



The HISTORY

of

CHANGI



Compiled by:

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FOREWORD

by

Group Captain A D A Honley AFC

Officer Commanding RAF Changi

As the withdrawal of British Forces in Singapore continues it is appropriate that this booklet should be reprinted. It tells of the transformation of Changi from jungle and swamp land to an Army camp, through Japanese occupation to one of the largest and most colourful RAF Stations in the world. While we prepare to leave and wonder about its future it is fascinating to read of its past and the part it played in the History of SE Asia.

I commend it to all who are serving here as a unique souvenir.

PREFACE

In 1961 Group Captain N M Maynard initiated some research into the history of the Royal Air Force station which he then commanded. Three years have since elapsed, during which time a great mass of historical material has been unearthed, and now at last it has been possible to collate this material and put it into print. This short history is the result.

To me has fallen the task of applying the finishing touches. My job would, however, have been impossible without the willing co-operation that has been forthcoming from hundreds of people in many parts of the world. In answer to appeals for information letters, documents, maps and photographs arrived from retired officers who helped to build Changi thirty years ago, from former prisoners-of-war in Australia and the United Kingdom, and from Royal Air Force men who have been at Changi since 1946, to mention only a few. My thanks to them all, and also to a number of people here at Changi today who have helped by reading and criticising the draft. Far too much space would be required if I were to name all those who have contributed in some way to the production of this history but one person must be mentioned: Flt Lt T R H Lyons. During his tour at Changi he amassed most of the material that I have been privileged to use, a process which involved him in a mountain of correspondence and must have occupied nearly all his spare time. He left Changi before he could complete the job, but I hope the end product does justice to all his efforts.

I should also like to thank the authorities of Changi State Prison, who have done the printing of this booklet on our behalf. This is the first occasion on which the Prison has embarked on a printing job of this type, and it seems particularly appropriate that the Prison, which itself figures in the story, should have the privilege of printing it.

Those who read this history may notice that some periods are dealt with more fully than others. I have tried to preserve some sort of balance, but I am uncomfortably aware that there are gaps in the story. The prison camp period is extremely well documented, and so - strangely enough - are the early years. On the other hand, there is much less information available about the later 1930s and the uses to which the Japanese Air Force put the airfield in 1944 and 1945. There may also be inaccuracies: information has often been available from only one source and I have had to use my own judgment on how far to rely on it. It follows that I should like to hear from any readers of this history who notice inaccuracies or who can offer further information. It may then be possible to publish a second edition during 1966 which will be both fuller and more accurate.

Education Flight
RAF Changi
February 1965

H A PROBERT

HISTORY OF CHANGI

CHAPTER 1. EARLY DAYS

The Changi that greets the passenger arriving in his Comet or Britannia in 1965 is very different from the Changi that met the gaze of General Gillman when he arrived to survey the area early in 1927. In the letters he wrote home to his son, he described it as partly mangrove swamp and partly virgin forest, with trees over a hundred feet high and undergrowth so thick that he and his party could not get through. One of the trees, indeed, stood 150 feet high and was such a notable landmark that it appeared on the Admiralty charts of the time, marked as Changi Tree. It stood a little to the west of the modern guardroom, and survived until 1942 when, in an attempt to confuse the Japanese, the sappers blew its top off. The very name 'Changi' reminds us of the nature of the original vegetation, for it is the vernacular name of the 'Balanocarpus', one of the tall, very valuable timber trees that used to abound on Singapore Island but have since disappeared.

The Changi district comprised three main hill areas, one which became known as Battery Hill immediately to the west of the small native village, Fairy Point Hill, and the Temple Hill/Changi Hill area. Between these granite outcrops were low-lying swamp areas, which extended to the alluvial plain east of the Changi Road and as far as the sandstone hills of Selarang to the south. The road from Singapore ended south of the mouth of the Changi River, near the Police Station, from where a narrow track entered a dark natural tunnel through dense jungle, eventually emerging into an area of young rubber trees and mangrove swamps around Fairy Point Hill. Apart from the police station and the small native village nearby, the only buildings were a private bungalow owned by one Mr Manasseh, a government bungalow owned by the Public Works Department a little further along the coast, and a Japanese Hotel. This was an attap structure built on piles over the sea, with numerous cubicles to house ladies of easy virtue. Early in 1927 the ladies were evacuated and the hotel was reconstructed internally to become the first Officers' Mess. Mention should also be made of the wooden bungalow at Fairy Point, near which stood the Fairy Tree, which was reputed to have magic powers.

Why should such an inhospitable site have been chosen for development as a military base? The strategic importance of Singapore Island had been appreciated ever since the days of Sir Stamford Raffles, but it had never been thought necessary to build fixed defences for the whole island. The defences of the First World War covered the harbour area only. However, the emergence of Japan as a powerful, potentially expansionist power in the Far East led the government of Mr Stanley Baldwin to the decision to build a Naval Base and an Air Base on the northern coast of Singapore Island. Consequently, coast defences would be needed to protect the approach to the Johore Strait. A basic assumption in all this planning was that France and her colonial possession, Indo-China, would remain friendly and that any attack on Singapore could therefore come only from the sea. The possibility that Singapore Island might have to be defended against a land attack from the north was never considered.

It follows that Changi's part in the new plan was to provide the base for the Royal Artillery batteries covering the eastern approaches to the Johore Strait, and the broad outlines of the Changi scheme were drawn up at General Headquarters, Fort Canning, in 1926, and approved by the Army Council. Early in 1927 the Army Council decided to send a commission of three officers, headed by Major General Sir Webb Gillman, RA, to prepare the detailed defence scheme. The Commission's terms of reference included the siting of the guns, the distribution of the defence troops, and the principles to be adopted in laying out the main camp area. The Commission stayed in Singapore for nearly three months, residing in the Europa Hotel and travelling daily to the various parts of the island they had to visit. Before they left, on 1st July 1927, they had recommended the sites for the main gun batteries: the 15 inch battery was to be located at Bee Hoe, two 6inch batteries on Battery Hill and at Telok Paku, and two other batteries on Pulau Tekong Besar, an island opposite Changi. Not only did these sites need to have adequate fields of fire, but they had to be accessible for heavy and bulky loads, such as gun mountings, and when one remembers that almost the whole area was covered in jungle and swamp the Commission's work can be seen as no mean achievement. Not only that, the Commission amplified the rough plans of the Changi cantonment which had been prepared the previous year at Fort Canning, and left behind detailed plans for the lay-out of the two main barrack areas at Changi, later to be known as Kitchener and Roberts Barracks respectively. Although these plans were considerably modified later on, in most respects they bear remarkable resemblance to the actual pattern of building eventually put into effect. The Commission realised that Changi offered ample scope for expansion in the future and would be the best place, not only for the artillery batteries, but also for the extra infantry that would be required to protect the new defence works on the island. However, far-sighted as the Commission was, its members can never have foreseen the uses to which the base they had planned would ultimately be put.

No sooner had the Commission departed than detailed surveys of the area were put in hand and labour started to arrive to clear the first building sites. To begin with, progress was slow, partly because of difficulties in obtaining the land that was needed, especially the higher ground on which the barracks were to be built. First the Commissioner of Lands had to estimate the value of the land and then the War Office had to approve its purchase. Next the intention to purchase was gazetted by the Commissioner, who eventually priced it and made the award. All this was a time-consuming process, and it could be further prolonged if the 'locals' got wind of it early on. A typical incident occurred in 1929 when it was decided to buy the sandy plain between Changi Road and Changi River. The assessed value of the area was announced at £15,000, whereupon a newly dug sandpit appeared literally overnight and the owners promptly claimed £120,000 on account of the value of the sand for glass manufacturing. Enquiries had to be started, but shortly afterwards came the temporary suspension of the Changi project, and the land was ultimately bought for a fraction of the price.

Gradually, however, the problems of land purchase were overcome and work could begin in earnest. The first tasks were to clear the virgin forest at Fairy Point, drain the nearby mangrove swamps between Fairy Point and the Government Bungalow, and get rid of the malarial mosquitos. The initial ground clearance was started by one officer, one foreman of works and eighteen coolies who travelled daily from the city. Once they had removed enough jungle, temporary huts and paths were built so that more local workers could be sent out from England. By December 1927, when the resident works staff started to arrive, the jungle undergrowth at Fairy Point was clear, huts for the local labourers had been provided, and the first four officers' married quarters on Fairy Point Hill were already up to first-floor level. The Japanese Hotel had been purchased in order to become the Officers' Mess for the Royal Engineers Construction Party, and temporary water and electricity supplies had been laid on. Even with such amenities, it was thought undesirable for officers to bring their families at this stage, yet despite warnings three of the earliest arrivals appeared complete with wives and children and underwent considerable hardships because of the high cost of living and the inadequacy of the local allowances. Families accommodation problems are as old as Changi itself! Nevertheless, by early 1928 the officers' quarters were finished and the first four blocks of married soldiers' quarters on Battery Hill were not far behind. Strangely enough, the roof tiles for these quarters could not be obtained from anywhere nearer than Marseilles.

By the end of 1927 most of the northern swamp had been reclaimed up to high-water level; this reclamation was essential not only because the land was designated to become the main sports ground but because it was a breeding place for mosquitos. If malaria was to be prevented, it was essential to ensure that mosquitos could not breed within half a mile of any of the living and working areas. The main swamps had therefore to be filled in, and long lengths of pipes were laid five feet below ground to drain away the sub-soil water. During the construction of Changi much useful experience was gained in the methods of combating malaria. The first medical officer arrived in February 1928, and the construction party suffered surprisingly little from malaria or, for that matter, any other tropical disease.

Mosquitos were, of course, by no means the only hazard. Snakes were plentiful, especially on Temple Hill, where the coolies would catch pythons in order to sell their skins for shoe-making and other profitable enterprises. On one occasion a thirteen-foot python was discovered in the mess pantry; on another a six-foot king cobra was killed just outside Fairy Point bungalow. Workers had to take special care when cutting through the jungle, as such snakes were a constant danger. Bees were another unpleasant form of obstruction frequently encountered. Nuisances rather than hazards were the armies of land crabs which were fond of making little mounds of earth all over the recreation ground. Nor must the weather be forgotten: work was inevitably made difficult by the heat and humidity, and the frequent heavy storms caused many building delays.

