

## LIKE BERT HINKLER

By Ron Raymond  
An extract from an autobiography.



During March 1964, the second group of crews proceeded to Toronto, Canada to undergo type rating training at the DeHavilland factory before accepting and ferrying a batch of three aircraft to Australia. The three captains were Squadron Leader Chris Sugden DFC, Flight Lieutenant Bernie Parker and me.

I enjoyed my time at DeHavilland Canada. We had been crewed up before leaving Richmond: John as my co-pilot, 'Red' assigned to navigate and two fitters, Corporal Robinson and LAC Richards both of whom were to serve with me later. We were tasked to ferry Caribou A4-164 back to Richmond – but first we had to complete a type rating under the auspices of the plane maker. To this end we enjoyed a leisurely few weeks in Toronto, leisurely to the point of mildly boring while we laboured through the aircraft's technicalities as presented by an engineer who seemed surprisingly ill informed concerning the machine's systems:



*'Yes, we understand the pressure side of the circuit – but where is the hydraulic return flow?' 'Ah...' Long pause... 'Ah, the oil is dumped overboard,' the man suggested followed by a further long pause – in fact a very long pause.*

*'Thank you, it just seems rather unusual, that's all.'*

*'Yes I suppose it does. OK then, if you are all happy about the hydraulic system we can move onto the flight controls...'*

While this particular presenter fluctuated between imprecise and incorrect, the marketing and operational people were competent and helpful in the extreme. Amy Hollingsworth, our flight instructor, displayed patience, tact and common sense worthy of a medal. I was saddened to hear of his death while scud running a year or two later when he hit a radio mast attempting to land in marginal conditions during an industrial dispute that closed the airways system. Then there was Suzy – everybody fell in love with Suzy as she fussed over our transport, accommodation, meals, mail and travel, all the while ignoring those who fell under her spell or were overheard giving ribald vent to an opinion of the Canadian weather and Toronto traffic.



Not that the weather or traffic was all that bad for, loaded with North American allowances and rugged up to a point where I could barely fit in the thing, I hired an MGB, folded the top back, and headed south to see the Niagara Falls and assorted Ontario sights during early Spring. The adventure delighted me such that I retained the car longer than good sense and finances warranted. Nevertheless it proved an enjoyable interlude - despite arriving at Niagara to find the falls a frozen mass of ice relieved by miniscule streams rather than the water I had visualised cascading over the escarpment.



It was interesting driving the MG around the city. The vehicle instantly established an accord with fellow sports car enthusiasts who, without exception, waved a greeting as I passed - a custom I have yet to encounter elsewhere, even in our MGF in New Zealand. All of which added to my regard for Canadians, relating their culture to that of the USA in a vein similar to my view of New Zealanders (Kiwis) versus Australians. Unfortunately we were quickly discovered by a group of expatriate Aussies in downtown Toronto: youngsters on their overseas experience who seemed to revel in the chorus from 'Tie Me Kangaroo down Sport' or 'Waltzing Matilda' in a misguided attempt to identify as wild colonial boys. Not that there was any real harm in it at all other than appearing mildly crass rather than unique: a common enough characteristic I find in Caucasian adolescence. Nevertheless the encounter finally irritated me to the point where I mistakenly accepted a lease busting invitation – a unique Toronto custom I had heard of but never experienced.

Put simply, accommodation leases in Toronto were carved in stone - tenants could not exit a lease without the owner's consent so they often resorted to a riotous party in an attempt to be thrown out: the affair I attended proved a masterpiece. By the time I arrived the debacle was running strongly with music at full volume, people jumping off furniture, broken glass in the remains of the kitchen, people drunk, drunks trying to dance, couples snogging in the bedrooms, somebody sick in the only toilet, people throwing beer bottles from the third floor window in an effort to hit a fish pond in the court yard below and a live snapping red Indian to add a unique something to the evening.

