



The Military Survey (Geo) Branch

Winter Newsletter 2020 – issue 78

The 4th December 2020 is the **50th Anniversary** of the Disbandment of
84 Survey Squadron Royal Engineers in Singapore



84 Survey Squadron RE & 556 Field Survey Depot RE compound Dover Road Singapore

A brief history of 84 Field Survey Squadron RE and 570 Map Reproduction Troop RE (A more comprehensive history will be published in early 2021)

The General Survey Section RE (FARELF) (OC Lt (Svy EO) G E Robertson RE) was disbanded on 31st August 1955 and the following day 84 Field Survey Squadron RE and 570 Map Reproduction Troop were formed.

Temporary living accommodation for 84 Fd Svy Sqn RE was provided at 40 Base Workshops REME, Singapore until such time as the accommodation in Kuala Lumpur was ready and 570 Map Repro Tp RE had taken over living accommodation with Singapore Engineer Regt at Gillman Barracks. The two new units shared the technical accommodation of the former Central Survey Section RE at Dover Road, Singapore until 84 Fd Svy Sqn moved to Kuala Lumpur.

The Field Survey Depot RE (FARELF) was redesignated 556 Field Survey Depot RE, with no change in the establishment or equipment table and with 570 Map Repro Tp RE assuming responsibility for the local administration of the Depot, with effect from 1st September 1955.

Other organizational changes occurred in the Survey Directorate, GHQ FAR EAST LAND FORCES in that the AD Survey was a Lt Col, a new appointment and DAD Survey a Major of the R Aust Svy Corps both effective on 1st September 1955. Major F D BUCKLAND, Royal Australian Survey Corps joined Survey Dte, GHQ FARELF as DAD Survey on 6th December 1955 and Lt Col W H JOHNS MBE RE arrived on 24th March 1956 to take up appointment as AD Survey GHQ FARELF.

Major E A Hansen MBE RE assumed appointment of OC 84 Fd Svy Sqn RE wef 7th April 1956 and 2/Lt C D Clapp RE (NS) was TOS 570 Map Repro Tp RE from 84 Fd Svy Sqn RE wef 7th April 1956.

During the month of April 1956 two printing presses and a proving press were erected and tested for clearances at 570 Map Repro Tp establishment. The grainer was also operating in temporary accommodation.

The move of 84 Fd Svy Sqn RE to Malaya was completed on 10th May 1956. The unit occupied good temporary working accommodation on arrival, and new buildings were well advanced. 84 Field Survey Squadron moved into new technical accommodation at Batu Cantonment Camp Kuala Lumpur on 10/11th September 1956

SURVEY OFFICER APPOINTMENTS FARELF

10 August 1956

GHQ FARELF

AD Survey	Lt Col W H JOHNS MBE RE
DAD Survey	Major F D BUCKLAND R Aust Svy Corps

84 Field Survey Squadron RE

OC	Major E A HANSEN MBE RE
2 i/c	Capt G E ROBERTSON RE
Tp Comd	Lieut H TAYLOR R Aust Svy Corps
Tp Comd	2/Lt K A PYE RE
Tp Comd	2/Lt B W KITCHING RE

570 Map Reproduction Troop RE

O C	Capt M P HENSHAW RE
2 i/c	2/Lt C D CLAPP RE

Structural alterations and new building at 570 Map Repro Troop technical accommodation was expected to start in a few days and completed in 6 weeks. New buildings include a Survey Records Library, Chemical Store, Graining Shop and POL Store. Following completion of structural alterations to accommodation, an air conditioning plant with temperature and humidity control is to be installed in the Printing Shop, Paper Store and Photographic Darkroom. Records Library to be air conditioned later. For the time being the Helio department is to be equipped with extractor fans.

A field survey detachment of 84 Field Survey Sqn is expected to move to the Ipoh area in late December 1956. Approval has been given for the Malayan Pioneer Company attached to 84 Field Survey Squadron to be equipped with automatic weapons in support of survey parties working in the jungle.

An RAF Canberra PR detachment arrived in FARELF on 27th January 1957 and the air survey programme started almost immediately. The weather in the mornings has been unusually good for North Malaya, and a high output of Survey photography at 1/60,000 scale was achieved. At the time of writing this report full air survey cover has now been completed from 2° – 30 N to approx 6° – 30 N (about the Malay-Thai Border) from central Malaya to the west coast. The central and east coast tasks are being undertaken in conjunction with photography south of 2° – 30' N line covering JOHORE. The Air Survey Liaison Staff attached to HQ FEAF has been increased to meet the additional workload imposed by the high output of Survey photography.

Arrangements have been made with HQ Malaya Command for Air lifts and supply drops in support of field surveyors working in deep jungle.

No 2 Trig Troop of 84 Field Svy Sqn RE moved to South Perak on 11th March 1957 and will be joined by No 1 Trig Troop from Negri Sembilan on or about 1st April. A detachment from the Cartographic Troop 84 Field Survey Sqn moved to Singapore to reinforce 570 Map Repro Troop in map compilation tasks of Johore.

No 2 Trig Troop of 84 Field Survey Sqn RE is to move to the Batu Gajah area on 5th May for field survey duties. No 1 Trig Troop moved to Telok Anson area from Negri Sembilan on 1st April 1957.

HONOURS AND AWARDS – The following awards to personnel of 84 Field Survey Sqn were notified in the 17th Operational List:
For Operational Service in Malaya – 1st July – 31st December 1956
Mention in DespatchesSgt N Nuttall RE
Commander-in-Chief's Certificate for Good Service.....WOII F J Simpson RE

Major T R Burrows RE arrived ex UK on 6th June and assumed command of 84 Field Survey Sqn RE, Malaya, on 27th June vice Major E A Hansen MBE RE. Major Hansen embarked on TT *Nevassa* on 29th June 1957.

No 1 Trig Troop of 84 Field Survey Sqn moved from Slim River to Kuala Kangsar on 27th June for field survey duties, but on account of operational necessity the troop is moving to the area of GRIK (Upper Perak) on or about 1st July. No 2 Trig Troop moved to the IPOH area on 4th June for field survey duties.

A reorganisation of 84 Field Survey Sqn is to take place by mid-July 1957. Brief details are as follows:

- (a) The air survey and drawing staff of HQ 84 Field Survey Sqn, Batu, will be transferred to Singapore and join the Sqn detachment already working with the Reproduction Troop. This move will give increased flexibility in the use of Survey manpower in the map reproduction stages.
- (b) The field survey staff consisting of two Trig troops will be divided between north and south Malaya to meet foreseeable operational requirements.
- (c) Headquarters of 84 Field Survey Sqn will remain at Batu, Kuala Lumpur as it is central for the control of scattered survey parties. It is also a good rest centre for the field survey parties after protracted jungle operations.

Major J K NOLAN Royal Aust Survey Corps, arrived 25th March 1958 and assumed the appointment of DAD Survey w.e.f. 1st April, vice Major F D BUCKLAND Royal Aust Survey Corps.

HONOURS AND AWARDS – The following awards to personnel of 84 Field Survey Sqn were notified in the – 19th Operational List Malaya:
British Empire Medal – 23247541 Sapper Kilgour I M, RE.....84 Field Survey Sqn RE
Mention in Despatches – 449861 2Lt Bailey M E O, RE..... 84 Field Survey Sqn RE

Capt R M Mangles RE assumed the appointment of 2i/c 84 Field Survey Sqn RE w.e.f. 2nd June 1958 and Lieut E M Dean RE joined 84 Field Survey Sqn RE from 570 Map Repro Troop RE for temporary duty on 13th June. Period of temporary duty is estimated at about 5 weeks.

A detachment from 84 Field Survey Sqn RE (Malaya) and 13 Field Survey Sqn RE (UK) arrived Jesselton North Borneo, from Singapore on 3rd June 1958. The task is to provide horizontal control, levelling data, field annotated air photographs, upon which to base topographical mapping at 1/25,000 and 1/50,000 scale covering some 1200 sq miles in the Mount Kinabalu – Kota Belud area. Field surveys are estimated for completion by end of August, and map proofs for final ground check are expected to become available during November and December.

It is also necessary to re-establish the height of Mount Kinabalu currently as 13,455 feet. The method for re-establishing the height of Mount Kinabalu is to carry the West Coast datum levels to several convenient fixed positions close to the feature and observe a series of verticals from different positions. The North Borneo Government is giving considerable administrative and technical assistance to the field survey detachment.

No 3 Trig Troop of 84 Field Survey Sqn RE reinforced by a detachment from 13 Field Survey Sqn RE (UK) are based at Kota Belud. The field control survey covering 1200 sq miles is expected to be completed by 3rd September 1958.

Nos 1 & 2 Trig Troops of 84 Field Survey Sqn returned to Sqn HQ, Kuala Lumpur, from Naka (Kedah) on 29th August. It is planned for these two field Troops to return to north Malaya during early October after a rest and re-fit. During the re-fit period Survey tasks are being carried out in the Kuala Lumpur area.

Capt J A Underwood RE arrived in Singapore on 16th September and assumed the duties of OC 570 Map Reproduction Troop vice Capt M P Henshaw RE. 2/Lt Mackie RE joined 84 Field Survey Sqn RE on 18 September vice 2/Lt Lavers. 2/Lt Ure re-joined 84 Field Survey Sqn RE on 12th October vice 2/Lt A P Baggs RE.

Lt Col W H Johns MBE RE embarked in the *Oxfordshire* on RHE on 15th March 1959. Lt Col I C C Mackenzie RE assumed the appointment of AD Survey FARELF vice Lt Col JOHNS on 2nd March 1959. Capt R M Kennedy RE arrived ex UK on 2nd Apr for duty with 84 Fd Svy Sqn RE.

HONOURS AND AWARDS - 2563759 Sgt LUCAS S D 570 Map Repro Tp RE was awarded a Commander-in-Chief's Certificate on 4th December 1959 in the 22nd Operational List.

Major R G ATKEY RE assumed command of 84 Fd Svy Sqn RE vice Major T R BURROWS RE, on 26th March 1960.

The Malayan detachment of 84 Field Survey Squadron RE remains employed on L7010 Series one-inch MALAYA with the field detachment HQ at KLUANG.

