than the other from continually walking up the different levels of the Rubber plantations. The joint exercise was conducted shortly after Hobart Camp. The aim of the exercise was to promote co-operation between the armed forces of the two countries and this was done with gusto, particularly at the bar-b-que at the end. The only major activity to follow the joint exercise, work wise that is, was the rotation of platoons through Putada jungle training centre to make use of some excellent live firing ranges. The platoons were self contained in their own little area complete with canteen and boot boy. I'm sure no-one will forget Gunga Din. A man of

considerable talent especially when it came to drinking beer for breakfast, sleeping on concrete, and not washing himself or his clothes. He never failed to amaze people, how he could collect 40 pairs of GPs, clean them, get drunk and return them to the same bed space he picked them up from with never a mistake was a constant wonder. Well only one mistake, and that was when he had a heavy day on the rum and coke, come morning, all the boots were still in one big pile around Gungas prostrate body. The soldiers called him some very interesting names that morning and they hunted through the pile for their boots. He also spoke a particular brand of English, "his own", and was also set on calling anything with under two pips on his shoulder a schoolboy, much to the upset of the subbies who on numerous occasions made rather severe reference to the unknown nature of his parentage.



The CSM going Non-Fac



The 2IC taking impromptu Thai dancing lessons



Sgt. Smith having a nap on his birthday



Sgt. Smith taking another nap after strenuous sound activity

Now for the social scene. The mere mention of names like the Hong Kong Bar, the BC Bar and the Super Pub will bring back many memories, and names like the New Lum Tong and the Sin Tong Lum will bring back different memories and I'm sure everyone did at least one trap run while they were there. The important part of an overseas trip is seeing the country and meeting the people and this, the contingent did with style. The organized tours to Thailand proved this beyond doubt. The tour started with a 24 hour trip by train, eating lousy food and getting ripped off by the train staff who set their prices by the amount of profit they wanted to make on the sale, with the result that the prices went up and down like the proverbial drawers. The train trip yielded many interesting moments from the 2IC being removed from his seat at gunpoint by a guard so that the guard's girlfriend could sit next to a particular platoon sergeant who was trying to arrange Thai Boxing matches once again for the hapless 2IC. At the end of the trip, the tour organizer, Peter Lim, met the train load of grumbling people who could only think of going home, believe me that attitude didn't last long. On reaching the hotel and allocated two to a room, the lads were set loose. Over the five day tour, Peter Lim had organized sightseeing tours which started off on the first day with excellent attendances and dwindled to the last tour which consisted of a very few bleary eyed stayers who could handle both the social life and the sightseeing. The first night the tourers attended a tiger show and like the author I'm sure not so many people realized the tigers were so versatile. It's a pity one couldn't patent that bottle opener in Australia, it would come in handy at parties. Next the unsuspecting tourist invariably went to Patpong road where there were so many and varied watering holes from the Butterfly Bar to the New Jockey Club. Once again the local workers were always willing to assist a visitor to find his way around and nothing was too much trouble. It was wonderful to be made so welcome. Bangkok has some of the best hotels and weirdest dancers in the world (HEY RICH!). The night clubs and discos were enjoyed by all. When the time arrived to go back to Butterworth, all that could be heard were bleary eyed soldiers saying "I never want to go home". Another interesting aspect of Bangkok was the taxi cab. This is how they diagnose heart disease. If you could survive a drive in one of the Taxi's without having a heart attack, then you were pretty healthy.

Singapore was a different story, so clean and so obviously set up to rake in the tourist dollar, it was by no means as popular as Bangkok, but much electrical gear was bought and there were many interesting places to see, like the surrender chamber, Raffles and a tame Bugis Street compared to its reputation. The trip to Singapore provided a welcome break and it was taken at the end of the two weeks training in Pulada.