As I wasn't experiencing too much pain - or logic for that matter - it seemed appropriate to strike up a conversation with the mountain of a man who had just been introduced to me as a Native America - it went something like this:

*"Are you really an Indian?"*

*"Are you really a limey?"*

*"I asked you first."*

*"Are you trying to take the piss out of me limey?"*





*"No."*

*"Well what the damn hell are you about then?"*

*"I just want to know if you are a real Indian."*

*"What for?"*

*"I never met a real Indian before."*

*"Well I am. My lineage predates the Little Big Horn, my mob personally scalped Custer in fact."*

*"Colonel Custer? You mean the boss of the Seventh Cavalry? "*

*"We scalped all of them as well."*

*"Wow, too much information! You must have been brave, braves."*

*"We did it with one hand tied behind our back."*

*"Now you're taking the piss out of me."*

*"I wouldn't think of it, anyway what are you – you from England? You damn sure sound like you are."*

*"I'm from Australia."*

*"Austria? You don't sound Austrian."*

*"A-U-S-T-R-A-L-I-A-N."*

*"That's a hell of a strange way to spell Austria."*

*"Ah... I give up. See you later Sitting Bull."*

*"Don't take it too hard Aussie. Here - have a Bud then you better get out of here before the cops arrive."*

*"Thanks, isn't Budweiser an American beer?"*

*"You're damn right it is – the best damn beer in the US of A."*

*"Even in Canada?"*

*"Yeah man – even in Canada. I like Canada but I'm an American and if I can't get an American beer, I'm out of here."*

*"That sounds like a plan," I observed as Sitting Bull handed me a Budweiser which we slugged down in a heartbeat before shaking hands and disappearing along our respective paths through the tapestry of life.*



I met up with the crew back at the apartment we rented as an alternative to the pub that Suzy had arranged for us. Red was involved in showing a lady the complexities of our self-averaging hand held sextant. Not that I had much faith in the instrument, I guessed it had been provided as a prop to either afford Red a purpose in life or assure us of his mastery of the black art. I could not see how he would actually 'shoot' a star or planet from beneath the aircraft's wing or even over my shoulder in the cockpit and, if he ever succeeded, how he would correct for the errors inherent in a Perspex canopy. In that regard the Caribou lacked an astrodome calibrated for sextant use and it truly puzzled me how to use it during our flight across the Atlantic. Of course every problem has a solution and this one was solved when the girl knocked the instrument off the table, consigning it to Category 5 operational status – Category 5 being the RAAF designation for a component best described as 'stuffed'.



It was nice to eventually complete our day and night handling checks followed by an uneventful five hour shakedown flight in 164. The flight proceeded from Toronto to overfly Sue St Marie and Niagara as the principal turning points before returning to Toronto. I was relieved to find the Niagara Falls flowing again in all their spectacular glory a spectacle that restored my faith in North America. All that remained was to fly the aeroplane to Australia, a task planned across the Atlantic from Gander, Newfoundland to the Azores, Gibraltar, Malta, El Adem (Tobruk) Aden, Karachi, Calcutta, Butterworth, Djakarta, Den Pasa (Bali) Darwin, Charleville and Richmond, New South Wales – a piece of cake.

Back in the days of pioneering aviation Bert Hinkler, an Australian, flew a similar route from England in a Gipsy Moth, the precursor to a Tiger Moth ...I think we took something like 10 days longer than Hinkler in his little biplane - and he did it without a self-averaging sextant. Of course simplistic as the Caribou was, it had enough systems for things to go wrong and sufficient crew to make the mistakes characteristic of complicated machinery. In deference to this philosophy Red rose to the occasion and applied the local magnetic variation east instead of west on our first sector from Toronto to Gander, a gross error



so close to the magnetic pole and an error we only detected when I commented on the size of the icebergs when I really should have been talking about snow covered mountains – an anomaly that captured Red's immediate attention and inspired me to carry my own map thereafter. In fact the first leg was inauspicious at best for as well as drifting some miles off track, we started leaking hydraulic fluid from the starboard propeller reservoir. This was a serious matter as the Caribou propeller relied on its own source of hydraulic oil and the wrong sort of malfunction in the system could lead to an uncontrollable propeller over speed. In the event I was rather pleased the problem manifested itself over Newfoundland rather than half way across the Atlantic.

As the propeller obviously needed attention we rolled up our sleeves and assisted our flying spanner (engineer) in removing the unit during the onset of a snow shower after we landed. We needed to set the scene pending arrival of spares from Toronto the next day. The job proceeded tolerably well and, covered in grease and glory, we were just about to close up the aeroplane when a Canadian Air Force officer arrived and, acknowledging our desperate circumstances, invited us to clean-up at the local Radar Base and join him for a drink in the Mess where there was a therapeutic and mandatory Screech waiting for us.