The reclamation of the northern swamp was linked with the start of Changi's road system. At first the old track across the swamp offered the only route to Fairy Point, but as the ground level was built up on either side of it the track became a hindrance. Consequently New Road (now Netheravon Road) was built along the southern edge of the swamp, the first of the permanent roads that were necessary to the development of Changi. Another swamp which also urgently needed to be filled was the Selarang River Swamp between Fairy Point Hill and Temple Hill, as it was in this area that the Changi Railway was to start. The modern Changi resident may be surprised to learn that Changi once possessed its own railway, but when he recalls the original function of Changi he will realise that there was no other practicable means of transporting very heavy loads to the gun batteries.

The railway plan was drawn up by the Royal Engineers survey team late in 1927, assisted by representatives of the Federated Malay States Railway. The railway was to be 1½ miles long, running from the pier to the 15 inch artillery site at Bee Hoe, with a loop line to serve the ammunition dump on the edge of Selarang Swamp. All except the loop was built during 1928, and to begin with it went through a deep cutting in the side of Fairy Point Hill and then across the swamp. Several hundred Chinese labourers, who were encamped on Temple Hill, as far as possible from the European community, were engaged on making the cutting and using the spoil so obtained to fill in the swamp. As time went on, more and more spoil was required in order to prepare firm sites for the workshops and power station, with the result that the southern remains of Fairy Point Hill eventually disappeared.

The railway line itself was built to standard gauge, because the stability of the large crane that would have to operate along it could not be guaranteed on the narrow gauge used by the Federation Railway. Nevertheless, its conversion to narrow gauge was considered practicable should it ever be decided to connect it up with the Federation system. One disadvantage of using standard gauge was that all the rolling stock had to be brought out from England, and the landing of some of the heavy items presented serious problems. The locomotive in particular caused many anxious moments; the Royal Engineers had no suitable cranes or derricks, and the barge built locally in 1928 for transporting heavy guns across water was thought incapable of standing the strain of being grounded on the mud. Eventually, a Chinese contractor was called in and the locomotive was loaded aboard a junk in Singapore Harbour. The junk was brought alongside the pier at Fairy Point and with the help of a Heath Robinson contraption of sticks and string, plus a large gang of coolies, the locomotive was safely unloaded. The British audience had their hearts in their mouths much of the time, but the Chinese remained typically unperturbed. At last the day came for the ceremonial opening of the railway, and a high-powered group of officers was conveyed along the line in the 'Changi Express', which consisted of the engine and one truck, converted into an observation car for the occasion.

The unloading pier at Fairy Point was also built during 1928, together with the station yard and running shed. From here another road was constructed, leading to the recently acquired War Department quarry on Changi Hill. Granite could be obtained far more easily there than from Pulau Ubin, and this quarry was the main source of granite for nearly all the early construction projects at Changi. The access road (first known as Quarry Road and now known partly as Tangmere Road) formed a second main link in the Changi road network.

Meanwhile plans for the permanent buildings were being prepared. One pressing problem was to find a suitable site for the Officers' Mess. To begin with, the old Japanese Hotel had been used, but it soon collapsed under the strain and Fairy Point House, which was completed in August 1929, was brought into use as a temporary measure. The planners considered that the best site for the permanent mess would be the one occupied by the Government Bungalow, but the negotiations for its purchase were fruitless and Fairy Point Hill was chosen as the next most suitable site. Temple Hill was also considered as a possible alternative, but it was isolated from the main building areas, anti-malarial measures would be required, and the Chinese temple which stood thereon would have to be removed first. Sites for the first five barrack blocks were actually completed. These blocks, together with the others built later in the same area, now house the headquarters officers of the Far East Air Force and part of the Royal Air Force Hospital, Changi. Below the barrack blocks another site was also prepared, this time for the service institute, now the airmen's 'Chalet Club'.

A fresh water supply and electric power were among the first needs of the growing cantonment, and for some years these had to be provided locally. Well-water, although easily obtained, was often brackish near the sea, and expert advice, including that of the designer of the Singapore City water supply from Johore, was taken regarding the best sites for wells. Once wells had been sunk, the water was pumped to underground storage reservoirs built on Barrack Hill, from where it was piped to the buildings where it was needed. Eventually, in 1934, Changi was linked to the Singapore water mains and further storage reservoirs were built on Changi Hill. Electricity was supplied at first by a 1¼ kw set installed in Fairy Point Bungalow, but this source soon proved inadequate, and a miscellaneous collection of ancient generators that had been acquired in Singapore was brought into use, assisted at night by the station steam roller, which was connected to a secondhand dynamo. Only at the end of 1928 did 15 kw sets arrive from England, enabling a power station to be brought into use.

Inevitably Changi could boast little in the way of recreational amenities in these early days. The expense of getting to Singapore was so great as to be almost prohibitive, so the building of squash and tennis courts was given high priority. Before long, representative matches were being played against other teams from Singapore at cricket, tennis, squash and golf, but such sporting facilities benefited only the minority, and for most people swimming provided the main means of recreation. Unfortunately sharks were a constant danger and until an all ranks swimming pool was built during the 1930s at Selarang, bathing could be allowed only within the old bathing pagar at Fairy Point.

The modern inhabitants of Changi take for granted the many beautiful trees and shrubs that contribute so much to its aesthetic appeal, but it is well to remember that the first builders of Changi set out to create not just a military camp but what now amounts almost to a garden city. Changi enjoys one of the finest natural settings of any military base anywhere in the world, and in the main the scheme of building has added to rather than detracted from it. But it is the flowering trees and shrubs that particularly delight the newcomer, and for these Changi is indebted to the horticultural enthusiasts who established the nursery garden, and to the many residents of Singapore who generously allowed the necessary cuttings to be taken from their own gardens. Changi benefits too from the many stately trees that were deliberately preserved by the planners, although not all attempts at preservation were successful. Once the bark of a jungle tree is exposed to the sun the wood deteriorates, and many of the trees that were originally left intact have since had to be felled, to everybody's regret.

The story of these first three years is one of feverish activity, during which much of Changi was reclaimed from the jungle and swamp and the foundations of its future development were well and truly laid. Then suddenly, as a result of one of those twists of politics that so often bedevil British defence policy, a halt was called. It was not that the need for the Naval Base and its associated defences had disappeared; far from it, for Japan's ambitions were becoming clearer all the time. The reason was to be found in political and economic events at home. As a result of the 1929 General Election, a Labour-Liberal coalition government was formed by Mr Ramsay Macdonald and shortly afterwards Britain was hit by the Great Depression. Cuts in expenditure were inevitable, and one of the casualties was 'Fortress Singapore'. The order went out that, although buildings already under construction could be completed, no further contracts were to be placed. By the middle of 1930 all work had ceased, Changi had been placed under care and maintenance, and the only activity was the coming and going of troops and their families who were stationed in Singapore and used Changi as a rest camp at the weekends.

CHAPTER 2. FORTRESS CHANGI

It was not long before the pressure of events dictated the resumption of work. In the autumn of 1931 the Japanese gave convincing evidence of their intentions by occupying strategic points in Manchuria and defying the remonstrances of the League of Nations. At the same time Mr Macdonald's Labour Government fell and although he continued in office as Prime Minister it was now as head of a National Government. A reappraisal of defence policy was quickly made and in the autumn of 1932 came the decision to go ahead again with the Changi project.

A further year was to pass before the actual building could re-start. Although much of the general planning had been carried out between 1927 and 1929, much detailed survey work remained to be done and almost the whole of 1933 was devoted to this. The nucleus of the works staff arrived early that year and working in conjunction with boards of officers sent from GHQ at Fort Canning they decided the detailed layout of the buildings that were to be erected during the later 1930s. Site plans were drawn up on the spot, and working plans and drawings were compiled at Fort Canning. By December 1933 all was ready for the first building contract to be placed.

From 1934 to 1941 work was to continue unabated. Chinese contractors were given most of the work, contracts being placed with them at regular intervals to ensure that the large labour force could be continuously employed. The contractors engaged Chinese labour in the main, although they used Indians occasionally for excavation and road-making. In addition several hundred labourers - mainly Tamils - were directly employed on the maintenance of buildings, on the erection of temporary buildings, and on anti-malarial drainage.

The normal method of construction was to build a reinforced concrete framework and fill this in with brick-panelled walls. The roofs of the earlier buildings were sloping, with Marseilles or Indian tiles, but from about the end of 1934 onwards most buildings, especially the barrack blocks and quarters, were given flat concrete-slab roofs. To begin with, the stone for nearly all the roads and buildings came from the War Department granite quarry in the centre of Changi, but by the end of 1935 the quarry faces were getting uncomfortably close to the buildings on the top of the hill and the quarry had to be closed. Thereafter the contractors went to Pulau Ubin for most of their stone. Sand was also plentiful on the spot, but in course of time the danger of malarial pools being formed in the excavations caused it to be brought from further afield.

The first stage in the building programme was to complete the barrack blocks on Barrack Hill, and this work was completed by 1935. At the same time the Royal Engineers' Institute and Sergeants' Mess were built at the foot of Barrack Hill facing the Padang, and the RE Officers' Mess was built on Fairy Point Hill. The construction of additional married soldiers' quarters on Battery Hill meant that by 1936 the area of Changi to the north of the present Cranwell and Farnborough Roads was much as it is today, except for the hospital, the airmen's swimming pool and various post-war married quarters which are interspersed with the older ones.

