Dedicated to all those who lost their lives or became prisoners of war in the Far East and all who have suffered since.

When Kenneth Kemp and the rest of his crew were posted to the Far East, it was a far cry from the homes that they had left behind. They had entered a world of monsoons, hurricanes, heat, humidity, a terrain of jungles & paddy fields and malaria, dysentery, typhus & cholera, which many airmen succumbed to.

Food was monotonous, enhanced by the arrival of Australian meat and the disappearance of imitation sausages. Also there was the ever-present risk on each mission that they flew, that they could be shot down and executed or become prisoners of war in the many notorious camps run by the Japanese.

While the war still raged in Europe, crews like Kens were fighting a different kind of war in the Far East.

South East Asia Command was set up to be in overall charge of Allied operations in the South-East Asian theatre during world War Two.

In October 1943 Winston Churchill and President Roosevelt as Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia appointed Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten till SEAC was disbanded in 1946.

The initial land forces operational area for SEAC was India, Burma, Ceylon, Malaya, Sumatra and for offensive operations in Siam (Thailand) and French Indochina. On August 15th this was expanded to include the Dutch East Indies & French Indochina. When most of Burma was captured, attention was turned to Malaya but the war was brought to a sudden end by the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima & Nagasaki on 6.8.1945 and Japan surrendered on 2.9.1945 on board USS Missouri, anchored in Tokyo Bay.
I first met Ken Kemp, a brilliant and very likeable eighty three year old, when I was researching his brother, Robert and writing an article on his death. When Ken mentioned that he himself had flown in a Liberator crew in the Far East, I was very interested to know about his experiences. He was kind enough to write down his memoirs for me of his time as rear gunner in Squadron Leader Roy Williams crew of 215 Squadron S.E.A.C.

Service record:
Service number: 1894765
Gunnery Course:
Pembrey, Llaneth, Wales.
7.4.1944-12.5.1944 Anson’s.
Total flying for course 17.45. Remarks on achieving 81%—“A good pupil, efficient in his work. Should make a good member of aircrew”.
1673. HCU Kolar. S. India 20.7.1944-208.1944 Liberator V1
Total time: 44.20 hours

War Operations from Ken’s log book. September 1944:
5.9.1944 (Pilot W/O Cameron): bombing & fighter interception.
7.9.1944: Bombing & cine camera, gun firing.
11.9.1944: Bombing, Air to ground firing & cine camera, 50 rounds.
15.9.1944: Movement from Jessore to Digri.
20.9.1944: Fighter affiliation.
25.9.1944: Cine camera D.N.C.O.
26.9.1944 Formation bombing & fighter affiliation.

October 1944
17.10.1944 Air Test
28.10.1944: Consumption test.
November 1944
1.11.1944: air Test
2.11.1944: ops to A.L.G. 3x500 Base Jessore
2.11.1944: Ops to A.L.G. 3x500 Jessore to Citt.
3.11.1944 Chittagong-Base. Art horizon u/s
10.11.1944: Practice bombing Jessore-base 24 bombs dropped.
13.11.1944: Formation & bombing practise, 16 bombs dropped
16.11.1944: Formation & bombing practise, 12 bombs dropped.
18.11.1944 Air test
19.11.1944: Formation bombing practice 9a/c.
26.11.1944: War operations: Attacked Pyinmana Railway Yards. Sqdn formation (12 a/c) 4x1000lbs. 5x500lbs. 7, 000 feet. intercom u/s.
30.11.1944: War operations: Digri to A.L.G.
31.11.1944 War operations: Attacked military camp at Vinh-Yen, stopping at Chittagong for refuelling.

December 1944
1.12.1944: Citation to base, returned from op.
Rangoon-Mingaladon map of Anti aircraft Defences-26\textsuperscript{th} December 1944.

1.1.1945 War operations: Attack on Bangkok-Moulmein Railway at Thanbyuzayat area. Low level 300 feet.


18.1.1945: War operations: Attack on Meiktila aerodrome. Fighter cover. Heavy flak. Height 9,000 feet. Bomb load 4x1000lbs & 8x500lbs.

21.1.1945 War operations: Combined S.E.A.C. attack Mount Peter amree Island. Bomb load 8x1000, 8x500 lbs. Height 6000 ft.

25.1.1945 War operations: Attacked store sheds at Amarpura, Mandalay. Heavy flak. 8x1000lbs & 4x500lbs. Height 6000 ft.

28.1.1945: War operations: Attacked Japanese held positions north of Kangaw Combined ops. 10x1000lbs & 2x500lbs. Height 3,000 ft.

31.1.1945 War operations: Attacked Amin. Buildings at Kyaumse, S. of Mandalay. 8x1000lbs & 4x500lbs. Height 6000 ft.

February 1945

3.2.1945: War operations: Attacked railway yards at Jumbhorn. 9x500lbs. Height 5,000 ft.