Screech is the fire water peculiar to Newfoundland. Its origin is simple enough, take freshly emptied rum barrels, scrape the remaining sediment into a manageable mass and re-ferment it as a brain numbing brew acceptable to the rugged 'Newfy' inhabitants – Screech. Somehow I found the product acceptable, so acceptable I had two more which proved to be another serious mistake that day. The bar of the Gander Officers Mess





contained a unique assortment of memorabilia, a Chinaman's pigtail hanging 'here', the control column from a Constellation that crashed on the airfield mounted 'there' and an assortment of lesser booby trapped artefacts from various prangs to snare the unwary. I idly triggered the Constellation pitch trim button while I watched the barman organising a glass of single malt, a bell rang, lights flashed and a gaggle of thirsty Canadians stormed into the bar looking for the miscreant who had summonsed them for a drink. Fortunately my allowances had been topped up by a grateful nation and I could meet the cost of the general shout ...one thing about the Canadians – they took no prisoners. What then followed was one of the more momentous and hilarious evenings during my time in the Airforce.

Rectification of our rogue propeller took two days after which time we launched into some of the worst weather that common law allows.

We left Gander before dawn on 11 May 1964. The weather looked ominous, the engines singularly noisy and our heads heavy after the hospitality at the RCAF Radar station. Added to all that I never really approved of an ocean vista so early, by night it's OK, mysterious perhaps, even picturesque if there is a full moon a clear sky and the sea state is down, but dawn is something else. I was simply not a dawn person. In Vietnam, we flew to Tan Son Nut airport, Saigon, before first light each day and I disagreed with that as well, a bleary eyed breakfast in the BOQ, the monsoon blowing clouds and stars across the sky, the cautious drive to the airfield through the darkened ville (village) in our asthmatic jeep, alert for people, kids, dogs, chickens and communists (Viet Cong) mesmerised by the lighthouse on Cape St Jacques as it cheerfully blinked the end to another night when I really didn't want the night to end. I just wanted to turn my back on it all and wake in daylight as a sparkling new me ready to tackle Ho Chi Min and General Giap as a matched pair if that was really needed and anybody else for that matter, anybody who disagreed with our grandiose but misguided cause, so long as they disagreed after sunrise.

Not that I was an absolute sloth, rostered on night ops I was happy as a sand piper, I tolerated the tracers, the blinding light of the flares and the smell of war as long as it happened at a gentlemanly hour, how did the song go, the song we sang so innocently at The Point?



*"They feed us lousy chow but we stay alive somehow  
On dehydrated eggs and milk and stew,  
The rumour has it next they'll be dehydrating sex  
That's when I'll tell the coach I'm through.  
For I'll face the sudden dangers,  
The shooting back at strangers, but when I get home late ....  
I want my woman straight...Buster!  
I wanted wings till I got the bloody things*



*Now I don't want them anymore."*

(Apology to Oscar Brand and 'Wild Blue Yonder')

No, first light is first light. It's just not a good time to plan or contemplate anything let alone a heaving, windswept, freezing sub-arctic 1,500 nautical miles of untamed ocean. Still I supposed it had to be done so I set climb power and took the bird up into the overcast. At least the grey clouds and rain swirling by the canopy took my mind off the ugly grey sea raging below, which was a very good thing as the ugly grey sea would rage below us for another ten or eleven hours.

It wasn't all that long before the adventure started to unravel. First, the Newfoundland airports closed behind us as a weather event surged down the east coast of North America. Second we were too far east for the Ocean Weather ship to paint us on radar and too far west of the airways for a land based fix. Third, our sextant was still unserviceable let alone useless in cloud. Fourth, I didn't really know if the weather change had also brought a change to our planned wind - something to affect our estimated position and govern any clever alternative we might consider. In fact the only thing I knew for certain was that we were flying towards the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, but even that became a secondary consideration when our Single Sideband radio began chirping a litany of airport closures down the east coast of the US denying any chance of diverting back to a suitable airfield. All we could do was grit our teeth and hold Red's planned heading: our salvation lay in finding the Ocean Station ship for a fix.



In those days the USN deployed Ocean Weather Stations, ships located in mid-ocean to track aircraft on radar, fix their position, provide weather and sea state details and stand by in an emergency. These vessels were positioned along air routes across the Pacific (specifically San Francisco – Honolulu) and the Atlantic (particularly Gander – Azores) they were an absolute blessing before the days of Omega, GPS and satellite weather data.