The use of the name 'Battery Hill' reminds one of the function of Changi in those days. The name was given to the hill that rises between Changi Village and the modern hospital, for the obvious reason that the first of Changi's gun batteries - a 6 inch one - was sited there. Two guns were installed, with the magazine in between, but unfortunately, through fear of damaging the nearby married quarters and the houses of Changi Village, they could never be fired with full charges! Not far from the 6 inch battery was the artillery control centre for the whole Changi section. The main artillery battery, later known as the Johore Battery, was built in a much more remote spot at Bee Hoe, a little way south of where the modern main road crosses the East-West Runway. The 15 inch gun emplacements were constructed during the middle 1930s, and the last of the three guns was mounted in 1938, after the railway engine propelling it had been derailed en route and 300 men had to be called out to restore the situation. It is interesting to note that the guns were similar to those mounted in the battleships 'Nelson' and 'Rodney'.

The construction of the artillery batteries was naturally accompanied by the building of living quarters for the soldiers who were to man them. The Royal Engineers had already staked their claim to the northern part of the camp, which became known as Kitchener Battacks: now it was the turn of the Coast Artillery Regiment of the Royal Artillery, and work on their barracks - Roberts Barracks - began in 1934. The obstacles on Temple Hill were removed and the RA Officers' Mess was built on the summit, with a series of officers' married quarters dotted around the lower slopes. Along Artillery Road (now Martlesham Road) appeared a string of six new barrack blocks and a NAAFI canteen. Not far away along Quarry Road were built the RA Guardroom, the NAAFI store, the Sergeants' Mess (the modern Corporals' Club) and a compound and sheds for the guns and motor transport of the anti-aircraft regiment. A group of married soldiers' quarters were also constructed along the modern Wittering Road. The whole of this development was completed by the end of 1936.

At first the planners had thought almost entirely in terms of defending Singapore against attack from the sea; hence the emphasis on the heavy artillery. Before long, however, it was appreciated that these fixed defences would be vulnerable to air attack and plans for incorporating anti-aircraft defences into the Changi project had to be made. The first AA regiment arrived in 1934 and to accommodate it two barrack blocks and a large number of wooden huts were built on the east side of Changi Road. These were known as India Barracks, because most of the men in the regiment were Punjabis of the Hong Kong and Singapore Regiment. A big AA expansion was decided upon in 1937, whereupon additional huts had to be built to the north of India Barracks. Eventually, in 1940, the Hong Kong and Singapore Regiment batteries were moved to Nee Soon and the AA defences of Changi were left in the hands of the three batteries of the British-manned Third AA Regiment, which had its headquarters in the building now known as St George's Hall. Anti-aircraft firing practices were all held at Beting Kusa, on the coast. The local fishermen had to be removed beforehand from their fishing enclosures by a Military Police motor-boat, and the guns were then fired from permanent concrete platforms on the foreshore. The 'Queen Bees' used for target practice came from the 'Co-operation Flight, RAF' at Seletar.

In 1936 the main building effort was switched to a new site at Selarang a mile or so south of Roberts Barracks. This had been chosen as a suitable home for a full battalion of infantry which the army had decided should be based in the eastern part of the island, and between 1936 and 1938 the whole complex of Selarang Barracks sprang into existence. to be occupied almost immediately by the Gordon Highlanders. Even now, the work was far from finished, for more accommodation was needed in Roberts Barracks. Between 1939 and 1941 a series of new barrack blocks, a NAAFI and Junior NCOs' Club and a cookhouse were built immediately west of the earlier RA barrack blocks. The cookhouse was fitted with all the latest equipment, electrically-operated, but unfortunately the head cook had to remember to telephone the RE power station whenever he wished to use the electric frier, as otherwise the circuits would be overloaded. Another modern amenity installed at the same time was individual slipper baths, the first hot baths in Changi.

The physical growth of Changi between 1934 and 1941 was inevitably accompanied by development of its welfare facilities. The growing family population necessitated the opening of a proper school and the bungalow at Changi Creek was purchased from Mr Manasseh in 1933 for the purpose. Until then an empty married quarter had been used, with the wife and daughter of one of the officers as teachers. Social life developed as the main messes were opened, but many officers and their families found their social activities focused on the Fairy Point Club, which consisted of a single room with a dance floor, a kitchen, and a paved terrace outside, from which a long flight of steps led down to the beach. It may have been in the Fairy Point Club that the Fairy Point Cocktail was originated - Cointreau, Gin and Passion Fruit Juice.

The Engineers held cinema shows twice weekly in H Barrack Block (the modern hospital), but the Gunners soon determined to have a cinema of their own. They leased the site along Quarry Road at a nominal rent and built the hall themselves, buying the materials out of battery funds. The hall held about 300 people, and with films being obtained by private arrangement and the other overheads being almost negligible, the profits were enormous. They were used to obtain the most modern projectors, to buy new seats, to erect a dressing-room for concert parties, to build a box-office and covered way from the road, and finally - the ultimate in luxury - to install air-conditioning. Even then, surplus funds were still available for playing field amenities, for a married families clubhouse and for laying out an all-ranks golf course in the area south of Roberts Barracks. Unfortunately the war intervened before the Golf Club could materialize, and the proposed site is now the Western Dispersal. For those who wished to seek amusement elsewhere there was a local service of Ford T 'Jinty' buses which ran along the very dangerous winding road to Singapore. However, the Gunners decided in 1936 that if they could run a cinema successfully they could also run buses, whereupon the 'Ubique' bus service was inaugurated as a means of transporting the solidery to and from the city lights. Six brand-new Ford V8 buses were bought and painted dark blue with the RA crest marked thereon. These buses were familiar sights in and around Singapore from 1936 until the war.

By 1941 Changi Fortress, as the Japanese termed it, was complete. In fifteen years a piece of virgin jungle had been transformed into one of the most modern and best equipped military bases in the world. The Royal Engineers in Kitchener Barracks, the Royal Artillery in Roberts Barracks, the Gordon Highlanders at Selarang all stood ready, yet the chances of war ever coming to Singapore seemed remote. The conflict in Europe, with its tale of sickening reverses and heroic resistance, seemed to be taking place in a different world. At Changi, now that building was done, the normal working day, except for manouvres and guard duties lasted from 7.30 am to 11.00 am, the rest of the time being devoted to such things as sailing, swimming, tennis and the gay social round. The inhabitants of Changi, in common with the rest of the population of Singapore, lived in a dream world, blissfully unaware that their 'fortress' was in reality little more than a house of cards. The Japanese occupation of French Indo China, coupled with the development of offensive air power, had rendered obsolete the whole concept of Fortress Singapore.

CHAPTER 3. PRISON CAMP

On 2nd December 1941, 'Prince of Wales' and 'Repulse' steamed past the gun batteries of Changi on their way to the Naval Base, sent there on Winston Churchill's orders partly to try to deter the Japanese attack on Malaya which was now thought to be imminent, partly to assist in repelling that attack if it should materialize. Watching these magnificent ships from vantage points such as the Fairy Point Club and Fairy Point Mess were many of the senior officers of Changi, now realizing perhaps for the first time that they were no longer to be shielded from the rigours of war, but nevertheless supremely confident that the huge Singapore base was secure. For the next few days, apart from a brief sortie by 'Repulse', these great ships lay under the protection of the guns of Changi. On 7th December, undeterred by them, the Japanese landed five hundred miles away to the north at Kota Bharu, and the following day 'Prince of Wales' and 'Repulse' passed down the Johore Straits again on their way to a tragic rendezvous with the Japanese torpedo-bombers and the bottom of the South China Sea. The guns of Changi still covered the sea approaches to the now deserted naval base, but as the Japanese forced their way south towards Singapore in the weeks that followed there dawned the bitter realization that those guns could not fire effectively in the direction from which the attack would now surely come. Writing to Mr Churchill on 16th January, General Wavell was obliged to say that, 'although the fortress cannon of heaviest nature had all-round traverse, their flat trajectory made them unsuitable for counter-battery work.' He could certainly not guarantee to dominate enemy siege batteries with them. A further point which soon emerged was that most of the ammunition for these guns was of the armour-piercing variety, quite unsuitable for the bombardment of ground forces.

Meanwhile the Changi Garrison could do little but wait and hope. Apart from one or two small-scale bombing raids, in the course of which a few buildings in Changi Village were damaged, the war did not come to Changi until February 1942. Then, for a week or so, there was intensive bombing and a certain amount of shelling from Japanese batteries across the Johore Strait. The RASC store on Quarry Road (near the present-day St George's Church) was completely destroyed, many other buildings were damaged, including the artillery magazine and some of the barrack blocks, and the electricity and water supplies were cut. Nevertheless, the Garrison was well placed to give a good account of itself should the Japanese attempt a landing near the eastern end of the island.

On the evening of 7th February the Japanese occupied Pulau Ubin, overlooking Changi, and followed this up on the 8th with a heavy bombardment of Changi itself, to which the fortress artillery replied with great intensity but little real effect other than to destroy a lot of rubber trees. Despite these operations the Japanese had no intention of attempting their landing in the east, and that night they made their assault across the narrowest part of the Johore Strait, west of the Causeway, and the defenders of Changi had to stand idle while the Japanese rapidly gained a stranglehold on the western part of the island. By 12th February the enemy had penetrated so close to Singapore City that General Percival had no choice but to order the defending troops to be withdrawn from Changi so that all remaining forces could be concentrated within a limited perimeter around the City. Before they withdrew, the Engineers, acting in accordance with Churchill's directive of 2nd February, blew up the guns which had been Changi's 'raison d'être'; the breech block of one of the 6 inch guns on Battery Hill flew several hundred yards before coming to rest on one of the civilian quarters at the rear of Changi Village, a symbol, as it were, of fifteen years of wasted effort.

Three days later General Percival accepted the Japanese surrender terms, and within a matter of hours the enemy decreed that Changi should become a gigantic prison camp, in which all the British captives would be concentrated. The order for all troops to move to Changi was given on 16th February, and from then until 18th February a procession of over 50,000 prisoners trudged wearily along the long winding road leading eastwards from the city, watched curiously by the Asian inhabitants of the villages along the route. Many Chinese risked the anger of the Japanese to distribute gifts of money and food; this was their war too and their knowledge of the fate that had befallen their compatriots in China at the hands of the Japanese left them under no illusions as to what was in store for them. Most of the prisoners carried as much clothing, food and cigarettes as they could, but their private belongings - the letters, the diaries, the photographs which mattered so much - had for the most part been left behind, because the men feared a Japanese search which never materialised. The wounded, and some of the other prisoners who had come direct from the battlefield, had of course little in the way of food and clothing.