Fatal Accident – On 5th April 1960, a labourer employed by the Brunei Government on behalf of Det 84 Field Survey Squadron RE in Brunei, was killed by a falling tree at Bukit Batu Belah. The inquest was opened on 25th April and adjourned until 2nd May 1960 for further evidence. Capt R M Kennedy RE attended the inquest. The verdict of the inquest was accidental death.

DISBANDMENT OF UNITS – 84 Field Survey Squadron RE and 570 Map Reproduction Troop RE were disbanded on the 31st August 1960. Both these unit were raised in FARELF to assist in the Malayan emergency and can be justly proud of their achievements both in the jungle and in the office.

RAISING OF NEW UNIT - On 1st September 1960, the new 84 SURVEY SQUADRON RE was raised in Singapore with the amalgamation of 84 Fd Svy Sqn and 570 Map Repro Tp. The occasion was marked by a parade held at Meiktila Barracks Square. Lt Col I C C Mackenzie RE AD Survey GHQ FARELF, inspected the troops addressed the parade and took the salute at the march past.



84 Survey Squadron RE – Amalgamation Parade 1st September 1960

Back Row left to right: - Spr Rigby, Spr Budenburg, Spr Willcocks, Spr Sharman, Cpl Robbins L/Cpl Craig, L/Cpl Bolton, Spr Allen Cfn Stephens, Spr Liddell, Spr Hurd, Spr Brinkworth, L/Cpl Byrne.

2nd Row Standing left to right: - Spr Crawshaw, Spr Widdowson, Spr Grayson, Spr Talbot, Spr Arman, Spr Blackmore, Spr Tolmie, Spr Eastal, Spr Cherry, Spr McLeod, L/Cpl Lambert, Spr Crane, Spr Hamid, Cpl Din, Cpl Davis.

1st Row Standing Left to Right: - Spr Knowles, Spr Lamont, Cpl Dunn, Spr Nicholas, Cpl Nicholls, Spr Wolff, Spr Wham, L/Col Somerset, Spr Daley, Spr Watts, Spr Thompson, Spr Hunnable, Spr Murphy, L/Cpl Howarth.

Front Row Seated Left Right: - Sgt Hewett, S/Sgt McCormac, WOII Miles, 2Lt Hoadley, 2Lt Shaw, Capt Underwood, Lt Col McKenzie, Major Atkey, Major Hall, Capt Mangles, 2Lt Curtis, WOII Jenkins, S/Sgt Hibbert, Sgt Bailie, Sgt Payne.

2/Lt P J Arnold RE joined 84 Survey Squadron RE and Capt R M Kennedy RE left 84 Survey Squadron RE during the month of December 1960. Capt B E Dalton R Aust Svy Corps joined 84 Survey Squadron RE and 2/Lt J P Waddington RE left 84 Survey Squadron RE during the month of March 1961.

A further RAF detachment from UK continued the flying of air survey photography of Thailand during Oct-Nov 1960. One small sortie was also made over Southern Brunei enabling work to commence on some of the Southern sheets of that block. 81 (PR) Squadron RAF flew only four sorties during the quarter; three were unacceptable for Survey. The fourth sortie covered small areas in the Kra Isthmus and Northern Malaya. The lack of survey photography in both Malaya and North Borneo mapping areas is now becoming critical and holding up field work.

Capt J Underwood RE visited Australia for the period 15th Nov – 16th Dec 60 to study methods of Map Reproduction with the R Aust Svy Corps.

Lt Gen M O M Ceao Gustavus Chakrabardh Commandant of the Royal Thai Armed Forces Staff College and 40 Officers visited the Sqn on 23rd November 1960. Brig B T U Cowey DSO Brig i/c Adm Singapore Base District and Col D C S David MC, Commandant EBG accompanied the party on their visit.



Thai Officers visiting 84 Survey Squadron RE on 23rd November 1960

The Air Survey Section moved from Kuala Lumpur on the 3rd February 1961 and are now operating in the new Multiplex and plotting rooms at Dover Road.

A new RAF (PR) detachment from UK continued the flying of Thailand from 6th February to 31st Mar 1961. This was a most successful detachment and there now remains only some small areas to be flown for this task to be completed. Unfortunately, there were no sorties made over Borneo and this coupled with the continued unserviceability of 81 (PR) Squadron aircraft, is making field operations very difficult to complete.

84 Svy Sqn was affiliated with HMS *Cook* on 4 April 1961. A party from the Sqn spent a day at sea with the ship on 11th April 1961.

PRINTING STATISTICS – Quarter ending 31st March 1961

Printing Impressions	2,654,607
Plates Printed Down	490
Number of Map Sheets	88
Number of Copies	570,527

Military training continued throughout the Quarter. PE tests and Range classification taking priority. Range results are as follows: -

FN	- Marksmen	4
	1 st Class	3
	2 nd Class	8
SMG	- Marksmen	36
	1 st Class	6
	2 nd Class	1
	3 rd Class	1
Pistol	- Marksmen	5

The Squadron won the Engineer Base Group Shooting Shield. The award as based on the Annual Range Course results of all Engineer Base Group Units.

Capt S Fraser RE joined 84 Survey Squadron RE and Capt R M Mangles RE left 84 Survey Squadron RE during the quarter ending June 1961.

The field surveys were progressing as follows: – Malaya (L7010, 1/63,360) The assessment of the control requirements for the Malay/Thai border area has been completed and forwarded to Royal Thai Survey Dept. The photographic gaps have still to be flown on sheets 81, 88, 90, 96, 97. Control has been received from the Surveyor General Malaya for sheets 88, 89 and 90. Due to considerable development in areas of sheets 80 and 81 field parties are experiencing difficulty in annotation with the existing photography. Sheet 79 is now ready for compilation. Brunei – Sarawak (T735, 1/50,000) Field control for the remainder of the Brunei Block was completed in April and the original records despatched to the DOS on the 15 May 1961. North Borneo (T735, 1/50,000) The field detachment moved to Beaufort on the 14 Apr where field work has been commenced on Sheets 5/115/7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, and 16. Due to Z photography mapping of sheets 7, 10, 11, 12 & 16 will be held up but field work is proceeding.

81 (PR) Squadron had been able to fly a few sorties during the June 1961 quarter but unfortunately the weather both in Malaya and Borneo has been unsuitable. The only successful sorties have been: -

- 81A/RAF/601 BORNEO/KOTA BELUD AREA Scale 1:40,000
(special sortie for training)
- 81/RAF/976 BORNEO scale 1:60,000
(this covers areas of sheets 5/113/8 & 3/114/5, 6 & 7.
- 81/RAF/1006 MALAYA MERSING AREA scale 1:60,000
- 81/RAF/1009 MALAYA IPOH AREA Scale 1:60,000
- 81/RAF/1012 MALAYA MERSING AREA Scale 1:60,000
- 81/RAF/603 BORNEO BINTULU AREA Scale 1:60,000
- 81A/RAF/606 BORNEO KUDAT PENINSULA Scale 1:60,000

Capt P McMaster RE joined 84 Survey Sqn RE on 23rd July 1961 and later Capt C H Wickes RE on 17th Sep 1961. The following officers left 84 Svy Sqn - 2/Lt C R Nichols RE on 4th Aug 61, Capt J A Underwood RE on 18th Aug 1961 and 2/Lt N A L Curtis RE on 7th Sep 61. A party of 10 personnel from 84 Survey Squadron RE visited HMS *Dampier* on 18th August 1961.

In the quarter ending December 1961 - 2/Lt P J Arnold RE left 84 Survey Sqn RE, RHE on NS Release. Other ranks joining 84 Svy Sqn during that period were: - S/Sgt P Webster RE on 13th Oct 61, S/Sgt J Kidney RE on 21st Oct 61, Sgt A J Robinson RE on 29th Nov 61, Cpl J C Rowlands RE on 4th Dec 61 and Spr J Hyde RE on 27th Oct 1961.

SURVEY OFFICER APPOINTMENTS FARELF – 8 January 1962

GHQ FARELF

Reg AD Survey	Lt Col I C C MACKENZIE RE
Reg DAD Survey	Major H M HALL R Aust Svy Corps
Tech Svy Offr	Mr S F SMITH
MRO	Mr P D J FLETCHER

84 Survey Squadron RE

Reg OC	Major R G ATKEY RE
Reg Fd Svy Tp	Capt P McMASTER RE
ESC Map Repro Tp	Capt S FRASER RE
Reg Tp Offr	Capt B E DALTON R Aust Svy
Reg Admin Offr	Capt C H WICKES RE

84 Svy Sqn - Civilian Tradesmen

<u>Civilian Survey Tradesmen</u>	<u>Estab</u>	<u>Post Filled</u>	<u>Post Vacant</u>
Draughtsmen Topographical	6	3	3
Lithographic Retouchers	5	2	3
Photoworker Cartographic	1	1	-
Helio Worker	1	1	-
Lithographic Machine Assistants	4	4	-

Lt Col D G L Wilde RE AD Svy Designate arrived on 25th February 1962 vice Lt Col I C C Mackenzie RE who departed RHE on 3rd March 1962 and Major R V Hammett R Aust Svy arrives to take up the appointment as DAD Survey wef 2nd July 1962. Capt C H Wickes RE departs from 84 Svy Sqn RE wef 21st May 1962.

Senior NCO promotions - S/Sgt M Iliffe, Carto Tech I, promoted to WOII wef 5th March 1962 and S/Sgt J Kidney, Photo Tech I, promoted to WOII wef 19th March 1962

Capt G R Gathercole RE joined 84 Survey Squadron RE on 7th July 1962 and Major H M Hall R Aust Svy DAD Svy returned to Australia on 29th July 1962

Local interest during the quarter ending September 1962 had centred on Malaysia. The Singapore elections passed off easily, and planning in support of Malaysia is in progress in all territories concerned. An increase in pirate activity off the North Borneo coast has caused uneasiness among the local population. The local police with some service assistance are taking retaliatory measures.

The following other ranks arrived to join 84 Svy Sqn on 9th October 1962 – L/Cpl J J Gould, L/Cpl R A Pomroy, L/Cpl B Houldershaw, L/Cpl R Jones, L/Cpl A A Claxton, and L/Cpl M L Ludlow.