We were last in a very loose stream of three aircraft, well behind Chris and Bernie so at least there was no fear of collision. All we could do was hold our compass heading while maintaining our airspeed and altitude and occasionally checking the outside air temperature for any change in the air mass. I handed over the flying to John while I conferred with Red about the likely effect of the unexpected weather: I felt that our Dead Reckoning had a good chance of seeing us within range of the Ocean Station's radar, surely we couldn't be 100 miles or so off track in just five hours of flying (mind you an unexpected 20 knot wind component was a mere zephyr at that latitude). We both fell silent. Neither of us knew the radar capability of an Ocean Station ship apart from the belief that it was probably good. After two hours John declared himself tired, so tired that he needed to rest in the cabin, a development that didn't concern me as I was quite content to fly my aeroplane, even on instruments, the rest of the way. In fact I logged six



hours on the dials out of a total of 11 that day. You will remember that the Caribou had no automatic pilot.

An hour after John retired, Chris called on VHF to check our progress and advise that he had contact with the Ocean Station and that I would be pleasantly surprised when I raised them in person – I felt a sense of relief at the news: I had not realised that I had become a shade tense with the unexpected during the deteriorating situation. When we finally did receive a radar fix



from the Vessel (Ocean Station Delta from memory) Red's DR proved accurate enough to avoid a heading change or ETA amendment so all was forgiven. Who needs a self-averaging sextant anyway?

Other than somewhere to hang our hats for the night, Laijes Field in the Azores failed to inspire although I did not doubt that the islands could provide a pleasant interlude if I ever had an opportunity to spend time there. They certainly had an interesting history and, like Brazil, a culture stemming from old Portugal. In the event we simply completed our post-flight checks, refuelled, and closed the aeroplane before checking into accommodation arranged by Suzy. Chris had become concerned over the possibility of sabotage to the aircraft – holding up my experience with the starboard propeller as an example of the hazards we faced.

Squadron Leader Sugden DFC, Chris, was a person I will never forget - a loyalty also felt by others who served with him in Vietnam. Chris was a complicated person, a passionate man, often critical of his senior pilots while protective of junior officers and the men, a leader who acted quickly, if occasionally impulsively, whom I found brave to a fault, knowledgeable in the ways of the air and far from hesitant concerning professional risk. However while I endorsed just about every action he promoted, I could not agree with his assessment of the propeller failure or his suspicion concerning sabotage. Technical problems happen in the best families and I still see them as the luck of the game rather than covert activity by persons unknown. During our tour in 'Nam I served as Second in Charge to Chris who occasionally displayed this impulsiveness leaving me no option other than ignore his verbal instructions on two occasions. These breaches of protocol ultimately proved correct and he was man enough to accept the changes without comment.

We flew the Gibraltar sector the next day, 12 May, a milk run in clear sky and smooth air all the way to the 'The Rock' which finally rose from the sea beneath a mantle of cap cloud at the end of an eight hour flight. The 14th and 15th proved equally suited to the task of ferrying aeroplanes halfway around the world, although I would have preferred the second rest day in Malta - rather than Gibraltar – and spent time exploring this gallant little island with its collective George Cross and history of survival against fearful odds. In the event we only had one night to visit downtown Valetta, time to purchase one or two souvenirs and then fly a brief three hour thirty minute flight across the Mediterranean to El Adem where we prepared for our longest flight the next day – the sector to Khormaksar, Aden.





I had grown up believing that a desert, and certainly the Sahara, was a dry treeless place, an undulating carpet of sand that became diabolically hot during the day and desperately cold at night, a belief I found only half correct as I tossed and turned, trying to sleep in the stifling heat of an ancient Nissan hut the night before we were due to leave for Aden. Our original plan included refuelling at Khartoum before continuing on however the politics of the region dictated a diversion around Egyptian air space via its most south western point (Nasser's



Corner) and a forecast sand storm at Khartoum eliminated hope of landing for fuel. We finally decided on a non-stop flight around the air space followed by direct tracks across Sudan and Ethiopia, twelve and a half hours of desert flying that would extend the aeroplane - even with our long range fuel bladders full to capacity. These bladders proved to be unreliable if not downright treacherous things while operation at maximum ferry weight saw the aeroplane well beyond its certified performance capability – in fact the machine felt cumbersome and ungainly as we taxied to the threshold for take-off two hours before dawn.