Despite the considerable damage caused by bombing, shelling and demolition, Changi appeared a haven of peace to the exhausted prisoners, many of whom were initially disinclined to do anything but relax and disport themselves in the sea. Very soon, however, discipline was being re-established and the essential services restored. As the main Singapore pipelines had been damaged, water supply presented an immediate problem, and rationing had to be imposed without delay. The malarial drains were rapidly cleared out to provide water for washing purposes and water holes were bored. Apart from this the most serious difficulty was overcrowding. Into Selarang Barracks, which until recently had housed 900 Gordon Highlanders and their

families, moved 15,000 Australian prisoners, leaving the remaining 35,000 - mainly British and Dutch - to occupy Roberts, Kitchener and India Barracks. Roberts Barracks became the hospital, and in Kitchener Barracks were concentrated the troops of the former Singapore Garrison, including the few RAF men who had been captured on the island. The 18th Division, which had landed in Singapore less than a month before the surrender and had been immediately thrown into the battle, found itself in the two barrack blocks and the many wooden huts of India Barracks. The prisoners who arrived from Java later in 1942 (mainly Dutch prisoners and RAF men who had been evacuated from Singapore before the surrender) were put into tents to the north of India Barracks, where the modern Technical Wing stands. This area was known as 'Java Lines'. At the northern extremity of the camp, in the bungalow that formerly belonged to Mr Manasseh, a Japanese army section was installed under Lieutenant Okazaki, but discipline and administration in the camp area remained in the hands of the allied officers under the command of General Percival. For his headquarters he took over the married quarters blocks that stand behind the modern Air Traffic Control. At this stage the Japanese regarded their prisoners as 'captives' rather than as prisoners-of-war, and it was not until August 1942 that the Japanese began to organize Changi as a proper prisoner-of-war camp under their own administrative staff.

At first the Japanese placed no restriction on movement of allied prisoners within the Changi area, and they were allowed to roam at will over the whole eastern end of the island as far west as the Goal. On 12th March 1942, however, each division was required to wire in its own area and movement between these areas became much more difficult in consequence. The main valley separating Roberts and Selarang Barracks became a no-man's land patrolled by Japanese soldiers and Sikhs who had gone over to them. Only men wearing special armbands and parties of men led by an officer carrying a special flag were allowed from one area to another. Within the divisional areas, however, the Japanese were hardly ever to be seen, a phenomenon which Russell Braddon noted with gratitude when he arrived from Kuala Lumpur in November 1942. In contrast with the privations he had suffered in Kuala Lumpur and the suffering he and countless others were to endure later in Thailand, Changi camp in 1942 seemed to him to be the 'Phoney Captivity'. His views were typical of those expressed by many other men who had been taken prisoner in Malaya or the Dutch East Indies and were brought to Changi during that year; its acres of grass and trees and its well-spaced, well-appointed buildings seemed to savour of another world, as did the welcome they received from the older inhabitants, who greeted them most warmly and gave them all their essential needs.

Some of the later arrivals, however, viewed Changi with mixed feelings. Having undergone much hardship they were in no mood for a return to some of the trappings of British army discipline. The allied commanders, anxious for their troops to be ready for the day when Malaya would be recaptured, strove to maintain the highest standard of discipline; they therefore held frequent ceremonial parades together with military lectures and courses in unarmed combat, and kept the men occupied all day with routine chores, some clearly necessary for the well-being of the prisoners, others less so. They also insisted that the distinction between 'officers and gentlemen' and 'other ranks' should be preserved, a distinction that rang hollow to those who had seen their comrades die in battle or in captivity and knew that heroism and cowardice were no respecters of rank. Yet, although some of the restrictions seemed petty and irksome, most were necessary if the men were to remain fit and their morale was to remain high.

Food supply and the maintenance of health were the most critical problems to be faced. After the first fortnight, during which British army rations were issued, prisoners had to make do with the Japanese ration scales, which consisted mainly of rice, and it was only gradually that the cooks devised means of making it palatable. Apart from rice, a little tea, sugar and salt were issued, together with the occasional ration of meat or fish. The Japanese refused to allow Red Cross relief parcels to be distributed, so any supplementing of the meagre rations depended on the ingenuity of the prisoners themselves. It was not difficult to find one's way out of the camp, and some of the more intrepid prisoners would forage among the old British Army dumps and sell their finds at black market prices. There were plenty of local traders only too willing to indulge in illicit enterprises and the black market rapidly became a thriving concern. Changi contained a great many 'saleable' commodities, but on occasion the desire for food would override common sense, as for example when precious M & B tablets from the hospital were being traded for bully beef or when men went out to sell the clothes they wore in exchange for food. The rubber plantations that lay between Selarang and the Gaol were gradually cut down and camp gardens appeared in their place. These gardens grew such fresh vegetables as sweet potatoes, Chinese cabbage and tapioca, and they remained a most valuable source of food right until the end of the war.

The other vital need was medical facilities. Inevitably the lack of proper sanitation led to widespread dysentery and hundreds of men died from this during the first few months. It was not long before ever lengthening lines of graves could be seen in the prisoner-of-war cemetery just west of the remains of the Johore Battery, and the custom of sounding the 'Last Post' had to be stopped because its frequency had a demoralizing effect on the sick and the wounded. A partial solution to the dysentery problem was to dig holes up to 40 feet deep and use them as latrines; several such holes would be grouped together without privacy. The large numbers of dysentery cases, together with the many casualties brought in from the remains of the Alexandra Hospital and the various temporary hospitals in Singapore, were far more than the hospital on the top of Barrack Hill could cope with, and within a fortnight of the surrender the hospital was moved to Roberts Barracks, where all the barrack blocks were rapidly converted into a gigantic sick bay. Block 126 became the operating theatre, Block 128 became the isolation wing for the diphtheria cases and Blocks 144 and 151 became the dysentery wing, with a temporary building nearby serving as the mortuary. Even Roberts Barracks was too small to cope with the multitude who needed hospital treatment and the Australians in Selarang set up their own hospital for 2,000 patients in the Officers' Mess and one of the barrack blocks.

Sick parades became daily features of most mens lives, mainly because of vitamin deficiency, which was symptomized by a raw scrotum, a raw tongue and open sores, mainly on the legs. The doctors did all they could within the scope of the available drugs and urged everyone to partake in as little activity as possible, having calculated that the calorific content of the diet was only sufficient to enable one to breathe. Unfortunately the Japanese remained unaware of this depressing state of affairs. One medical officer became convinced that the diet was such that only by eating hibiscus leaves could the men stave off perpetual sterility, and although thier views were treated with some scepticism every hibiscus bush in Changi suffered as a result.

Despite the military parades, the sick parades and the many chores, most men had much leisure time on their hands. The art of conversation flourished, as was inevitable with so many men of such varied backgrounds being concentrated together, and the groups of bore-holes proved to be excellent places for gossip and rumour spreading, so much so that, in prison language, rumours became known as 'bore-holes'. More official types of news were circulated in a daily news bulletin that was published from July 1942 until December 1943, based on information obtained over concealed battery-operated wireless sets. The prisoners were thus able to keep up-to-date with the progress of the war, and even when they were all moved to the Gaol in 1944, the receiving sets continued to operate. The most ingenious means of hiding the sets were devised, including the fitting of a small one into a broom handle, and many of the sets were never discovered by the Japanese. Personal news was much more difficult to obtain, and it was not until March 1943 that the first incoming mail was received; as for outgoing mail, the men at Changi were allowed just five postcards of twenty-four words each during the whole period of the captivity.

Among the men who were particularly influential in maintaining morale were the padres. One of these, the Rev F H Stallard, obtained permission from the grudging Japanese commander to convert part of the ground floor of the dysentery wing of the hospital (Block 151) into a chapel, which was decorated and furnished by self-help and dedicated as St Luke's Chapel. Notable features of the decorations were some murals painted by Bombadier Stanley Warren, a member of No 15 Field Regiment who had been brought seriously wounded into the hospital and who was asked by Padre F Chambers (Stallard's successor) to paint them while he was recovering. These murals can still be seen, having been restored in 1963 by the original artist, brought out from England specially for that purpose. Padre Chambers unfortunately failed to survive the captivity; he died at Kranji having sustained internal injuries while trying to help a prisoner lift a particularly heavy load. He was refused hospital treatment by the Japanese, a tragic end for one whose work at Changi had aroused the admiration of all his fellow prisoners. Elsewhere on the camp, the mosque in India Barracks was converted into 'St George's Church', its altar candlesticks being made by the sappers of 18th Division, its harmonium being rescued from a wrecked Chinese school, and its pews being the seats of a former outdoor cinema in Changi Village. Only the star and crescent on the roof remained to testify to the earlier use of the building.

No account of the Changi prison camp would be complete without some reference to the 'University'. Despite the apathy which was all too apparent among many of the men, the RAEC staff were soon appealing for potential lecturers and instructors, and a wealth of talent was unearthed, ranging from officers who possessed some sort of professional qualifications to almost the entire staff of Raffles College, Singapore, who had been mobilized as volunteers and now found themselves behind the wire. Inevitably educational

materials were scarce, but several libraries were found more or less intact, and chairs, tables and even blackboards were discovered. From March to August 1942 the educational programme expanded until several thousand men were taking part. Lectures were given on every conceivable topic and class tuition was provided in a series of faculties, including General Education, Business Training, Languages, Engineering, Science, Agriculture, Law and Medicine. Southern Area College (in Kitchener Barracks) provided tuition approaching university level, while 18th Division College provided instruction up to matriculation standard. Unfortunately, hardly had the educational work got fully under way than the teaching staffs began to be depleted by the departure of working parties and by November the 'university' had contracted into an Education Centre, which provided a library and a limited range of classes and lectures.