L/Cpl N R Grimmett and L/Cpl D P Kimber joined 84 Svy Sqn on 6th November 1962.

S/Sgt B F Gerhard joined 84 Survey Squadron RE on 17th December 1962 and WO I N E Petty 556 Field Survey Depot on 29th November 1962.

The **Borneo Operation** commenced on 8th December 1962 with the movement of British Forces to BRUNEI. Survey units have been involved with map production and air chart distribution, and planning for additional survey work in Borneo. Capt Gathercole was appointed survey adviser to COMBRITBOR from 13th December, and map stores were set up at BRUNEI on 13th December and at KUCHING on 14th December. The Director of Lands and Surveys SARAWAK and the State Surveyor BRUNEI have given extremely useful assistance. One survey NCO was attached to the Sarawak Rangers from 15th December for the purpose of obtaining survey information in an unsurveyed area of NORTH BORNEO. Other main events during the quarter include different meetings with representatives of Malaya, USAMSFE and USARPAC and THAILAND. Sgt Wyse posted to Kuching i/c Map issues to armed forces involved in the Brunei Revolt

The **BRUNEI EMERGENCY** came as a surprise to 84 Svy Sqn RE. Military training was planned for Sat 8th December 1962 and in fact the whole unit was to be engaged in shooting its annual range classification on this day at Bukit Timah on the 30-yard range. The unit left for the ranges at 0700 hrs, 8th December 1962; at 0745 hrs the OC returned to the unit on a routine matter and was there informed by OC 556 Fd Svy Depot that men were required to assist in urgent map distribution to British Forces as there had been an armed revolt in BRUNEI in the early hours of 8th December 1962. This information was confirmed by the TSO who arrived at the unit at approximately 0800 hrs. The unit was recalled from the ranges to provide assistance to 556 Fd Svy Depot and also to be prepared for any rapid map production that might be required. Men were available to 556 Fd Svy Depot from 0830 hrs and 84 Svy Sqn was ready for rapid map production by 0915 hrs, 8th December 1962. From then until midnight on Saturday 15th December 1962 the unit was engaged in extremely rapid map production in support of British Forces in BRUNEI; since the 15th December 1962 support has continued but at a lower rate because the main requirements of the British Forces had been met between 8th – 15th December 1962. Field surveyors were NOT engaged in the operation other than as assistants to 556 Fd Svy Depot in map distribution.

During the first few days it was NOT possible to work a shift system as maximum effort was required. Men were rested as and when a slack period occurred in their sections: gradually shift work was introduced by 12th December 1962. The unit was brought onto normal hours as soon as the workload permitted. It is pointed out the main load fell on the Officers and Senior NCOs due to the close supervision required during the high production rate; most of the Officers and SNOs worked full hours from 8th – 15th December 1962 supervising two shifts in a day. There was no other solution as the unit was NOT established to work at extremely high pressure on two shifts. In order to ease the strain on the supervision two Senior NCOs were requested from UK as reinforcements on 10th December 1962; unfortunately, they did not arrive until 23rd December 1962 by which time the main strain was over. It was of course too early to say that a further period of intense effort would NOT occur.

Major J S Coulson RE assumed command of 84 Survey Squadron RE vice Major R G Atkey RE 22nd January 1963.

The Survey Detachment in Borneo remains in its present location of Kuching/Sarawak with the focus on the Borneo T735 1:50,000 Series. The Air Survey Liaison Section moved to the island of Labuan on 30th April 1963.

On the 4th May 1963, a Belvedere Helicopter crashed in Borneo close to the village of Long Merarap in the Trusan Valley in the 5th Division of Sarawak. The Commander of the rescue patrol Frank Williams was actually meant to travel on the helicopter but was called to the ops room and it left without him. A patrol from 22 SAS were inserted into the area to look for survivors. They found the wreck, but sadly all 9 men who had been aboard the helicopter were dead when they got there. Brigadier Neil Kelly CBE) was a passenger on that Belvedere on that sad day. He and a Medical Officer were dropped off at a Long House on a "hearts and minds" mission; the Belvedere then went on and a few minutes later it crashed. At the time no one knew that Neil and the MO had been dropped off at that particular long house and it was 17 days before they were found and rescued. Neil had another lucky escape a couple of days later as his rescue evacuation helicopter with him on board this time, also crashed. The ASLS staff were tasked with trying to identify the crash site using aerial photography taken by the PR Squadron that day, but without success.

81 (PR) Sqn RAF continued to fly Survey photography of Borneo whilst the Air Survey Liaison Section classified the quality of photography made up the flight plans and plotted the results. It is planned for both 81 Sqn and a small section of air survey personnel to return to RAF Tengah and continue survey photography of Borneo from there. The Air Svy Liaison Section at Labuan closed down on the 2nd July 1963 and returned to RAF Tengah Singapore (S/Sgt Phil Webster, Cpl Brian Weir, L/Cpl Noel Grimmett, L/Cpl Ian Cragg & Spr Harry Hawkins).

The beginning of 1964 saw No 1 and 2 Survey Troops remaining in their present locations of Kuching/Sarawak and Keningau/Sabah, respectively. No 3 Troop (UK Based) arrived from the UK on 9th Feb and left Singapore for Borneo on 13th Feb. They settled in very quickly at Simanggang and have made good progress. No 3 Troop personnel were:

Capt D J Baker RE, S/Sgt Osborn M S J, A/Sgt Holmes D, Cpl Moncrieff V H, Cpl Smith P F, L/Cpl Green V M, L/Cpl Loughton J, L/Cpl Parr M D, L/Cpl Durup J P, Spr Brindle M H, Spr Brown J E, Pte Nixon GW.

Three Gravity bases were established, two at Kapit and Nanga Gaat in Sarawak and one at Sepulut in Sabah. Twenty-eight gravity stations were observed near Kuching. Work on the Tawau traverse continued but was severely held up due to lack of helicopter support. The problem of Helicopter priorities was discussed, and attempts were made to rectify this situation. Good progress was made by the UK based field troop with height control in the Simanggang Block.

Impressions for the second quarter of 1964 were 1,322,322. Main production was again devoted to T735 1:50,000 Series of North Borneo. On stores and equipment, a new 3 projector set of MK II Multiplex Equipment arrived and was erected in November. The three tellurometers from 3 Troop were serviced and recalibrated by International Aeradio. A 3-ton vehicle was sent to 2 Tp on 24th Oct.

On map production in the last quarter of 1964 the number of impressions was 1,147,200 the main effort being T735 series of Borneo and the L904 series of Thailand Town Plans plus several Map Catalogue Indexes

In 1965 the Sqn HQ remained at Dover Road Singapore and No 1 and 2 Survey Troops remained in their present location of Sibu/Sarawak and Tenom/Sabah, respectively and No 3 Survey Troop had by this time returned to the UK. The Squadron HQ had established a system whereby Tellurometers in use in Borneo and requiring repair, could be repaired in Singapore by a commercial firm and returned to the field troops within one week.

Personnel movements were - Lt R Wood to Sarawak on 7th Jan 1965, Capt White from Sarawak 15th Jan and WOII Frampton to Sarawak on 3rd March.

In the third quarter of 1965, the Squadron HQ continued with its printing programme both for new sheets and routine reprints. The trade testing for this quarter was also completely successful and all available personnel carried out PE tests and a Range Course Programme.

1 Topo Troop results for the first and second phases for the triangulation extension in the Danum block have been passed to MOD for computing. Work has started on the provision of detailed vertical control for computing and also the provision of detailed vertical control for 1:50,000 mapping in the Danum area and the results due. 2 Topo Troop continued working on the establishment of height control, but lack of helicopter support had again hampered progress. Field work in both troops has been restricted as helicopter support was limited to 20 hours per month.

In 1966 the Squadron HQ remained at Dover Road in Singapore with Major R M W Busk RE in command of the squadron. The two topographical troops were detached from Squadron Headquarters and were serving in East Malaysia.

During the period January to March 1967 the Borneo withdrawal was completed. 1 Topo Troop returning to Singapore at the end of January, after finally completing the measure of GORAM-MAJAU. 2 Topo Troop continued to work from Labuan, completing the fixation of MURUK MIAU and the re-observation of the West Sabah Loop traverse at the end of March, in spite of the withdrawal of the Whirlwinds from Labuan in mid-Feb, and under the constant threat of their own compulsory withdrawal. In Singapore 1 Topo Troop began a period of training to fit them for vehicle operations, with the aim of full mobility by 1st June. In Air Survey the KATIBAS task continued, with only a few weeks plotting remaining.

1 Topo Troop had been concerned with the 1st Order re-triangulation in West Malaysia and Singapore and a final report was being compiled. The proposals for the geodetic connection between Nakhon Sithamarat and Kota Baharu bases are being examined for a possible starting date. 2 Topo Troop had been concentrating on 1st Order electronic distance measurements to provide scale checks for the ruling triangulation in West Sabah.

Capt A E H Matthews RE assumed command of 1 Topo Troop on 5th Sep 67 and Major T W G Farmer RE assumed command of the Squadron vice Major R M W Busk RE on 20th Oct 67.

In January 1968, the Squadron HQ remained at Dover Road Singapore. No 1 Topo Troop established its base at Kota Baharu West Malaysia during October 1967 and 2 Topo Troop established its base at Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. 1 Topo Troop continued with the joint operation in establishing a connection between the geodetic triangulation system of Thailand and Malaysia. The progress has again been hampered due to the breakdown of tellurometers but the Troop completed the British task in early March and it was decided that personal and equipment should remain in the location in order to assist the two other nationalities towards the completion of their tasks. 2 Topo Troops are deployed on Topographical control surveys in Sabah.

At the beginning of the bi-annual period the control of all technical work in the Squadron and the command of those troops working in Singapore was re-organised. A new department 'TECHNICAL CONTROL' was introduced; the administrative responsibilities coordinated under Sqn HQ Tp and the elements of Air Survey; Carto and Print consolidated under Map Production Tp. This organisation is now developing well, and the benefits are being felt.

