



## **AS IT HAPPENED**

**BY**

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### **SUPPORTING RAAF BUTTERWORTH (MALAYA/MALAYSIA)**

During the 1950s to 1960s, No. 2 Squadron was based at RAAF Butterworth, Malaya (later Malaysia). Butterworth is situated on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula, opposite Penang Island, and about 80 kilometers from the Thai border at its nearest point. No. 2 Squadron flew two flights of Canberra bombers and one flight ("C" Flight) of Dakota transport aircraft.

"C" Flight was based on No. 2 Squadron for administrative and engineering requirements, but was operationally responsible through the Officer Commanding RAAF Butterworth to the (then) Department of Air in Canberra.

The role of "C" Flight was to provide air transport support to RAAF Butterworth; to drop supplies to the Malay Forts along the spine of the Peninsula and to troops acting against the Communist Terrorists (CTs) at the Thai/Malay border; and to provide Australian Embassy support to Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam.

Supply dropping to the Malay Forts was a fairly hazardous operation because they were situated in mountainous terrain. Accordingly, there was little or no room for lax pilotage.

Our airborne despatchers, who were from a British Royal Army Special Air Supply Unit, were quite experienced and efficient. All types of supplies including ammunition, fuel and explosives were regularly dropped.

### **FRIENDLY? OR ENEMY!**

I was Flight Commander of "C" Flight for two and a half years from 1962 to 1965. At that time, our knowledge of Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam from an air/ground operational aspect was very sketchy, and part of "C" Flight's job was to land on and measure advanced airstrips which often were very short, very narrow and had a suspect surface.

Mixed in with the operating hazards for landings and take-offs, was the spine-tingling feeling of being unsure whether our side or the other was in control of the strip. Some airstrips had hundreds of local troops sent to guard them for our operations. Our presence was always welcome to both sides because of the Colombo Plan supplies we carried.

As a result of personal experience, my briefing to crews carrying out advanced airfield assessment was clear and concise. "If troops on the airfield are standing up watching the aircraft, there was no worry. If they were standing up looking outward, be on the alert. But if they were lying down facing outward - get the Hell out of there!"

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### **C.T. PAPER WAR**

On one occasion, with Rob Hart as my second pilot, I was captain of an aircraft detailed to drop some hundreds of thousands of pamphlets in southern Thailand on what was a fairly routine mission. However, unknown to me, it was my despatchers' first try at dropping leaflets.

Flying at low level in very hot conditions, our crew door to the cockpit was left open. and we slid back the side windows up front. With the single door at the rear of the aircraft being open, we received a pleasant breeze in the cockpit due to the flow-through of air.

The pamphlets came tied in bundles of about one thousand, and with a lanyard designed to be tied to the aircraft. The bundle was then pushed out the door and it broke open about fourteen feet from the rear of the aircraft.

Being unaware of the correct procedure, the despatchers broke open several bundles inside the aircraft. Immediately, there was a rash of some thousands of pamphlets covering the whole of the cargo compartment and swirling around the cockpit, slapping around the heads of the crew and covering their eyes.

After the initial shock and the use of one or two unprintable expletives, there was a great deal of hilarity in the aircraft, and a time-consuming degree of scrabbling around as everybody tried to retrieve the errant pieces of paper.

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### **RAINMAKER MAGIC**

At another time, there had been a very serious drought in Singapore, and arrangements were made for Singapore to be loaned the use of an RAAF Dakota, fitted with rainmaking equipment, to seed the clouds in an endeavour to produce rain. For political reasons, the loan of the aircraft and its rainmaking potential was widely publicized and headlined in the local press.

As the Dakota approached its destination, a great thunderstorm developed, and the aircraft was forced to hold to the north of Singapore as the storm dropped four inches of rain all over the island.

After the aircraft landed, the crew got into the car to be driven to their hotel in town. The Sikh driver, and later the hotel staff were all over them like a rash, for their magnificent rainmaking efforts.

The crew meantime, had been thoroughly briefed not to tell anyone that the equipment to make rain was to be fitted next day!!