Entertainment too had its place in the life of Changi. The Australians in Selarang raised a Concert Party of almost professional standard, and it became such a booster of morale that for a long time its members were kept back whenever the Japanese called for more workers. One of its comedians, Harry Smith, had a catchphrase, 'You'll never get off the Island', which became almost the watchword of the prisoners throughout the captivity. While the Australians concentrated on variety shows, the British, using the old RA cinema, known as the 'Playhouse', put on straight plays in the main, achieving likewise a very high quality. One of the Japanese interpreters was most helpful in providing stage properties, gowns, make-up and so on, and some of the Japanese guards were regularly to be found in the audience. Having propped their .303 British rifles against the walls of the theatre, they would sit down and listen; then they would stand to attention while 'The King' was played. On the first night they attended, they were so taken in by the excellence of the make-up of the 'girls' that as soon as the performance was over they all dashed around to the stage door to meet them!

The foregoing description of life at Changi during 1942 suggests that the prisoners found conditions there far more tolerable than in most other prison camps. Nevertheless there were constant reminders that they were completely at the mercy of their captors. For one thing, the Japanese at first refused to recognise them as prisoners-of-war, entitled to certain rights under the Geneva Convention. They regarded them simply as captives, an attitude typified by the inscription on the armbands worn by the POW medical officers who moved from one area of the camp to another: 'One who has been captured in battle and is to be beheaded or castrated at the Emperor's will'. Then there were the interrogations. A Japanese order issued soon after the surrender laid down that prisoners were to answer all questions to the best of their knowledge and without evasion; the attitude of the Japanese army towards the British prisoners would depend on their compliance with this order. Then again there were the guards. Most were Sikhs who had succumbed to Japanese pressure and had gone over to the enemy. These Sikhs, who were regarded as traitors by the prisoners, took advantage of their position to make increasingly absurd demands on the prisoners and eventually even the Japanese realised that they were going too far. Consequently in November 1942 the Japanese tried to remove the causes of the trouble by ordering the Indians to recognise all forms of salutation, not to enter the prisoner-of-war area except when on duty, and not to strike the prisoners who failed to salute. Forbidden to use violence, the Sikhs now resorted to forcing the escorting officers to strike the prisoners, and they also took any opportunity to drill alleged offenders and to make them stand to attention for long periods.

The clearest indication of the Japanese contempt for their prisoners came in September 1942. During the previous month General Percival and most of the other senior British and Australian officers had been taken away to Japan, and Colonel Holmes and Colonel Galleghan were left in command of the 20,000 or so prisoners who now remained at Changi. At the same time Major General Fukuye and a large administrative staff arrived to establish a proper prisoner-of-war camp regime. Hardly had Fukuye arrived than four escaped prisoners were brought in. Two of these had got away from Bukit Timah in May, and had rowed 200 miles in a small boat before re-arrest. The Japanese, who refused to recognize the right of any prisoner-of-war to attempt to escape, announced on 30th August that all prisoners were to be given the opportunity to sign the following statement: 'I the undersigned, hereby solemnly swear on my honour that I will not, under any circumstances, attempt to escape.' Colonel Holmes pointed out that prisoners-of-war were not allowed to give their parole, and he and his fellow officers refused to sign. To a man the other ranks followed suit.

Two days passed, with no sign of the next Japanese move. Then, on the morning of 2nd September, the senior commanders were ordered to witness the execution of the men who had tried to escape. The victims were dragged to Selarang Beach and ordered to dig their own graves. Corporal Breavington, one of the two Australians from Bukit Timah, pleaded that his comrade should be spared, saying he had ordered him to escape with him. His plea was in vain, and just before they were riddled with bullets both men stood to attention and saluted their Colonel. 'The bravest man he had ever seen', was Colonel Galleghan's tribute to his corporal. Hard on the heels of this cold-blooded massacre came the Japanese order that all the British and

Australian prisoners, apart from those in Roberts Hospital, were to concentrate at Selarang. This whole move, ordered at midday, had to be finished in five hours, and that night 15,400 men were crammed into Selarang Barrack Square, with only two water taps and totally inadequate latrines. For three days the prisoners held out, and photographs preserving the incredible scene for posterity were taken at risk of the photographer's life. The allied commanders knew that their men could not live in such conditions for long (the Japanese had even threatened to bring to the square the diphtheria cases from the hospital) and they pleaded for the declaration to be either amended or made an order. Eventually the Japanese made it an order, whereupon the British and Australian commanders ordered their men to sign the declaration under duress, pointing out that they would otherwise die of disease. Reluctantly, yet sensing an element of victory in the stand they had made, the men signed and on 5th September they were allowed to return to their former areas, any illusions they might previously have entertained about the Japanese having now been completely shattered.

Already, by the time of the Selarang Incident, the prisoners remaining at Changi numbered less than half of those who had marched in only seven months before. Many of them had died; many more had been taken away in working parties. It had taken the Japanese hardly any time at all to recognize the value of their prisoners as a labour force and within a week of the surrender groups of prisoners were already being taken back into the City to clear debris and work in the docks. Steadily the number of working parties increased, some of them being sent away from the island into Malaya. To be chosen to join a working party meant that the life of relative security and comfort at Changi was to be exchanged for a life of endless toil under the most degrading conditions - endless, that is to say, unless death mercifully intervened. It was hardly surprising that everybody feared being sent on the working parties and intrigued ceaselessly to avoid this fate. Towards the end of 1942 the Japanese announced that parties were to be ready to leave for Thailand, where there would be comfortable camps and plenty of rations - indeed conditions would be so pleasant that sick men from the hospital could be sent there for convalescence. The 7,500 strong 'F' Force, the first large party to go to Thailand, included many such men and also much impedimenta, including a piano. On arrival in Thailand they discovered the speciousness of the Japanese promises: they were in fact destined to build a railway through the cholera-ridden jungle between Thailand and Burma. That railway represented a death sentence for at least one third of the men who left Changi in 'F' Force and the other forces that followed it early in 1943. Some of the survivors eventually found their way back to Changi at the end of 1943 and those who had been lucky enough to stay at Changi did everything possible to help them recover from one of the worst ordeals prisoners-of-war have ever been called upon to face.

CHAPTER 4. JAPANESE AIRFIELD

While the Thailand working parties were setting out, rumours began to spread to the effect that the prisoners who remained would be used for the most unlikely of projects, namely the building of an airfield at Changi. Those who knew anything about aviation could think of few less suitable places, yet in due course the rumours proved true and in May 1943, to make room for the Japanese engineers and the various air force units that would follow, all the allied prisoners were cleared from the northern and eastern parts of the camp and concentrated at Selarang. For the time being the hospital remained in Roberts Barracks, but by May 1944 both Roberts and Selarang Barracks were required by the Japanese and somewhere else had to be found for the 12,000 prisoners who lived there. The Japanese answer to this problem was Changi Gaol.

Changi Gaol had been originally built in 1936 to house 600 prisoners. Most of the cells were intended for Asians, but 24 were designed for Europeans. Immediately after the surrender in February 1942 nearly all the white civilians in Singapore had been rounded up and placed in the Gaol, and eventually no fewer than 3,000 men and 400 women and children were incarcerated there. The internment camp was administered by the internees themselves, many of whom had plenty of money and were thus able to buy the necessities of life. They had the use of three or four old trucks and an ambulance, which provided their links with the city and with the many Asian friends who were prepared to help them with gifts. They also had their links with the outside world in the form of wireless receiving sets; news of the war was regularly received and disseminated, both within the internment camp and more widely through the other prison camps on the island. The Japanese were slow to appreciate what was going on and even slower to try to stop it, but by the middle of 1943 their fortunes were beginning to decline and they became aware of growing hostility among the Asian population of Singapore. Searching for the 'brains' behind the opposition to their regime, they came to the false conclusion that the Gaol contained a spy ring which received and transmitted information by R/T and was trying to stir up anti-Japanese feelings.

Matters were brought to a head by an incident which occurred in September 1943. A British raiding party from Australia made its way into Singapore Harbour, destroyed six Japanese tankers, and escaped undetected. The Japanese never considered that this exploit could have been carried out by anyone other than saboteurs working under the orders of the internees, and the Kempei Tai (the Japanese equivalent of the Gestapo) was ordered to round up the ringleaders. On 10th October 1943 all the internees were paraded in the Main Yard as if for a routine roll call. Military police arrived and certain internees were labelled and segregated. Throughout the rest of the day the Japanese searched the personal belongings of the internees, engaging in much looting and wanton destruction in the process. That evening 57 internees, including the Bishop of Singapore, Dr Wilson, were removed to Japanese Military Police centres in Singapore for interrogation. Fifteen of these died as a direct result of the cruel treatment meted out to them, and the trial of their inquisitors in 1946 had gone down in history as the 'Double Tenth Trial'.

In May 1944 the civilians were removed from the Gaol to Sime Road, in order to make way for the prisoners of war from Selarang. At the same time the further remnants of the Thailand Railway working parties were brought to Changi from Sime Road, and in all about 12,000 prisoners were concentrated in the Gaol area, 5,000 in the Gaol buildings and the rest in attap huts which the prisoners built for themselves in the courtyards. The main materials used in their construction were rubber trees for the uprights, bamboos for the roof supports, straightened barbed wire for the bindings, and palm fronds for the roof and wall coverings. All these huts were erected within the month allowed for the move from Selarang, enabling every man to find shelter somewhere, much to the amazement of the Japanese.