During the month of July 1968, 1 Topo Tp completed gravity measurements of the Singapore Triangulation Operation and completed their preparation for the Field Work. The Field Work was satisfactorily completed in the main in just over two weeks with all measurements and angles measured to geodetic standards. During this time 1 Topo Tp was supported by a SIOUX helicopter from the RE troop at KLUANG for movement and re-supplies. 1 Topo Tp was also reinforced for this operation by six surveyors from the staff of the Chief surveyor of Singapore. Although a new experience for all of them they lived and worked with British surveyors on all hills. Their co-operation was valuable to the success of the operation.

Progress on all photographic tasks has been severely limited during the period by poor weather conditions over Malaysia and Christmas Island, where repeated attempts have so far resulted in no acceptable photography. Several tasks have been completed, however, and some progress has been made on the Borneo Survey, to which a further 189 Nautical Miles of flight lines were added after FEAF authorization in August. There has been a detachment, in November, when Cpl Lyno arrived for Survey Liaison duties with 81 (PR) Det based at RAF Kai Tak for the Survey of Hong Kong and the New Territories. Complete photographic coverage of the area was obtained in the period 18th – 29th November 1968. This section is now staffed by Cpl D Lyno, who relieved Cpl J Jefferies in August: and Cpl A Aldous who replaced Spr R Brown in October.

A total of 695 Nautical Miles of survey photography has been obtained and accepted during the six months to December 1968, leaving a further 347 Nautical Miles still to be flown. The numbers of impressions for this quarter was 1,019,607 total number of copies 209,957 resulting in 54 Map Sheets, the main effort again being on reprints.

In 1969 the Squadron HQ remained at Dover Road Singapore. No 1 Topo Troop returned to Sqn HQ and No 2 Topo Troop were based in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, East Malaysia.

During the period January to March 1969 1 Topo Troop was based in Singapore completing outstanding reports and reconnoitering the CHANGI tasks. Capt G P G Robinson RE took over command of the troop from Capt R A Ellis RE. on 16th Jan 69 and four personnel were detached to 2 Topo Tp in Sabah. The troop commenced the angle observations necessary to fix the HVPP's and RM 1 associated with the Changi Sector station. Transport to the points off Singapore island was provided by a helicopter from the RE Air Troop, launches from 33 Maritime Regt, assault boats from FEP and the troop commander's boat.

2 Topo Troop over this period has been used to prepare for the observation of the Tawau – Lahad Datu block. Capt R A Ellis took over command of the troop from Lt J Elder RE. Four members of 1 Topo Tp had been attached to the troop. Observations of the horizontal control scheme in the Tawau and Lahad Datu Block had commenced. A considerable amount of time had been wasted due to postponements of promised helicopter support. Considerable difficulty had been experienced in obtaining labour at reasonable rates as it was the harvest season.

For the period April 1969 to March 1970 the Squadron Headquarters remained at Dover Road in Singapore. The topographical troops were detached from the Headquarters serving in East Malaysia during part of the year. There had been three OCs in this period the present being – Major E M Dean RE.

Major T W G FARMER RE	SOS Sep 69
Major M R RICHARDS RE	TOS Sep 69/SOS Mar 70

Officers, Warrant Officers and Senior NCOs employed within the Squadron HQ and Field Troops for the period April 1969 to March 1970 were:

Capt J W Roger	RE	TOS May 69	Capt G P G Robinson	RE
Capt R A Ellis	RE		Capt R F Skitch	R Aust Svy
WOII M J Maunder	RE	TOS May 69	WOII B F Gerhard	RE SOS May 69
WOII T Braybrooke	RE		WOII D K MacKenzie	RE SOS May 69
WOII D J Pettet	RE			
Ssgt C R Price	RE	TOS May 69	Ssgt R D Evans	RE
Ssgt M J Nicholls	RE	SOS Dec 69	Ssgt R Jones	RE
Ssgt L J Wallis	RE	SOS Oct 69	Ssgt D A Scothern	RE

1 Topo Troop now Singapore based had been employed on one major task in Singapore. On completion of that task most of the troop including OC Capt G P G Robinson RE and Troop Ssgt, Ssgt L J Wallis RE went to Sarawak to support 2 Topo Tp. The rear party consisting of on average three persons, continued to undertake minor tasks in the Singapore and West Malaysia area.

2 Topo Troop reinforced by members of 1 Topo Tp had moved out of Sabah after 12 years of continual work. After the completion of the Tawau and Lahad Datu block control the troop withdrew to Singapore for regrouping and resting before moving to Sarawak for more 1st order surveying work. Once again, the troop was heavily reinforced by members of 1 Topo Tp.

Air Survey personnel were generally deployed as Air Survey Liaison Staff on OP MANDAU. The following task was completed VITI LEVU – FIJI ROAD revision. Further photography was received, and the road revision completed on all outstanding sheets.

In early 1970 1 Topo Troop was employed in support of 2 Topo Troop in Sarawak, other tasks undertaken by 1 Topo Troop during the period were a magnetic & control Survey of Gan and the survey of Troposcatter Aerials in Singapore and the provision of a bearing Picket at Dieppe Barracks. 2 Topo Troop were solely employed on the Geodetic traverse on the Sarawak – Indonesian Border.

The run-down of the Squadron had begun and the first batch of stores of a technical nature were returned to ORD on 5th Feb 70 and other minor items on 23rd Feb. The SQMS holdings of Excess Issues had been rationalised and a large quantity of stores no longer required returned 3 BOD.

The records show that Squadron Headquarters remained at Dover Road in Singapore for the period until the official disbandment of the Squadron on 4th December 1970. All barrack items and reproduction equipment were officially handed over to the Singapore Government on 2nd December 1970. A Topographical Troop has been detached from Headquarters, serving in Pontianak, Indonesia during the period. The Officer Commanding for the period was – Major E M Dean RE

During the period July to September 1970 the combined Topo Troops completed their withdrawal to Singapore finally leaving Indonesia (Op MANDAU) on the 20th August 1970 having completed all field work. The reports for the Sarawak & Indonesia tasks had been completed. A rear party of surveyors from squadron HQ carried out survey tasks in Penang and Mersing (W Malaysia). All Topo Troops stores had now been handed in prior to the unit Disbandment. Topo Troop personnel had now been absorbed into Squadron HQ to form a pool of labour for the final crating of stores to be sent to UK.

In July 1970, the majority of Squadron Air Surveyors supported a detachment of Air Surveyors from UK who were attached to the PR Squadron flying the photography for “Op MANDAU”. The Air Survey Office had now closed. The rundown of the Repro Troop had continued over this period with several personnel being sent on postings & courses to the UK.

On the 16th September 1970, 84 Survey Squadron & 556 Fd Svy Depot organised a Farewell Barbecue at the Dover Road Swimming Pool for all personnel and their guests. This was followed on 18th September 1970 with farewell drinks for all 84 Survey Squadron personnel and 556 Field Survey Depot personnel including all civilians of both units, at the Carlito Club. The Carlito Club then close officially on the 19th September 1970.

On 2nd October 1970, 84 Survey Squadron RE and 556 Field Survey Depot RE held a farewell cocktail party in the RE Sgts Mess for 100 guests, including the Chief Engineer Col R F N Anderson OBE MC, AD Survey Lt Col M R Richards RE, CRE Lt Col B R Lamble RE and Mr N Rames Waram Chief Surveyor Singapore. A plaque was presented to Mr Rames Waram by Major E M Dean RE in recognition of the close co-operation of the Singapore Survey Department and 84 Survey Squadron RE and 556 Field Survey Depot RE.

Then on the 21st October 1970, the OC Major E M Dean RE on behalf of 84 Survey Sqn RE handed over a Portable Boxing Ring and Boxing Ring Shelter to the Minister of Social Affairs Inche Othman WOK MP for Pasir Panjang who accepted on behalf of the Pasir Panjang Community Centre. The evening programme consisted of speeches, the exchange of plaques, a buffet and five exhibition bouts of boxing.

There has been a rapid rundown of topo troops on RHE during this period. All personnel had been employed on the sorting and crating of stores and general tidying up of the compound. The 7 Bar and 3 Bar Multiplex equipment’s have now been crated and dispatched to UK. The drawing office, photo department and print department have now closed, and all equipment handed to the Singapore Government.

On the 2nd December 1970, A handover board of officers from the Singapore Government and officers of the British Military forces convened at 84 Survey Sqn RE to hand over officially the 84 Survey Sqn RE Compound and fittings.

(Compiled by Noel Grimmett from The National Archive files)

Early Days of 84 Field Survey Squadron Royal Engineers

(Recollections sixty years later by Ron Birch)

84 Field Survey Squadron was established in mid-1955 its primary purpose the revision of the mapping of Malaya which had become outdated during the Japanese occupation of the peninsular. Subsequent tasks would include the establishment of horizontal and vertical control for future projects in specific areas of the country overseen by civilian contractors, Hunting’s Aerial Surveys. Malacca’s Military Commonwealth Cantonment being an example. Due to the continuing Emergency numerous other tasks requiring a survey input would be needed and include deployments to the Malay Security Services, Military and Commonwealth units and the Royal Air Force.

Prior to the Squadrons’ being, a small Survey Section had been situated for quite some time in Singapore and from this nucleus 84 Field Svy Sqn would expand.

The Squadron would need enough to form a minimum of two Field Troops plus an Air Survey oriented base section. Additional Headquarters support would naturally be required.

Personnel was mainly ‘recruited from UK based units consisting of both regular and National Service personnel. 13 Field Survey Squadron based in Fernhurst provided six members, a high percentage from such a small unit: three

Sergeants, two Corporals and a Lance Corporal namely Sgts Wilf Reid, Cecil (Tommy) Thompson, and Bill Raglan (MT Sgt), Cpl Frank Litterick, Cpl Jim Way (Instrument Mech) and L/Cpl Ron Birch.

This influx was shortly supported by others, many coming by sea as opposed to the quicker air travel by the earliest personnel. They included the new OC Major Hanson, the new SSM Fergus Simpson, Cpls Denis Martin, John Stevens, Mike Osborn, S. Robinson and L/Cpl Alf Isherwood together with quite a few NS men. Existing personnel from the Svy Section included Capt Jock Robertson, S/Sgt Mont Iliffe, Sgt Norman Nuttall, Sappers Dave Harries and Graeme Hollingshead.