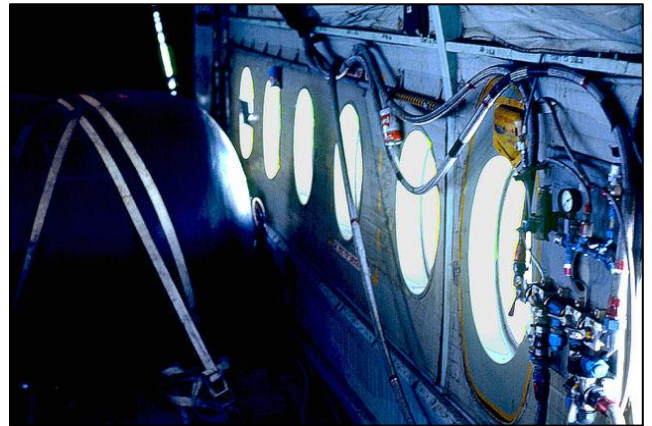
Overweight aircraft operation are not necessarily hazardous, not if the aeroplane is loaded within 'ferry' limitations rather than grossly overweight, the balance is OK, trims are set correctly, air density is not reduced by heat, altitude or humidity and the aeroplane has been serviced properly. Of course the machine lacks its customary zest but even that is acceptable as long as the engines continue to deliver power. Sometime after I left the military, Sleepy Jack (Jack Rydstrom) one of my line pilots from the RAAF unit I commanded in Papua New Guinea, had an engine fail in a civilian Caribou, a tricky development further complicated when his remaining motor also failed over PNG's Fly River delta. Jack died when he went down in the jungle before he managed to reach an airfield. Sadly his Lady, a passenger in the cabin, was also killed when the cargo broke loose crushing her against the forward bulkhead, amazingly the co-pilot survived the whole sad ordeal to tell the story. Jack's aeroplane was undoubtedly heavy but I doubt that he would have accepted anything illegal. He would have set METO power (Maximum Except Takeoff) in an effort to remain airborne when his first engine failed, probably placing unavoidable stress on his remaining Pratt and Whitney, a tired R2000 engine that had seen better days. I flew overweight aeroplanes for various reasons in various situations, situations that were no big deal provided the engines ran normally. By day this was never a problem however at night I occasionally had the unique sensation of being suspended in space immediately after takeoff - an illusion attributable to a black night, a constant heading and flight instruments telling me I was not going anywhere in a hurry. I sometimes even varied the pitch attitude (raise the nose a little) but the rate of climb would remain fixed on some





unfamiliar value while the airspeed reduced as a reminder that, yes, we really were airborne so stop meddling and fly the thing properly. Fortunately I never felt this in a jet, however I did experience it during the take-off out of El Adem once the Caribou finally lifted off and reluctantly dragged itself into the sky.

Not that the sector to Aden was anything but a milk run. Long and tiring, the skies clear all the way, clear enough that despite heat haze and dust we enjoyed a splendid panorama as we crossed the Nile and the rugged mountains of Ethiopia before Djibouti presented itself as a precursor to the Gulf and finally Aden's Khormaksar Airport. The whole business lasted a numbing 12.5 hours of hand flying leaving us a thoughtful little crew as we climbed out of 164 to Chris disgustingly announcing that both the other aeroplanes were unserviceable – a state that continued for 11 long, sweaty, thirsty days while we waited for replacement long range fuel bladders and enjoyed Chris' continuing affirmation that it was all a plot to delay delivery of the aeroplanes. For my part I thought it more like a Gilbert and Sullivan opera with different lyrics.



I still wonder at our forefathers who arrived on such a desolate shore to doff their hats and offer three rousing cheers for the British monarch as they raised the Union Jack and claimed the place in the name of Mother England. Along with blistering heat and flies, Aden left me quite indifferent. At the time, the British and a bunch of rowdies known as Redfan rebels were busily shooting at each other in the adjacent mountains, a dreadful piece of God's earth even hotter than Khormaksar airport where young 'Tommys' deplaned from RAF Beverly air transports and downed whatever was liquid and cold in the airfield's small bar before leaving for the barren, rocky hills to fight a war. Normally I hold infantry in high regard, however I amended this to awe as I watched those lads board their vehicles in preparation for combat.