When they first arrived, the prisoners found the amenities of the Gaol very limited compared with those they had become accustomed to. Nevertheless, in true prisoners-of-war fashion, they rapidly provided themselves with the essential services. Because there was no oil for the boilers there were no cooking facilities, so the Royal Engineers transformed the boilers into wood-burners. Thus, with the aid of the woodcutters who brought in wood from outside the Gaol, the cooks were enabled to make the best use of the meagre rations. Fortunately these could continue to be supplemented from the prisoner-of-war gardens, which was just as well, as in March 1945 the Japanese cut the daily rations to an all time 'low' of less than 8 oz rice and 4 to 6 oz vegetables. Sewage was another problem, but their experiences of the first month at Changi had taught the prisoners the answer. 40-foot bore holes were sunk in every courtyard of the Gaol, home-made, human powered augers serving as drills. These holes were used as latrines and the dreaded outbreak of dysentery never materialised. At the same time the Gaol plumbing system was made to work again, and showers were rigged up in the courtyards with the aid of stolen piping. At Changi there had been a great deal of 'home industry', and the manufacturing programme was soon resumed in the 'Central Workshop' in the Gaol. Birch brooms, soft brooms, toothbrushes, soap, paper, boot and shoe soles, clogs, cooking and eating utensils, darts, axes, needles, artificial limbs: these were but a few of the items which were produced.

The educational and entertainment programmes were also seriously interrupted by the move to the Gaol; nevertheless it was not long before the lecture courses were resumed, and the library which had been got together in the earliest days of the captivity was taken to the Gaol and re-opened there. Ronald Searle's monthly magazine, 'Exile', continued to be published as well. The absence of stage facilities was a nasty blow to the theatrical fraternity, and it was soon decided that a theatre would have to be built. As the other ranks were all at work on the airfield, this would need to be constructed by the officers, who had now been removed from the command of their troops and compelled to live separately. A full-sized stage was designed and materials were scrounged or stolen from all over the island. The Japanese had approved the original plans but were incredulous at the contrast between the plans they had seen and the theatre that finally materialised. The 'Playhouse' was able to draw on the Australian Concert Party, plus considerable British talent; it had a former manager of the Westminster Theatre as the producer, and it had a most efficient stage staff, including Ronald Searle, who helped with design. No wonder that the standard of productions there was outstanding. Unfortunately, early in 1945 the cast overstepped the mark. Scenting the imminence of the German and Japanese defeat, they finished a variety show with a new song entitled 'On our Return', which incensed the Japanese Commander, Gen Saito, so much that he banned all further entertainment, cut the rations and called a special search for hidden radios.

So much for the conditions under which the prisoners were compelled to live in the Gaol. What of their work? For nearly two years they laboured to fulfil the Japanese ambition to turn Changi into an air base. A less likely spot for an airfield would be hard to find, in the opinion of the engineers who found themselves working on it after the war. Yet Singapore Island is particularly short of suitable sites, as most of the ground is undulating, with hard rock outcrops, and the low-lying areas are mainly covered by swamp. The Japanese chose Changi because it was reasonably level and sandy, with relatively few wet spots, and because most of the buildings needed for aircraft servicing and repair and for accommodation were already there. The plan was to construct two intersecting earth air strips, one running roughly north-south, parallel with the main road, and the other crossing it at right angles; to that end the 'Ground Levelling Party' (so called out of respect for the Geneva Convention) started work in September 1943.

To begin with the Ground Levelling Party comprised about 800 men, but it steadily expanded until every fit man was included, together with many who were far from fit. Survivors of the Thailand railway were numbered among them. The work consisted of nothing more or less than shifting hill to swamp. Their bodies almost totally unprotected from the burning heat of the sun and the glare of the pulverised flat of the airstrip, the men toiled at the hillsides, excavating the soil and rock and loading it into hand trucks. These were pushed along the network of narrow-gauge railway lines to the edge of the swamp where the spoil was tipped. When one considers the grossly undernourished condition of the men, most of whom weighed less than two-thirds of their normal weight, and the fact that they were working for between ten and twelve hours a day in gruelling heat, it is truly remarkable what they achieved.

There were, of course, consolations. Unlike most of the other labouring tasks that they had been forced to undertake, this one had some point, for one day the Japanese would be driven from Singapore and this airfield would be of use to the British. Indeed, by 1944 there were already visible signs that the Japanese sun was on the wane, for 30,000 feet overhead would drone the reconnaissance Super-Fortresses of the United States Air Force. Occasionally these great aircraft would come over low, to the intense annoyance of the Japanese and the delight of the prisoners. A further consolation was the many opportunities for thieving, especially when Japanese aircraft crashed, which they often did.

These aircraft started to fly from Changi late in 1944, many of them having been shipped in crates and assembled on the spot. Three hangars were built for them, the modern blocks 130, 196 and 201, now used as the station baggage section and the station workshops. They were very well constructed with high quality timber, and except that two of them have recently been re-sheeted, they remain as the Japanese built them. The barrack blocks that over-looked the airstrips and the dispersals were used as workshops and aircraft stores. Ramps, the remains of which can still be seen, were built leading up to some of the blocks, and many of the interior walls were torn down. Around the airstrip large numbers of open-box type dispersals were built and many of these remain around the sports field and on the Selarang side of the modern Western Dispersal.

As the airfield neared completion the prisoners knew that the Japanese were unlikely to be in a position to use it for very long, for they were still able to keep in touch with the outside world by means of their hidden radio receivers. Frequent Japanese searches had seriously reduced the number of receivers in use, and at one time the absence of spare parts threatened to sever contact entirely. However, a daring raid on the Japanese radio store in one of the buildings of Roberts Barracks remedied the deficiency and enabled the prisoners to keep up to date with the allied victories in Europe. In May 1945 news of the German surrender came through and it was realised that the full weight of allied military power would now be thrown against Japan. The Japanese in Singapore and Malaya realised this too, for further working parties were immediately called for to build defence works on Singapore Island and in Johore. The men in these parties were allowed to take hardly any personal possessions with them and they were cut off from all outside news until the Japanese told them of the surrender. Those remaining in the Gaol, on the other hand, could keep right up with events and on 10th August 1945, the radio operators picked up the news which all had been eagerly awaiting - the start of surrender negotiations.

The effect on the inmates of the Gaol as this news was passed from mouth to mouth was electric, but great caution was needed as none knew what kind of treatment the Japanese might try to mete out to the prisoners before authority slipped from their hands. On 15th August the unconditional surrender of Japan was announced by the allies, but it was not for another two days that the Japanese confirmed the news at Changi. Almost immediately the working parties began to return and by the end of August over 17,000 men were concentrated in and around the Gaol. Meanwhile, the prisoners had to wait ten days for the first sign of relief. In 28th August allied aircraft dropped leaflets ordering the Japanese to lay down their arms but to continue to care for the prisoners. The leaflets also told the prisoners of the arrangements being made for their recovery. On 30th August some medical officers were dropped by parachute, together with some stores, and on 5th September troops of the 5th Indian Division arrived to reoccupy Changi and take the Japanese into custody. British recovery teams came in at the same time to handle the allied prisoners, the first of whom left Singapore by air on 12th September on their way home. The end of captivity had come quickly and without bloodshed, yet the emaciated men who had survived recalled grimly the many thousands of their comrades who had been less fortunate at the hands of their Japanese captors and would never return. Changi and all the other places where the Japanese had held their prisoners remained - and still remain - a bitter memory to those who endured them.

CHAPTER 5. ENTER THE ROYAL AIR FORCE

As the allied ex-prisoners were tasting freedom for the first time in three and half years the Japanese occupants of Changi Barracks found that they themselves were being taken into captivity. They were quickly removed from Changi into a prison camp nearer to Singapore City, whence many of them came during the next two or three years as labourers employed in cleaning up the Changi area and developing the airfield. British officers under whose orders they served have testified to their perfect discipline and their hard work. Their officers would salute British airmen, and at the same time administer very rough justice to any of their subordinates who were guilty of even the slightest infringement of regulations.

No sooner were the Japanese removed from Changi than the Royal Engineers returned, setting up their Headquarters in Block 42 at the foot of Barrack Hill. They found the place much tidier than they had expected, and most of the buildings seemed to have been adequately maintained. The Japanese had always regarded captured buildings as the property of the Emperor, and as damage to anything belonging to the Emperor was a most serious offence such buildings were kept in excellent condition. In some places, however, there was much undergrowth to be cleared, and there was a lot of wreckage lying about which needed to be removed, a task which was not to be completed until about 1948. The Japanese had, of course, left a great many aircraft scattered around, together with much aircraft scrap; most of these were in the area east of the present-day schools. It was soon decided that the easiest and most rapid way to dispose of them was to invite the local Chinese traders to cart them all away for a small fee; this they were only too willing to do and doubtless made a handsome profit on the deal. Soon not an aircraft remained, not even one which could be preserved as a museum-piece, and Changi has had to be content with a Spitfire as its only vintage aircraft.

Much of the debris to be cleared had been left lying around ever since 1942. For example, even after the locals had had their pick, there was a great deal of ammunition still left lying in the area of the old ammunition dump. This dump had consisted of three concrete storage tunnels, two of which had been blown up in 1942. The third had remained intact and was still choked with ammunition. The visitor to Changi today can see the remains of these dumps near the incinerator site. Much of the railway had been torn up by the Japanese and the metal sent back to Japan for scrap; a similar fate had befallen much of the quay equipment, such as the cranes. However, a stretch of track still existed at the pier end, together with one engine and a few trucks. The track was soon removed and although the route can still be followed through the trees opposite the baggage hangar, the only positive sign is a few sleepers and some ballast at the Johore Battery end. The Johore Battery itself presented a real clearance problem, as it had hardly been touched since the British left it in 1942, with huge gun mountings and concrete slabs lying jumbled together, and large quantities of ammunition buried amid the wreckage. By about 1948 most of the debris had gone, but the main concrete emplacement still stands almost intact, overlooking the main runway. It can be seen by anyone who cares to walk a few steps past the 25-yard range, and the panoramic view of the approaches to the Johore Strait which one obtains from the top demonstrates at once the strength and the weakness of the Battery's siting.