Originally the squadron was based in Gillman Barracks in Singapore and expected to last three months or so before moving over the causeway to Malaya. The early days were spent with acclimatation, fitness, jungle warfare and Malay language training in preparation for their future deployment. Moving to Malaya shortly afterwards the Sqn were accommodated in 'straw bashas' in Rowcroft Lines, Kuala Lumpur

Mapping Revision was conducted by a combination of arial survey interpretation at HQ by the Air Surveyors and Cartographers with the actual visual ground confirmation by the Field Survey Troops. This often resulted in rivalry between the two, perhaps on the difference in living conditions, air-conditioned offices for the cartographers and jungle treks the lot of the field surveyor.

Another particularly important task was to assist the RAF in bombing raids of suspected Communist Gorilla camps deep in the jungle. This required horizontal coordinated positions along jungle perimeters to calculate bearing and distance to the accepted co-ords (from whatever source available) of the suspect camp. The RAF could then conduct their raid along these bearings from the surveyed coordinated ground position.

One job within this category stands out due to its unusual circumstances:

During 1957 the Communist Guerrilla Leader Ching Peng negotiated peace talks with the Malayan Government in the village of Krow on the Siam border. As talks broke down a plan to track his movements back into the jungle was devised, Alf Isherwood and Ron Birch being deployed as the survey part of the Australian Regiment for this mission. Ron would coordinate the perimeter position whilst Alf drew the short straw and joined the Australian field patrol deep into the jungle. Unfortunately, on this occasion the leaders' camp had been vacated by the time Alf's patrol could reach and coordinate it.

As stated earlier due to the continuing terrorist insurgency the Sqn was often called upon to support the security services on various missions, this mainly involved a Field Surveyor being seconded to the Malay Police. The Field Surveyor, armed with a partially revised map and relevant air photography would not only join, but often navigate, armed police into the jungle to access suspected guerrilla camps.

These patrols were sometimes accompanied by surrendered terrorists, often young women, and could last three or four leach sucking days depending on the density of the jungle.

The 'Bread and Butter' task of providing control for future projects could perhaps be described as basic traversing but in difficult conditions. Areas of interest would be identified by the Companies' representative and requirements for horizontal and vertical positions forwarded to a Field Survey Troop. Closed traverses were conducted often through dense jungle or rubber plantations with surveyed points being constructed for future reference. Computations were carried out in situ and forwarded to the contractors via the Military Survey authorities.

Early in 1958 the need for surveyed mapping in British North Borneo was announced. Whether this was due to political rumblings in neighbouring Indonesia or a general need for mapping and like the Squadron's Malaya function, more personnel would be needed.

It was therefore decided to create a Third Field Troop with additional manpower requested from the UK; 13 Fd Svy Sqn once again providing the main contingent. With seven qualified Corporals it was decided to promote the Troop Sergeant within this qualified group with Ron Birch (possibly the most junior) being promoted to this post.

The Survey detachment, commanded by Lt Keith Todd, Australia Survey Corps sailed to North Borneo in mid-1958 being based in Kota Belud near Jesselton.

The task was to select and coordinate specific ground points and positively identify them on the Air Photography. The Air Surveyors back in KL would use these positions to carry out revised mapping by Multiplex and similar techniques. Time to complete the task was strictly limited so sub-detachments were created to cover a specific area. This worked perfectly until the country witnessed the largest floods for years.

We now had a situation with detachments spread over a wide area with the respective air photography hopefully safely survived in their hands. Without phone or visual contact, it was a few days before contact with everyone could provide proof that all was well, and the survey could continue.

An interesting participant in assisting in the survey was the Office Commanding Ben Burrows and his wife who visited the detachment for a couple of weeks or so. Perhaps he was worried about progress but each day he would be first in the land rover to climb some hill or other armed with a bundle of air photos. Not only him but his dear wife accompanied the Troop Sergeant in the field every single day of her visit. Their visit was cut short when the OC received a signal requesting his immediate return to Malaya due to heavy terrorist activity in areas being surveyed.

The survey was completed after some three months, the detachment returning to KL to liaise with the Air Surveyors to finalise the project. It was at this time that personnel from the initial set up of the squadron started to return home, their three-year tours completed.

Sometime later the Squadron would change its name and drop the title Field becoming “84 Survey Squadron RE” (September 1960). Some of the original intake would later serve with the newly named squadron with the same dedication as they performed back in 1955.

Unfortunately, as I pen this account, I realise that only a small handful of the original squadron personnel are still with us today.

SINGAPORE JUST AFTER SUNSET

By Alan Gordon

The ‘sunset’ in the title refers to the ending in the 1950s and early 60s of the British Empire on which “the sun never set”. In the mid Sixties there was still a lingering air of Empire in the lifestyle of those lucky enough to get a posting to the Far East and, I was one of them.

From the Second World War until 1963 virtually all military surveyors were based permanently overseas and even after that date, until the end of the Sixties there was a 50/50 chance of a foreign tour. An overseas posting in those days was a very different thing from the short deployments that became the norm.

When I joined the army in 1962 the recruiting campaign was based on “*Join the Royal Engineers: travel and a trade*” and there I was a year after donning uniform stuck hardly a hour’s bus ride from where I had been born hence, I regularly presented myself at Block 100 in A Camp Barton Stacey, the squadron office of 47 Cartographic Squadron, to request an overseas posting. Oh joy, after 12 months of trying in 1964 I finally won the jackpot – a posting to 84 Survey Squadron, Far East Land Forces.

The posting process started with a call from the office to say a posting order had arrived and to go there and ascertain whether you had won the posting lottery (Singapore or Cyprus) or lost it (Aden). 14 Squadron in Germany was considered somewhere between the two. I got a winner - 84 Squadron. Next it was off to the QM’s to order tropical kit and an MFO box.

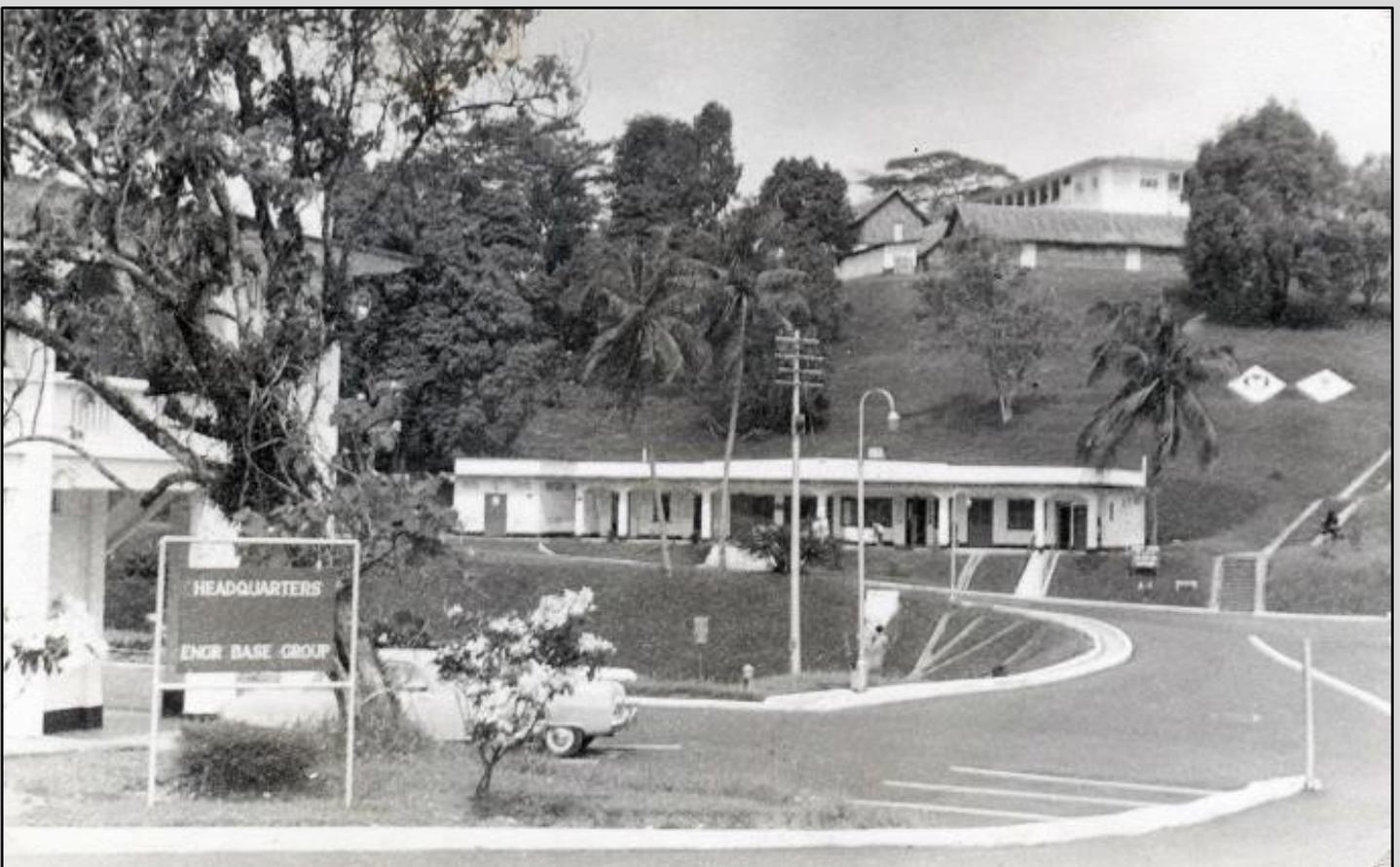
When the kit arrived you were presented with an array of olive green (OG) shorts and longs, puttees, hoesetops (socks with no bottom – very odd), sandals (known as Jesus shoes) and tropical pyjamas in a fetching shade of pale blue. By the Sixties the MOD had pre-empted Ikea with the introduction of flat-packed plywood packing cases, known as MFO boxes, – you were given these plus a handful of screws to self assemble – albeit no drill, bradawl or screwdriver was forthcoming! All your possessions that would not fit into an army suitcase were packed into these boxes and shipped off by sea. Next came several armfuls of jabs against yellow fever, typhoid and all sorts of other nasties and finally ‘embark’ leave. This gave a last chance to saviour Watney’s Red Barrel before your taste buds were converted to Tiger beer which was drunk either straight or tops which was with a small splash of lemonade.