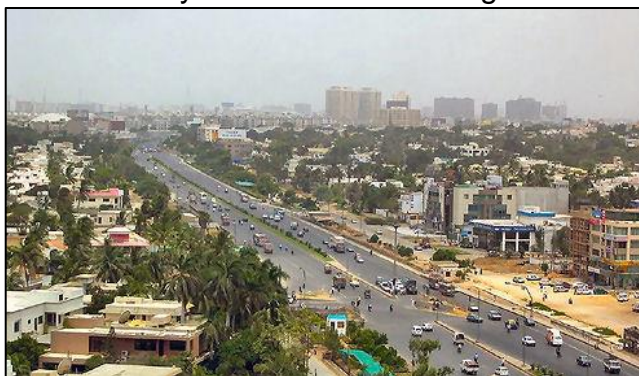
Aden's saving grace was its function as a 'duty free port' and in this context goods were remarkably inexpensive. Naturally we took the opportunity to spend up big on treasures to take home. Amongst other things I acquired a tape recorder – a gadget I used in an attempt to convince Chris and Bernie that they were health hazards. For reasons unknown the sleeping arrangement at Red Sea House, our dilapidated military accommodation, was based on rank, captains shared one room, co-pilots another and crewmen yet another, a system that differed from the arrangement in Canada where accommodation was allocated by crews, even to my chaps sharing the cost of an apartment appropriate to our exalted status as aircrew. I quickly found that Chris and Bernie were inveterate snorers not only inveterate but raucous. Of course snorers are snorers, they have no simple way of not snoring once the mood comes over them, or at least I was not aware of one at the time, so I gritted my teeth and hid my head under the rock hard pillow each night while hoping to fade into unconsciousness somewhere in the hours



before dawn, a feat I usually managed out of sheer exhaustion. Of course this was far from a satisfactory solution, for one, my head became hot at the hobs of hell stuffed under the pillow and, second, I could still hear them snoring. Finally enough was enough so I set up the tape recorder and played the racket back early one morning, an event that failed to impress anybody let alone moderate my tormentors.

Bernie woke first, glared blearily at the tape machine, yawned, scratched himself, rolled over and went back to sleep. It would not overstate things to say the ploy lacked effect. Chris eventually woke and studied me as if I was something he'd found under a piece of gorgonzola before commenting on the desert's odd effect on some people, that perhaps an assignment with one of the army patrols would suit my temperament, even compensate for the inconvenience of Red Sea House. Chris had a way like that, a solution for every problem, instantly conceived and translated into action, by you, if you didn't keep you head down. Nevertheless I imagine the Boss gave the matter further thought for after breakfast he broke the news that the fuel bladders should be on their way with the RAF shortly and, as there was little point in leaving all the aeroplanes in the burning hot sun, I should take 164 and my crew to Butterworth in Malaysia where I could wait and re-join Bernie and him when they 'came through'. I agreed that the idea had merit although my team would regret missing the opportunity to chase the ragged rascals round the rugged Arabic rocks as it were. Chris just responded with one of his penetrating looks that warned of very thin ice so I left things at that to gather the crew and set about readying the aeroplane for the lonely flight across Pakistan, India, Burma, Thailand and Malaysia.

The flight to Butterworth took four days, one to Karachi followed by a day off, one to Calcutta and the final sector to Butterworth, a total of 33 hours airborne. I don't remember why we stopped in Karachi however I do recall enjoying the occasion along with formal cocktails in the august company of diplomats and administrators at the High Commissioner's residence, a refreshing alternative to the sight of a



dentist, complete with a business sign advertising his presence on a down town Karachi footpath, where he operated on a patient in daylight and full view of passers-by, horses, mules, dogs and the inevitable horde of flies. Not that the ambience of Calcutta proved any better with people either asleep or dead by the side of the road as our transport delivered us through the city streets to Dum Dum airport in the hazy glow of an Asian sunrise, an event accompanied by the aroma of oriental spices and cooking. The jury is still out on my acceptance of an Asian lifestyle however there is no denying the exotic flavour of the place.

Butterworth fighter base was a relaxing stopover in a small piece of Australiana secreted roughly one third of the way up the west coast of the Malaysian Peninsular, a six day delay while we waited on Chis and Bernie to finally arrive - six days of hardship involving comfortable





accommodation, servants, splendid meals, current news (The Strait Times) a well-stocked bar, access to George Town on Penang Island and the opportunity to carry out maintenance on the aeroplane with access to cover, workshops, tools and experienced supervision. We even flew an air test on each of two days however we were careful to limit each flight to one hour for fear of overdoing things. We might even have flown on a third day but Red noted some cumulus clouds in the far west so we agreed that conditions were becoming a bit grim and we changed into 'civvies' before catching an afternoon ferry boat across to Penang Island and George Town.