As order was being restored the planners were at work considering the use to which Changi should now be put. There was clearly no question of it retaining its former role; heavy artillery batteries were no longer relevant to the defence of the Naval Base. The barracks could, of course, be used for garrison troops, but there was no real shortage of such accommodation on the island. On the other hand there was in Singapore an acute shortage of airfields capable of handling the heavy aircraft that were now in use. As soon as the island was reoccupied in September 1945 the RAF started to use Kallang for its transport aircraft, mainly Yorks and Dakotas, but so intensive was the traffic that its runway soon began to break up and somewhere else had to be found. The Japanese-built airstrips at Changi were the answer, and in April 1946 the army moved out, having leased Changi to the RAF. In their existing state, however, the Changi airstrips were no better able to withstand hard usage than those of Kallang; they were unpaved and the grass grew very sparsely. The first step was therefore to strengthen one of the strips. It was decided that the north-south airstrip would be the better one for permanent development, but as its construction would be a costly and lengthy process a temporary pierced steel planking runway should be laid on the east-west airstrip. This runway was built by Japanese prisoners in six weeks early in 1946, and at the same time a taxiway was built parallel to the northern part of the north-south strip, where a PSP parking apron and two further hangars were later constructed.

The PSP runway remained in use for nearly four years, despite serious settlement especially at the western end. Changi was used for many purposes during this period. It became the terminal point for the Transport Command 'York' service from the United Kingdom, and it was used by the

Lancastrians and Constellations of BOAC. It also obtained its own transport squadron, No 48. 48 Squadron had been disbanded in January 1946 at Chittagong and then only a month later its nameplate was transferred to No 215 Squadron, which operated Dakotas from Kallang. As soon as the PSP runway was finished, 48 Squadron moved into Changi, where it has remained ever since, operating services to Butterworth, Rangoon, Saigon, Hong Kong and a host of other places throughout the Far East. The Squadron set up its Headquarters in a temporary hut opposite the modern control tower, and the house that had originally belonged to Mr Manasseh, now generally known as 'Changi Creek', became the squadron mess. In July 1946 a second squadron arrived, No 52, also operating Dakotas.

No account of the early days of 'RAF Station, Changi' would be complete without a mention of the CO's personal flight, which consisted of a Spitfire, a Mosquito, an Auster, a Tiger Moth and an Expeditor (an American-made communications aircraft). For a long time during 1946 the first station commander, Group Captain Ryley, waged a successful fight against all attempts to dispossess him, although eventually he was compelled to come to terms. His station headquarters were located in the warrant officers' married quarters overlooking the PSP runway, but his officers' mess was somewhat remotely situated in several requisitioned government bungalows at Telok Paku.

Once it had been decided to develop Changi as an airfield, it was also chosen as the location for the main RAF headquarters on Singapore Island, mainly because it had extensive accommodation. As soon as the RAF took over Changi, Air Command South-East Asia was moved in from Tanglin Barracks and the Fullerton Building. The barrack blocks on Barrack Hill, the earliest ones built in Changi, were taken over for the headquarters offices, and to indicate that the RAF had come to stay, Barrack Hill, in common with nearly all the other roads in Changi, was re-named. Shortly afterwards Air Headquarters Malaya, which had come to Kuala Lumpur as No 224 Group in 1945, was also moved to Changi and took over various married quarters in the Upavon Road area as its headquarters. Temple Hill Mess was used by ACSEA and Fairy Point by AHQ Malaya.

Thus by 1948 the Royal Air Force was firmly installed at Changi. The station was operating three transport squadrons, No 48, No 52 and the Far East Communication Squadron (which had been separated from 48 Squadron in 1947), and it was the terminus for the main RAF transport services to the Far East. It housed the headquarters of the RAF in Singapore and Malaya, and only at Selarang Barracks did the Army, once the proud possessors of the whole area, now hold out. There were signs, too, that the more leisured days of peace were back. The first families had arrived late in 1946 and now most of the pre-war married quarters had been returned to their former use. 1947 had seen the opening of the first post-war school, in Block 79, and steps were being taken to establish the other amenities that the presence of the families entailed. Inevitably the stage was set for the further expansion of Changi, but first its permanent role had to be decided.

CHAPTER 6. EXPANSION

It had become clear by 1948 that the future of Kallang as the major civil airport on Singapore Island was limited. Its situation near the harbour and the built-up areas of the city made its further development almost out of the question, and a substitute clearly had to be found. The new international airport would need a runway capable of taking the largest civil aircraft, and to many the north-south airstrip at Changi seemed to offer as good a site for such a runway as any. It could be developed to serve as a joint civil and RAF airfield and this plan was very carefully considered during 1948. So certain did it seem that the plan would be approved that a number of very spacious married quarters was built along Wing Loong Road to accommodate some of the staff who would work at the new civil airport. However, detailed surveys of the north-south airstrip eventually forced the conclusion that the clay and sand base was so unstable as to make the cost of building a runway of international standard almost prohibitive. Furthermore, subsidence could be expected and subsequent maintenance would be expensive. Consequently it was decided that the new civil airport should go elsewhere and that Changi should be limited to RAF use. A new runway would still be needed, for the PSP runway would not last much longer, but the types of aircraft that the RAF would be using on it would not call for such high specifications.

Work on the new permanent runway began on 1st February, 1949. The line of the former Japanese north-south airstrip was followed, and the strip was widened slightly from 950 feet to 1000 feet. Much excavation had to be carried out, and the soil was used to fill in various swamp areas, including that east of the present Station Headquarters, and the one where the modern Army sports field stands, between Calshot and Changi roads. The runway itself was built 150 feet wide, with a flexible bituminous surface, concrete surfacing having been rejected because of the danger of settlement. 98,000 tons of granite were used in its foundations: as the old Changi quarry was now unusable because of the building that had gone on in its vicinity, the extra cost of transporting the granite from Pulau Ubin and two quarries elsewhere on Singapore Island had to be accepted. The 90,000 cubic yards of laterite needed were brought 21 miles from a quarry in the centre of the island, and the 1350 tons of bitumen came from the Persian Gulf. To ensure adequate drainage the runway was constructed with slight slopes outwards from the centre line, as is usual in areas of tropical rainfall, and outfall ditches were built leading in the north to Sungei Changi, in the south to Sungei Tanah Merah Besar, and in the west to Sungei Selarang. Early in 1950 the new runway was finished, together with a taxi-track on the western side, and the old PSP runway could be relegated to serve as aircraft dispersals. Gradually over the years much of the PSP has been replaced by tarmac surfaces, and in 1964 only two areas remain, one in the Technical Wing, and one at the end of the Eastern Dispersal.

Simultaneously with the construction of the permanent runway, a new programme was put under way to provide the extra accommodation required by the Royal Air Force at Changi. Hitherto it had made do with the pre-war army buildings, plus the hangars erected by the Japanese, plus a lot of temporary huts, many of them built in the area now being developed from the main runway. There was a shortage of technical buildings and many of the married quarters that had up to now been used as offices were needed for their original function. Nor were these quarters sufficient for the steadily increasing numbers of married personnel, and a new quarters building programme had started.

The main period of building lasted from 1948 to about 1956. It would be tedious to go into much detail, and the highlights must suffice. The main development was in the area just south of Changi Village, where a new equipment section was built so that the Supply Squadron could move from its initial home in the former Japanese hangar near the western dispersal. Nearby a series of single-storey buildings was erected to house the local troops of the RAF Regiment Malaya. A few years later, in 1956, the Regiment was detached for some months and its buildings were left empty. This was too good a chance for the station commander to miss. Tired of the constant noise of aircraft taking off and landing, he decided to move his station headquarters from Block 106, alongside the airfield, where it had been for the previous five years, to the Regiment buildings. Possession being nine points of the law, the RAF Regiment Malaya found themselves relegated to Telok Paku on their return, where they were subsequently replaced by the local contingent of the RAF Regiment. Since then, SHQ RAF Changi has stayed put, and OC Operations Wing has been left to endure the distractions of Block 106.

Not far from the modern SHQ, at the western end of the playing fields, there were other developments. The growing family population soon rendered Block 79 inadequate for the children's school, and between 1950 and 1953 a new primary school was built, its new assembly hall replacing the pre-war generating plant repair shop. By 1956 the demand for secondary education was pressing and a secondary modern school was built to the south of the primary school, while the nearby Block 79 housed a small grammar school. By the later 1950s those buildings too were insufficient for the number of children clamouring for admission, and they were supplemented by several rows of attap huts. Still the child population increased and in 1962 the partially built

Selarang hospital was converted into a new Grammar School and opened in May 1963. This enabled further rearrangement of school accommodation, the Secondary Modern School moving to the blocks vacated by the Grammar School, and the Infant School establishing itself as a separate entity in the former Secondary Modern School. Finally, in 1964, Changi has lost its Secondary Modern School altogether.

The 'Selarang Hospital' just referred to was the result of a decision made at the time of the Korean War to build a new hospital for all the RAF stations in Singapore. Construction had begun in 1955 and then been halted. Instead it was decided to extend the existing hospital blocks (24 and 37) on the top of FEAF Hill by linking them with a new building (161), a task which was carried out in 1962.

Changi's churches also call for comment here. The original Church of England church was in Building 64, but in 1956 the erstwhile Parachute Store and Safety Equipment Section was converted into the St George's Church and the old building was turned over to the schools. The Roman Catholics still occupy their original church, which had been damaged during the war and subsequently restored. In 1961 the Roman Catholic padre who had been at Changi at the outbreak of war returned to search for some personal belongings which he had buried just behind the church. All he found was a ten cent piece dated 1950; somebody had beaten him to it.

Much of the building programme for 1948 to 1956 was concerned with married quarters. Many of them were built in spaces between the older pre-war quarters in the northern and western parts of the camp, but the most ambitious project was Lloyd Leas. On a new site opposite Selarang Barracks, and extending as far south as Tanah Merah Besar Road, a large estate was built, comprising officers', senior NCOs' and airmen's married quarters; the estate was named after Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Lloyd, Commander-in-Chief in the late 1940s. In more recent years additional married accommodation has been provided by means of locally-owned hirings; hence the Toh Estate, between Tampines Road and Selarang, and the very recent Tampines Estate south of Tampines Road. Even with this extensive 'suburban' development, the demand for accommodation has continued to outstrip supply and hundreds of married personnel have had to live in rented houses in the eastern outskirts of Singapore, up to ten or twelve miles away.