Until the early Sixties the journey to your new home would have been by troopship but then the RAF introduced air trooping from RAF Lyneham using either the world's first jet airliner, the De Havilland Comet, and the Bristol Britannia, woefully misnamed as the 'whispering giant' – some whisper!

The trip to Lyneham seemed to take as long as the flight to Singapore – 3-ton (no tonnes in those days) truck from Barton Stacey to Andover station then wait, train to Basingstoke then wait, change trains for Reading, a long wait there where for some odd reason seeing that we were off to the Far East, our small party of Tot Hodgson, Dick Case and Taff Eveleigh decided that our last meal in England would be a Chinese! Then train to Swindon, report to the transport office, wait again and then finally an RAF coach to Lyneham. There was no on-board catering and the flight to Singapore involved refuelling – both aircraft and passengers – at El Adem in Libya, Khormaksar in Aden and finally Gan, a tiny island in the middle of the Indian Ocean. The journey totalled 26 hours flying time all of which I spent with painful ears.

Stepping out of the plane at RAF Changi you were immediately struck by the heat, humidity, and the indescribable smell of the orient. We were met by Morys 'Taff' Williams the squadron orderly corporal and the Land Rover journey across the island to Gillman Barracks proved that you were now in a totally different culture and somewhere far from home; this was long before universal tourism and the famous clean up and modernisation of the island by Lee Kwan Yew. As we drove along the Ayer Rajah Road past barracks after barracks – Cloutman Lines, Rowcroft Lines, EBI, etc - we realised just how large was the British military presence in Singapore.

Eventually we turned into Gillman Barracks, home of Engineer Base Group (EBG), past pristine lawns and bright white colonial style buildings then up the hill to the impressive accommodation blocks at the top.



The entrance to Gillman Barracks, Medical Centre in the centre and a barrack block visible at the top of the hill

Gillman was the epitome of a colonial era barracks – large white painted three storey blocks with a veranda down each long side with rows of double doors that were always folded open to catch the breeze except when the regular storms rushed in off the sea. Four rows of bed, locker, bed, locker - one down each external wall and two back to back down the middle. Newcomers got a middle row bed and, as you gained time, you could move to an outside bed – with nobody's head backing onto yours!

In one corner were a few rattan chairs clustered around a TV that was seldom watched as subtitles in multiple languages covered half the screen. There were also bound copies of a week's worth of Daily Mirror newspapers that were supplied by the Nuffield Trust, albeit six weeks old by the time we got them!

The barracks was very much the domain of the single soldiers and JNCOs – 'pads' (as married personnel were then called) only stayed there until married accommodation became available and officers and seniors had their own messes on the other side of Alexandra Road.



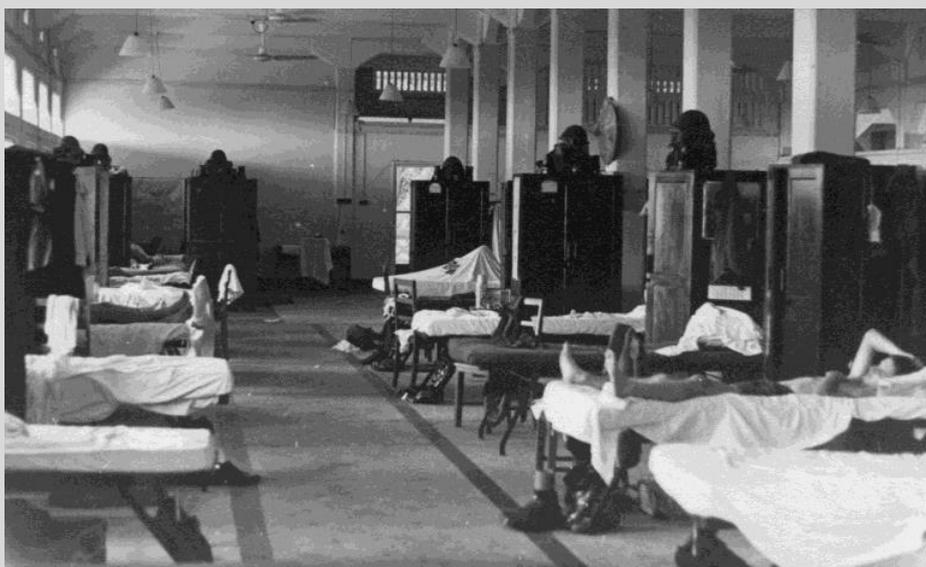
The 'cookhouse' block and 84's barrack accommodation

When I first arrived in 84 Squadron in late summer 1964 the 'singlies' lived on the top floor of the NAAFI block where the large open floor space had been divided into small four- or six-man rooms. Shortly afterwards we were moved up to 'H' block at the very top of the hill with stunning views over the offshore islands and to the rear was a huge Chinese cemetery – watching the funerals became a spectator sport. Then 59 Squadron arrived, and we were again moved, this time down the hill to the floor above the Cookhouse (Dining Room) that was alongside the parade square and there we stayed.

The barracks had an excellent outdoor swimming pool that was visited most afternoons, a large NAAFI, a barber's shop run by a Malay who gave uninvited neck twists, a gymnasium, a huge 'padang' sports field and an AKC cinema where the films were different every evening.

Having come from Barton Stacey where at that time most of the camp infrastructure such as delivering the coke to fuel the stoves, cleaning the pans in the cookhouse and serving in the mess bars was manned by soldiers doing 'regimental duties', soldiering in the Far East came as a pleasant surprise. Gillman Barracks had boot boys, albeit long past their boyhood years, char wallahs, Fred's dhobi and not to forget Sew Sew, an ancient Chinese lady who toured the barracks each day looking for buttons and stripes to sew on or shorts to tailor.

On arrival Taff showed us to our bed spaces and we unpacked, settled in, and then went for a meal. In the evening we went downstairs to the NAAFI bar and met more of the squadron who were all very friendly before an early night when we noticed three things; the ceiling fans might be continually rotating but they appeared to make no difference to the hot, humid air, the ceiling itself was home to dozens of chic chaks but apparently they lived on 'mosies' so leave them alone and finally – nobody wore the issue tropical pyjamas but all wore a sarong to bed. My first purchases in Singapore were two sarongs and a pair of flip flops.



A soldier's 'home sweet home' for up to three years.

The next morning, I was woken up at 05:30, had a shower, the first in my life, and went to breakfast and at 06:30 boarded a 3 ton truck for the 20 minute drive to get to work for 07:00. All four of us reported to the SSM, a 'fatherly' Pete Frampton, in the squadron office. He welcomed us then took us in to meet the O.C. Major Jay Coulson. He also gave us a friendly welcome and the advice to take photographs of the area in the next couple of months as very soon all 'things oriental' will have become commonplace and finally – don't get a tattoo – they are alright for matelots but you'd end up regretting it in later life!

We were then taken to our respective places of work, introduced, and started to find out what was going to fill our working days with the squadron.

It was a relatively small squadron operating in two virtually independent parts; Squadron Headquarters and the production sections and two field troops. The field troops were permanently based in Borneo and the surveyors only seen by the rest of the squadron when they transited to and from the UK and Borneo. The Singapore based headquarters and production sections totaled about 60 which included about eight Malay Others Rank (MOR) drivers. There were two civilians; Mrs Lim a typist and 'Charlie' Chan a photographic technician who also ran a 'coffee swindle' in the repro building.



HQ and Carto block on the left and the Map Depot warehouse on the right



*NAAFI break in air survey; Saturday working was in civvies.
Baz Humphries, Maurice Friend, Alan Gordon,
Harry Hawkins, Taff Everleigh*

84 Survey Squadron occupied a purpose-built small camp opposite the military cemetery and adjoining a much larger camp occupied by a Signals Regiment. It was surrounded by a high wire fence with a small guardroom by the entrance and a seldom used second gate farther along for 556 Field Survey Depot, always known as just 'the map depot'. Well-built technical accommodation housed the headquarters, air survey, cartographic and repro sections with the map depot in a large warehouse.

The air survey block was a large open room with two small offices at one end: the air photo library and the officer's room. There were the ubiquitous ceiling fans which were usually switched off as there was almost always air photography laid out on the large, slotted template board that filled most of the floor of the building.

The routine was the same each working day; up early and down to breakfast in time to board the truck although many skipped the eggs and bacon and opted to fill their issue 1 pint china mug with tea and take a piece of toast to be eaten during the twenty minute journey. Mid-morning and 'Speedy', a particularly miserable Chinese man, would arrive slowly pedaling a 'Walls' ice cream style trishaw containing NAAFI buns and cold drinks. Any other cold drinks were obtained by going to the fence with the Signals Regiment and buying them from the 'Sinalco' shack situated there. Then the rush for the truck at 1330 and the race back down the road to get ahead of 54 Squadron's truck so that we were at the front of the lunch queue.

Afternoons were spent at the pool where water rugby was a favourite, water skiing or sub aqua diving offshore from EBG's recreational speed boat, playing sport or up on the roof reading and generally passing the time of day.

If thirsty during the afternoon the 'Maggie Man', another Chinese with ice-cream style trishaw selling Magnolia milk, would appear on the square and if you were short of funds he would provide a drink on credit with your name added to his book. He always seemed to know when people were going to be posted from the unit before they did as he would come demanding payment of 'the book'. Evenings were filled by trips to the cinema, beer in the NAAFI and regular

visits downtown by bus or 'white top' taxi to either the upmarket Singapura Hotel or the more down market Bugis Street where the Squadron favoured a bar called 'Pat Boons'. Collyer Quay, Change Alley, the street markets in Orchard Road and Tanglin, the Britannia Club, a large NAAFI in the centre of town; these all soon became quite commonplace as did eating satay from a stall or a beef stew (the leg that it was cut from was suspiciously small) at Abdul's stall in Keok Street. Soon the sudden torrential downpours followed by steaming roads and pavements, grotty monsoon drains everywhere, and trishaw rides became everyday experiences no longer worth a comment. In hindsight it was all very 'Virgin Soldiers' really!