### **Crews who brought the second flight of Caribous to Australia - May 1964..**



**Standing L-R:** Owen Murrell (Loady), Wally Patterson (Nav), Brian "Ric" Richards (Loady), John Staal (Pilot), Keith "Red" Jordan (Nav), Don Pollock (Pilot).  
**Seated L-R:** Des Lovett (Pilot), Barry Ingate (Loady), Ron Raymond (Pilot), Chris Sugden (Pilot), Bernie Parker (Piloy), Bev Barry (Nav).





George Town emerged from a tropical swamp during the time of the Raj to become a trading post of the British East India Company and, eventually, the most favoured and liveable town in Malaysia, an architectural and cultural accolade as defined in its World Heritage status, an award without precedent anywhere East of Suez. I was enchanted to be walking in the footsteps of Somerset Maugham and Joseph Conrad, the shadows of grand architecture, of elegant ladies and nineteenth century gentlemen who created an empire. We spent the afternoon touring the town, the Island, and finally dining in a style such that we missed the last ferry back to the mainland. Not that I was particularly concerned for the surfeit of good living had left me completely agreeable with most everything that had or might come my way during 164's delivery and, anyway, the town offered accommodation appropriate to my new found self-image as some sort of world girdling ferry pilot. Unfortunately the mood failed to extend to my colleagues who insisted on weaving our way to a collection of sampans by the waterfront where we cunningly negotiated a bargain rate across the Strait to a point on the mainland where we could strike out for Butterworth – or hire a taxi or something. The voyage across the Strait went something like:



*"Is it always this rough?"*

*"Why – aren't you feeling well?"*

*"Of course I am – I wouldn't be dead for 50 bucks an hour."*

*"Jeez – it's got water coming in!"*

*"Don't give it another thought – these things are meant to make a bit of water."*

*"But I thought water was supposed to stay on the outside of a boat."*

*"Well this is not a boat, it's a sampan."*

*"I take it there's a difference."*

*"There sure is, sampans are oriental boats developed over the millennia. The Chinese discovered gun powder after they worked out how to row around in sampans that's how old they are. Take this one, more character than the three of us combined"*

*"So what's gunpowder got to do with a leaky sampan?"*

*"Nothing really – it's just relative that's all."*

*"It's just what?"*





*"Shit Skipper, I think I'm going to be sick!"*

*"Hang in there buddy – the sea air will have you feeling tip top in a heartbeat."*

*"That's if my heart continues to beat."*

*"That it will – I have it on good authority."*

*"How about I sing a few bars of 'Those in Peril in the Sea' do you think that will sooth him."*

*"OK let's give it a go."*

*"I'd rather find a tree to sit under."*

*"No sooner said than done - here's the other side coming up right on the nose."*

*"Yeah but I can't see any trees."*

I woke the next morning to news that Australia was sending an 'Airforce presence' to Vietnam. My first action after breakfast involved a visit to the Mess Library in an effort to find where Vietnam was, my second included a walk to Base Operations to check on progress, if any, of Chris and Bernie, my third involved walking back to the Mess Library to read all that I could find in a Time magazine about a war that would probably take our minds off beer and sex for the foreseeable future.



A woman went to the doctor's and said, Doc, my husband seems to have lost his sex drive, what can I do. The doc said, here, give him one of these Viagra tablets, that should fix him. But, said the woman, he hates taking tablets, he won't even take an Aspro when he gets a head ache. Don't worry said the doc, just crush the tablet and pop it into his coffee, he won't notice. Thanks said the woman and left.

Two weeks later she was back at the docs, he said, well, how did the Viagra go. Terrible said the woman. Why said the doc, what happened? Well I did what you told me, said the woman, I crushed the Viagra, put it into his coffee, he jumped up, laid me on the table and we had the best sex I have ever had. Well, what's the problem, asked the doc.

I don't think I can ever go back to that cafe again, said the woman.

# THE RAM

THE MAGAZINE BY & FOR SERVING  
& EX-RAAF PEOPLE & OTHERS



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