The improvement of recreational amenities went hand in hand with all this. The playing fields on the pre-war 'pagar', north of Netheravon Road, were supplemented by further playing fields on the newly drained area between the schools and Station Headquarters. The ambition of the pre-war golfers was realized when a golf course was completed, running right across the central part of the camp around Changi Hill. Beside the pagar a swimming pool was built in 1957 and ceremonially opened in December by the Earl of Bandon diving in. The Officers' Club pool had been opened a year earlier, the culmination of extensive development of the Club facilities. The modern buildings had been erected in 1950 and 1951, with the former premises of the Fairy Point Club then being converted into changing rooms.

In such ways Changi has developed into one of the most modern and well appointed stations in the Royal Air Force. While communications with the City of Singapore are now extremely good - even if somewhat perilous - it is perfectly possible for the airman posted to Changi to lead a full life without ever venturing beyond Selarang. He can spend his leisure time indulging in any of the widest variety of sports facilities; there are clubs galore to occupy him in the evenings; and when he has money to burn he can buy everything from a camphor-wood chest to a motor-car in Changi Village, which has grown up as almost an integral part of the station and acquired in the process a world-wide reputation among RAF aircrews as being 'the place to buy things cheap'. This description may suggest to the reader that Changi has become nothing more or less than a gigantic holiday camp, and the casual visitor might easily acquire a similar impression. The British taxpayer is not, however, renowned for his willingness to subsidize other people's relaxation, and it is necessary now to consider Changi's 'raison d'etre' in the post-war world.

CHAPTER 7. THE MODERN ROLE

It has already been mentioned that 48 Squadron was the 'founder member' of modern Changi. Ever since 1946 it has operated from Changi, initially with Dakotas, then from 1951 with Valettas, and finally from 1957 with Hastings. In addition to its routine task of operating transport routes throughout the Far East, 48 Squadron became heavily involved in the anti-Communist operations in Malaya, operations which lasted from 1948 until 1957. The main task was supply-dropping, a task which in the difficult terrain and weather conditions of the area cost the squadron four aircraft and their crews during these years. In 1957 the Squadron was honoured by the award of its standard, which was presented at Changi in January 1963. Since the Malayan Emergency the Squadron has played a leading role in all the major activities of the Far Eastern Theatre, ranging as far afield as the Brahmaputra Valley, where it helped to evacuate British families, and even Kuwait at the time of the Emergency there. At present it operates permanent detachments at Christmas Island, in the Pacific, where it runs scheduled services to Honolulu, and at Kuching, where it provides tactical support for the ground forces.

48 Squadron's first child, the Far East Communication Squadron, has continued to operate from Changi too, flying aircraft similar to those of 48. In 1952 it received the first VIP Hastings, but even today it retains some of its original Valettas as well. Another offspring of 48 Squadron was a flight of Beverleys which was established at Changi in 1959 but moved to Seletar a year later to form part of No 34 Squadron.

Although no longer a part of the Changi scene, 52 Squadron deserves a place in the Changi story, for it operated there for twelve years, including the whole of the Emergency. Indeed in June 1948 it fell to 52 to strike the first aerial blow of the campaign against the Malayan terrorists. Throughout the years that followed it used its Dakotas (and their Valetta replacements) for supply dropping, air trooping and a wide range of scheduled services. In 1958 three of its crews were detached to Katunayake to carry personnel and supplies to Gan in connection with the building of the new airfield there. The following year 52's move to Kuala Lumpur brought to an end its association with Changi.

Another fairly early arrival on the scene was No 41 Squadron of the Royal New Zealand Air Force. Its first appearance was in 1949, when a flight of three Dakotas was moved in to assist No 48 Squadron in supporting the security forces in Malaya and to operate courier services. In 1951 the detachment was withdrawn but four years later the entire squadron moved in, having now been re-equipped with Bristol Freighters. Its role was to convey freight and passengers throughout the Far East and to drop supplies in Malaya; in this connection a detachment was deployed at Kuala Lumpur until 1960. This detachment being no longer necessary, 41 Squadron now operates another one up in Thailand.

Thus far Changi's roles were simple; it was the main base for the transport aircraft in the Far East and it was the terminal point for the Transport Command routes from the United Kingdom. In 1958, however, an entirely different role was added. No 205 Squadron, after a history of operating flying boats in the Far East that stretched back as far as 1928, was to lose its faithful Sunderlands and re-equip with the land-based Shackletons Mark 1. Seletar, the flying boat base, lacked a suitable runway and '205' had therefore to be re-deployed; Changi was the obvious choice. The first Shackleton was flown out from the United Kingdom in May 1958, and by July enough aircraft had arrived to enable the Shackletons to take over the squadron's search and rescue commitments. By November the whole squadron had been converted to the new aircraft and the last Sunderlands were due to depart. Within a month those who bemoaned their loss were saying 'I told you so', for one of the Shackletons, engaged on an anti-piracy patrol, had crashed into the sea with the loss of all its crew. A six-day search ended when another Shackleton spotted a newly dug grave on Sin Cowe Island, with the letters B205 marked in coral on the beach nearby. A naval frigate called to the spot found that a Chinese fisherman had seen the crash and had recovered and buried the body of the flight engineer. The wooden cross that had been fashioned by the fisherman over the grave was brought to Changi in 1961 and erected at the rear of St George's Church, where it may still be seen. Since that unhappy event 205 Squadron's fortunes have changed. Its main duties have been concerned with maritime warfare, but its other tasks have received much more publicity. Ships that have run aground or have broken up and sunk in typhoons have been located and their crews rescued; crew members of aircraft that have crashed in the jungle have been found; medical supplies have been dropped to epidemic areas. And so one could go on; suffice it to mention that '205' received its squadron standard in 1959, and was re-equipped with Shackleton Mark II in 1962.

Even the addition of the Shackletons to the Hastings, Valettas and Bristol Freighters failed to exhaust the capacity of Changi airfield. In 1963 the squadron that had last been heard of at Kallang in 1946 when it changed its nameplate, namely 215, reappeared in Singapore, this time operating Argosys. 215 arrived at a most opportune moment, for the demands of the Borneo operations were already stretching the existing squadrons to the utmost. Despite the inexperience of its crews in flying a new type of aircraft, the squadron was immediately flung into active operations and has acquitted itself with distinction.

At the time of writing (late 1964) Changi's aircraft remain fully engaged in supporting the land and sea operations in defence of Malaysia. Its main runway has just been lengthened to enable it to take the largest military transport aircraft; its dispersals have been improved and extended; and an air terminal has been built overlooking the western dispersal. And as if its operational commitments were not enough, Changi continues to house the Headquarters of the Far East Air Force on the old Barrack Hill. There the planners sit, working out yet more roles for the Changi of the future. But it is at this point that our story must stop. The veil of security, symbolized by the wire fences that now encircle so many of Changi's vitals, must descend on a station that suddenly finds itself facing yet another military challenge, a challenge whose ultimate consequences are impossible to predict.

POSTSCRIPT

When Squadron Leader Probert ended his story in 1964 he made no prediction as to the future of RAF Changi. And wise he was, because few could have even guessed what path it would take.

In that year 48 Squadron with their Hastings and 215 Squadron with Argosys completed their 1000th sortie in support of troops operating in Borneo. In addition there were new tasks for them, parachute spotting patrols and leaflet drops as a result of the Indonesian infiltration of the Labis area of Johore. 48 Squadron celebrated its 50th Anniversary in 1966 and soon after extended its operations. It was committed to maintaining a detachment at Butterworth to drop supplies to jungle forts and airstrips. These were very small DZs, many with hazardous approaches, and the task was often augmented by dropping medical supplies to the aboriginal settlements. Then Confrontation ended and in the prime of life 48 Squadron was disbanded in February 1967, followed at the end of the year by 215 Squadron.

There had been portents, however, of the next role which RAF Changi was to play. In August 1966 a VC 10 of Transport Command had arrived on a proving flight and after the runway had been strengthened these big rear-engined jets took over from the Comets on the Far East run in April 1967. In September of the same year the RAF's most recent acquisition, the Hercules C MK 1, appeared at Changi and 48 Squadron was re-formed the next month when four of these new transports arrived. The Squadron was immediately thrown in at the deep end when it was called upon to assist with the withdrawal of British troops from Aden in November. Aircraft on their way to the Far East were diverted and two aircraft went back from Changi to help in the largest troop lift since the Berlin Blockade in 1948. Few Squadrons have had a more exciting return to active service and this emergency was followed by another one in January 1968. They were called upon at a few hours notice to rush troops and helicopters to the Island of Mauritius where they were required for internal security duties because of political disturbances. This was subsequently called 'the swiftest combined service mobilisation in British experience'. The fact that the Squadron was back in service was ceremoniously recognised when the Squadron Standard was returned in St George's Church in February.

RAF Changi was rising to its new role in the changing organization of the Royal Air Force in general and Air Support Command in particular. The VC 10's made their almost daily appearance, the Hercules explored the Pacific and circumnavigated the world, the Shackletons of 205 Squadron flew their long essential sorties and the Bristol Freighters of 41 Squadron rose noisily from the airfield while the colourful Meteors from 1574 Target Facilities Flight flew to distant firing ranges. But then in 1968 the British Government announced its intention of withdrawing its Forces from Singapore by December 1971 and plans were made for the RAF to leave Changi by that date. As part of the withdrawal 52 Squadron with Andovers MK 1 returned temporarily to Changi from Seletar in February 1969 and the Squadron was disbanded in December. In March 103 Squadron and 110 Squadron with Whirlwind MK 10 Helicopters and 130 Beaver Flight, RCT came to rest awhile when the flying ceased at Seletar.

Soon they will depart with all the other Squadrons and the RAF will leave Changi after an association lasting over 25 years, and a base which has been an Army camp, a POW cage, a Japanese airfield and an RAF operational Station will become who knows what it will be in 1972?

March 1970
Squadron Leader J M CARDER