Some of those at the pyjama party in Pepys Road

We were a mixed squadron long before 'multicultural' was a thought in a liberal head. When we were accommodated above the dining room in the bed on my right was Ngalin, an MOR driver, behind me, literally head to head, was Siong Tsa Chan an MOR storeman in 556 Map Depot and to my left was Cornishman Spr Vic Williams, a clerk in the squadron office and an ardent fan of Kathy Kirby – a pop star of the day. We all got on famously!

This was to be home and the way of life for the next three years unless posted back early to the School for a course.

Universal telephones and the Internet were yet unimaginable and the only contact with families in UK was by air mail letter that took up to a week while parcels that took six weeks by sea.

Every aspect of life was centred totally on the squadron and those you lived and worked with. There was a vibrant social life. Married soldiers would invite the 'singlies' home to enjoy some home cooking and a touch of domestic life and some were even trusted with babysitting duties. They also shared significant events such as Christmas, New Year, christenings and milestone birthdays with all in the Squadron; Bill Chapman's 21st is still a vivid memory as is the renowned pyjama party hosted in 1964 by the families that lived in the quarters in Pepys Road.

The unit laid on regular Squadron 'dos' generally held in the club house of the Anti-Mosquito unit; a mock pub named 'The Anna Fell Inn' (a play on anopheles – the malaria mosquito). Later the Squadron built its own club in the Dover Road camp. This was the dawn of the age of 'pop' music – the 'swinging Sixties' - and when I arrived the unit already had its own group called 'The Hellions'.

Later in the spring of 1966 two squadron members, Dave 'The Rave' Jordan and Peter Wood, joined with three musicians from elsewhere and formed 'Point Five' which went on to achieve island wide success winning media exposure in the local press and on television.

Life was relatively unencumbered by military matters compared to life in the Regiment at Barton Stacey. What mattered was work on the production of the mapping needed to support operations in Borneo; the ongoing conflict with Indonesia known as 'Confrontation' continued until mid-1966. What was initially unbelievable to the new arrival was that the choice of which form of OG uniform to wear to work was solely a personal choice: OG jacket worn outside shorts with a cloth belt or tucked in with a stable belt, 'Jesus shoes' and rolled down grey issue socks, long socks with garter tabs and black No 2 dress shoes or the full hosetops, puttees and boots – all up to you to decide! Also counter to previous military experience, once through the gates at Dover Road it was berets and shirts off for the rest of the day.



Bill Chapman leading an annual 10-mile 'bash' under command Sergeant Ginger Bootland.

In 1965 there was only one parade when EBG marked the Queen's Birthday and only one range day which took place on the 9th of August and this was rapidly curtailed when news arrived that Singapore had separated that day from Malaysia. Jungle training at Khota Tinggi was a break from the norm and on one Saturday we all travelled into Johore to the ranges at Ulu Tiram to throw grenades. Duties for a soldier were very easy compared to the Regiment's best kit inspection guard mount. Every couple of weeks there would be telephone orderly duty.

This involved an early lunch and then sitting by the guardroom all afternoon to open the gate if necessary until relieved by the Sikh Army Department Policemen in the evening and then sleeping on a camp bed in the drawing office; all just in case the telephone rang – it never did when I was on duty. For a while we also had to perform the same duty at 59 Squadron's base at Cloutman Lines while they were deployed to Thailand. The downside of these two duties was that your meal was plated up in Gillman cookhouse and then suffered a twenty-minute drive to you! The other duty was Gillman MT guard; based in a small room on the dining room floor and doing 'stag' with a pick helve around the vehicles parked on the square; no inspection, no fuss just boring.

The squadron's technical tasking was almost solely devoted to the production of mapping of Borneo, series T503 at 1:250,000 scale and T735 at 1:50,000. The former small-scale mapping was in work when I arrived. It was produced by graphical means; vast slotted template laydowns, hours spent gazing through universal stereos annotating the air photographs in red ink to show the water courses and occasional sparse habitation followed by plotting it using a Nashton Plotter. When this series was complete, we moved into the Multiplex booth adjacent to the Chief Clerk's office and worked on the 1:50,000 series. This was very challenging work as the photography of jungle clad Borneo, poor quality RAF imagery, resembled close-up pictures of grey cotton wool and it was so difficult to set up the stereo models that two sappers were unable to do so and therefore lost their trade and were transferred to a field squadron.



Opportunities arose occasionally to leave the island. Tot Hodgson and I took our leave in 1965 by taking a slow train, it took two days, to travel as far north as was then possible to Khota Bharu on the north east coast and from there take a local bus south for a 100 miles to Kuala Terengganu. I discovered that after you had been in Singapore for a year you were entitled to a stay at the 'Change of Air Station' at Tanah Rata high up in the Cameron Highlands so off I went and teamed up there with a sapper from 11 Field Squadron with the memorable name of Randolph 'Randy' Pantin.

*Photo-shoot on a logger's bridge en route to Endau –
Taff Williams, Bob Pomroy, author, Al Cox, Dave Millington, Tim Holt, Dave Lythell*

A group of us spent a week or so away from the unit travelling by assault boat down the Sungei Lenggong to Endau on the east coast. A highlight of 1965 was when half a dozen of us were detached for several weeks to *HMS Triumph*, an aircraft carrier converted to a fleet repair ship, for a trip to Hong Kong. The voyage there had the added excitement of us travelling through the edge of a typhoon with the sea breaking all along the vast flight deck. Once in Hong Kong we had to spend the days ashore entertaining ourselves and on one long day I visited Macao.

On several occasions I was detached to the small Air Survey Liaison Section led by Sergeant 'Satch' Payne at RAF Tengah, an interesting change of routine with the downside that I was always accommodated in the transit block situated at the end of the runway and at half hourly intervals throughout the night either Javelins or Hunters would land or take off for various patrols.

My tour came to an early end when in 1966 Taff Eveleigh and I were called to the squadron office and informed that we had been selected for a Tech 2 course and would be shortly returning to the UK. Despite being told what a wonderful career opportunity it was I was very disappointed to be leaving 84 Squadron and Singapore. A few weeks later we endured an interminable flight aboard a British Eagle Airways Britannia via Colombo, Kuwait, and Istanbul to Heathrow - so ended my first overseas posting.

In retrospect it was a wonderful experience both as regards living and working closely in the squadron and also the chance to see the Far East before the advent of the 'hippy trail', widespread tourism and the later amazing transformation of the island into a showpiece of the modern world. It was the very last 'knockings' of a colonial style life and as the Sixties drew to a close so British Forces withdrew from East of Suez and concentrated on a NATO role. Suddenly 14 Squadron leapt to the top of the postings preference list - farewell Tiger, hello Schlosser Alt!

(Photographs by Bill Brown, Tot Hodgson, Bud Moon)

THE LAST DAYS OF 84 SURVEY SQUADRON ROYAL ENGINEERS

By Colin Price

Preface: January 2006

I have been asked to commit to paper my memories of the final days of a proud unit as I was in a unique position, being the SQMS of the Squadron and present at its close. It has been 36 years since these events took place and the fine details have faded as one might expect, so please forgive me if facts are inaccurate in any way. If any kind soul can correct me let me know, as I would be pleased for the history to be recorded correctly for posterity.

SOLD FOR A DOLLAR

Singapore 1970

84 Survey Squadron RE was situated as some may remember, off the North Buona Vista Road at the end of Dover Road opposite the Garrison Church, on the Pasir Panjang Estate in Singapore Postal District 5. The Squadron shared the small camp with 556 Field Survey Depot RE. It was a quiet military backwater where it seemed only Squadron members, Map Depot staff and its customers, military funeral parties and visitors to the Church and its congregation ventured.

It was sometime in late 1969 that the then Officer Commanding, Major T W G Farmer RE, informed the Squadron of its forthcoming fate. This was, that towards the end of 1970 or early 1971, the complete withdrawal of British Forces from the region would take place as the responsibility for the defence of the independent and Sovereign (Island) State of Singapore (9th Aug 1965) had come to an end after 151 years. I think it was in March or April 1970 that the last OC, Major M R Richards RE, broke the news to all of Headquarters Troop that 84 Survey Squadron was to disband upon closure at the end of the year and that the unit's real estate and assets were to be handed over to the Singapore Government. I am of the belief, if my memory serves me correctly, that early indications lead us to think the Chief Surveyor of Singapore was to take the Unit over as a going concern but this was to change much later to a unit of the Singapore Army,

As a very green SQMS at the time, having only taken over the post late in 1969, I remember quaking in my boots and putties at the thought of all the work and preparation that would have to be done to make the Squadron ready for handover, and the prospect of dispatching all our soldiers' MFO safely on its way to Blighty (UK) was daunting.

1 Troop was still in Sarawak, up-river from Kapit, doing its best to conquer the jungle hazards whilst performing their trig and heighting tasks and being resupplied from Dover Road by my small team of able and hardworking staff comprising; Corporal Roy Campion, Sapper Jock McCullagh and not to forget the Malay Corporal, whose name, escapes me now.

As the months passed, key dates were revealed slowly. 1 Troop members returned progressively to Singapore in June and July and it was planned that all of them should return to UK to their various postings in their turn as the administration demanded. Whilst these moves were in progress the Squadron was given its final dates for closure and handover, which was to be at the end of November or early December. The process for winding down had been meticulously planned and was starting to be executed. In essence, the plan was to release key staff as their tasks came to an end and that the fully equipped unit, except for certain controlled Field Survey and Air Survey instruments and equipment, was to be presented to the Singaporeans. The Drawing Office had little or no work by this time and the Printers were doing only limited reprinting to top up stocks for 556 Field Survey Depot.

In late June the Squadron received orders to send a detachment of field surveyors to Pontianak in Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo) on Operation Mandau, to compliment a unit of Australian surveyors for two to three months assisting the Indonesian Government in marking out plots of forested land for a mass migration scheme to relieve pressures on the population of the Island of Java. Equipping this small force entailed unpacking equipment destined for UK and demanding new stores before they could travel. All this at a time when my over-worked staff; already working a full day, was brought under additional pressure to perform further feats of effort and dedication.

The process of carrying out the 100% stock check of the G10 stores (Unit Equipment Table) and accommodation stores had to proceed despite these interruptions. Deficiencies had to be made up and damaged stores replaced. The Q Stores was to be complete and laid out as for inspection and all offices including the Print Shop complete with tools and equipment, were to be up to scale and set out ready for use.

It was at about this time when one calm, dark, humid afternoon whilst doing paperwork and making up boxes, my team and I experienced what it is like to be struck by lightning. Out of nowhere it seemed, the bolt cracked above our heads onto the telegraph post attached to the end of the Store roof and the thunder echoed skywards getting louder as it departed. We each froze as we felt the shock and slight tingle of the charge as it passed through us and the rain started to beat hard on the corrugated iron roof. The pole was split, and our invaluable telephone was out of action for about a week. The last thing we needed at a critical time!

All through this period our soldiers were departing for UK and of course, not being replaced. In September, our Malay soldiers were discharged and returned to their homes in the North, some as far as Alor Setar. They were sadly missed for their hard work and devotion to the British.

October saw the return of the Detachment from Kalimantan. Some amongst them were highly disgruntled at the lack of work ethic in the locals and the colourful language of the Australians did not impress many. I recall that inflation in Indonesia was rampant at the time. One Singapore Dollar (2s 8d - 13.3 pence today) bought a suitcase full of Sen Notes wrapped roughly in bundles of 100 notes. This applied to all denominations and the paper used was poor quality re-pulped unbleached newspapers, for one could see the old typefaces under the currency image.

Having checked their stores, they were repacked and returned to the Ordnance Depot or to UK as required, and the procedure of running down the unit continued apace. The OC, Major Richards, was posted early, roughly 6 weeks prior to the close, which left the newly promoted 2i/c Major Deane (Dixie) in charge of the final phases.

By early November, the camp had begun to take on a deserted feel as non-key personnel returned to the UK. The stores staff remained along with the Squadron Clerk to complete the final administration work after which they departed towards the end of the month. I am unsure of the actual date of relinquishment and I cannot even remember what day, but from my records my flight date home was Monday 7th December 1970, and it was about a week prior to that when the handover took place. This would place the date on Monday 30 November or Tuesday 1st December 1970 (I can do no better than that).

The last three remaining members of the Squadron, acting OC Major E M Deane RE, WO2 (SSM) Mark Maunder RE and myself Staff Sergeant Colin R Price RE were left to tie up the few remaining tasks and perform the final ceremony.

As I remember it, the Depot vehicle served as taxi for the final journey along the North Buona Vista Road to Dover Road when on the final morning, in nervous anticipation of what was about to happen, the three of us paraded on the verandah of the Guard Room at 0900 hours. A few minutes after the allotted hour a Singapore Army truck drew up outside of the open front gates. A very young-looking Army Lieutenant alighted from the passenger seat and six or eight soldiers piled out of the rear and lined up. I cannot remember any orders being given; it was all very quiet and subdued. The officer came forward and saluted and we all returned the compliment. We then withdrew into the room behind us.

Prepared papers were signed, and the young officer handed over the token sum of 'One Singapore Dollar' for the site and its contents. We lowered the Squadron flag and the Army detachment mounted guard as the three of us, somewhat bemused, walked to the connecting door at the rear of the building that was 556 Field Survey Depot and withdrew. The door was locked behind us and that was the end of the history of the proud independent Survey Squadron, numbered 84.

P.S. My last days on the island were spent moving out of Married Quarters in Jalan Rumia, Holland Village, which I handed over to an Australian corporal. I took the short journey down the North Buona Vista Road to the Military Families Hostel on the Ayer Rajah Road from where, a few days later the 7th December, we flew home to Brize Norton and 556 Field Survey Depot RE continued to operate providing map support to the few remaining British Forces and an increasing number of Australians until its close in 1971. I will leave those events to someone else to recall.



Colin Price - 2006

Previously published by the DSA, in The Ranger Summer Edition 2006 Vol 2 No 13 Page 19

Notification of Deaths

John Bickers



AAC Harrogate 53 B

? ? Williams, ? Al Roberts, ? Pete Timbrell ?
? Geoff Hancock, ? Bud Moon, Wes Noble, ? Pete Usher, Phil Broxham
Alan Fisk, ? Bill Powell, Captain Seaton, **John Bickers**, Brian Woodhead, John Alcock, ?

Alan Roberts initially informed us of the sad news that we have lost another member **John Bickers**, who died early in the morning of Tuesday, 29th September, 2020, aged 93.

John Rowlands (JR) was then kind enough to send us the following information about John Bickers: -

Until a few weeks ago, John had enjoyed fairly good health, but then suffered a series of minor strokes that entailed going into hospital each time. Each stroke weakened him until it was decided he needed 24-hour care. A few days ago, he moved out of his flat into a care home in Ripon, where his son James lived.

JR then responded further with the following: -

John was much respected by all those of us who served under him. He was a very gracious man and very capable in his surveying career. Way back in 1953, when I first met him, he would have been 26 years old. I, and most of the 53A intake of Army Apprentices would have been 15 years old. John was our Survey SSMI and in all probability one of the youngest SSM's in the British Army. I know that just after the 2 World War he was posted to Palestine and was in Aden in the 1960's. He retired to Harrogate having decided not to accept a commission. Had he accepted I am sure he would have had great success as an officer. Of the many senior NCO's, I served under, he was the best. I never once heard him use questionable language which was rare in sergeant-majors!

Yours sincerely

John Rowlands

Carrying the Torch - Again

Lance Corporal John Bickers RE stood in front of the Rising Sun pub in the village of Charlton two miles from Shaftesbury starrng down the A30 towards Salisbury. He was dressed in Army PT kit of singlet, dark blue shorts and khaki plimsolls and he was waiting for Captain Don Wilde RE to appear. The date was the 1st of August 1948 and both men had been selected to carry the Olympic Torch for a leg of its journey from London to Torquay where the sailing events were to take place.

Then a small motorcade came into view and there in its midst was Don Wilde holding the flaming torch aloft. The flame was passed to John's torch and off he set for Shaftesbury. There was a car in front of him, a motorcyclist on each side and another car behind which 'encouraged' John to keep up what was an extremely fast pace.



John carrying the 1948 Olympic torch



John with torches from both the 1948 & 2012 Olympics

John ran on towards the ancient hilltop town thankful that the weather was dry but aware of a slight wind in his face and getting warmer as the little entourage progressed along the road.

The final approach to Shaftesbury is a long uphill and after passing the ivy clad Grammar School on his left John was surprised at the large crowds that had gathered to cheer him on his way. The final two hundred yards was up the fairly steep main street ending at the top in front of the Town Hall where the flame was passed to next runner in the chain. John, now suffering a heat rash, doused his flame, got dressed back into uniform and returned to the Survey Training Centre RE which was then in the grounds of Longleat House.

And now, 64 years on, John Bickers was once again selected to carry an Olympic Torch, this time for 300 metres in York on the 19th of June 2012.

(First published in the DSA Ranger in the Summer 2012 Edition)

Editors Apology

Due to an oversight on my part I included **Donald Proctor** under the Notification of Deaths, in the earlier editions of the latest newsletter, when in fact his daughter Jane Williams was advising us that Donald's health was such that he was no longer able to enjoy his branch membership or the newsletters.

As Jane has pointed out 'If he (Donald) were still able to read the magazine, he would have been very amused by the report and probably quoted *Mark Twain* in his reply "*the report of my demise has been greatly exaggerated!*"

Jane has requested an apology, which I am happy to make, and further to publish this correction. Jane will inform us when the sad event eventually occurs, although she hopes that it will not be for some time.

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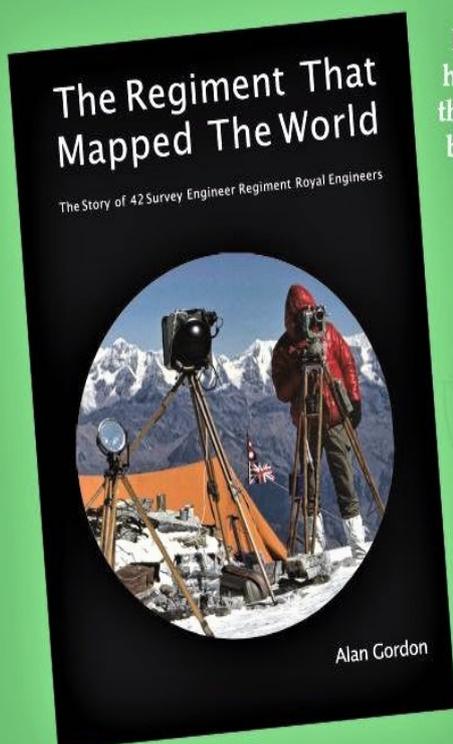
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The story of a unique British regiment 42 Survey Engineer Regiment Royal Engineers



For those interested in military history, surveying, mapping and the everyday life of a soldier, this book offers all of this and more.

The book spans from post war chaos withdrawal from Empire, Middle East turmoil through to the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland and cruise missile deployment.

During its 37 year life the Regiment surveyed and mapped across the world: the deserts of the Middle East, islands in the Caribbean and Pacific, the Mediterranean, the Himalayas, the Americas, Australia and Europe.

It takes map making from hand drawing to GPS and automated cartography.

It is as much about the people who served as about the surveying and mapping.

300 x 210 mm with 240 pages lavishly illustrated with photographs mainly donated by former surveyors and extracts from the maps they produced.

New Publication

For all those who are interested in military history and in particular the history of the Corps of Royal Engineers then 'The Regiment that Mapped the World' is a book to be read.

After ten years of research and writing Alan Gordon has finished the story of 42 Survey Engineer Regiment Royal Engineers.

The book will be published early in 2021 as a limited edition. There will be an opportunity to pre-order.

Details will be placed on various military web sites and in publications. All members of the DSA and REA Survey (Geographic) Branch will individually be sent the details.