5.2.1945: Pilot W/O Mazengarb. War operations: Attacked railway & military camp at Mandaya, North of Mandalay. 12x500lbs. Height 6000 ft.

8.2.1945: War operations: Attacked Japanese troop concentrations at Singu. Bomb load 10x1000lbs & 2x500lbs. Height 5,000 ft.

11.2.1945 War operations: Attacked supply dumps at Rangoon, heavy flak, one enemy fighter shot down. Bomb load 6x1000lbs & 2x500lbs. Height 13000 ft.

“This was the heaviest bombing attack to date of the Burma war. Other Liberators & B-24’s of Strategic Air Force participated, with U.S.A.A.F. Superfortresses. An escort of Thunderbolts & high cover by P-38’s over the target was provided. One enemy pilot was seen to bale out”

12.2.1945 War operations: Attacked enemy artillery positions at Menmu bomb load: 10x1000lbs. Height 5,000 ft.

17.2.1945: War operations: Attacked Rungborn aerodrome. 10x1000Lbs, 2x500 lbs bombs. Height 10,000 ft.

21.2.1945 War operations: Attacked Japanese H.Q. & stores at Myittha. Bomb load: 10x1000lbs & 2x500lbs. Height 10,000 ft.


25.2.1945 War operations: Attacked Japanese military store sheds at Taunggyi. Bomb load: 10x1000lbs & 2x500lbs. Height 10,000 ft.

March 1945.

2.3.1945 War operations. Attacked Makasan railway Yards & sheds at Bangkok. Heavy flak. Bomb load 3x1000ft. 6x500lbs. Height 3,000 ft.
7.3.1945: War operations: Attacked Jethesand railway sidings at Martaban, heavy flak. Bomb load: 3x1000lbs & 8x500lbs. Height 7000ft.

17.3.1945: War operations: Attacked store dumps at Rangoon. Bomb load: 4x1000lbs & 8x500lbs. Height 15,000ft.

19.3.1945: War operations: Attacked railway yards at Nan-Hoi. (Kra Isthmus) Bomb load: 9x500lbs. Height 2,500ft.


“This raid above a 200 foot bridge built by prisoners of war caused many casualties among the prisoners of war held in Burma and Thailand. The railway was also being used to evacuate sick & wounded Japanese and survivors from their defeat in Burma”

24.3.1945 War operations: Attacked railway sidings at Pauuk, Moulmein. Bomb load: 3x1000lbs, 9x500lbs. Height 7000ft.

27.3.1945: War operations: Attacked supply dumps at Bangkok. Heavy flak’s bomb load 9x500lbs. Height 11,000ft. Heavy flak.


April 1945

2.4.1945: War operations: Attacked railway yards at Khaeng-Khoi, Siam. Bomb load: 12x500lbs. Height 5,000ft.

5.4.1945: War operations: Attacked Dumpsand stores at Rangoon. Heavy Flak Bomb load 12x500lbs. Height 10,500ft.

The above are entries from Ken’s logbook, signed by James Sindall, Acting Wing Commander. Wing Commander Sindall went on to receive the D.S.O. on July 20th 1945, being promoted to Wing Commander in July 1947. Then to the Air Ministry on 10th May 1949, General duties Branch, R.A.F. & transferred to the Secretarial Branch on 5th April 1949. Before retiring from the R.A.F. in 1958, Ken flew 33 sorties for his tour with a total of 323.40 day hours & 84.00 night hours.

Liberators Ken flew in:
“Q” EW 285 after the war
. A lot of aircraft were either scrapped or given to the Indian Air Force.
(1) Back row: John Graham, Stanley Dyball & Hedley Lamberty
Front row: Jock Mclennon, Cecil Quinn, Ken Kemp.

(2) Back row: Hedley Lamberty, Peter Monaghan.
Front row: Jock Mclennon, Cecil Quinn, Ken Kemp
Ken flew under Squadron Leader Roy Douglas Williams RAAF, D.F.C. (service number 400609.) Squadron Leader Williams was born in South Yarra, Victoria, Australia. He enlisted on 18.9.1940 at Melbourne. He was discharged at Base PO AC SEA on 20.12.1945. He was presented with his D.F.C. for “gallantry & devotion to duty on many successful sorties” by the Governor of Victoria at Government House, Melbourne on 10th July 1947.

Co-Pilot-Len Russell from Portsmouth.

Navigator-Stanley Dyball, R.A.A.F.
Service number: 413839 born in Croydon on 5.4.1914 & enlisted on 13.9.1941 at Sydney, N.S.W. He was discharged at RAF Station Bhopal on 15.1.1946.

Bomb Aimer W/O John Clifford RAAF
Flight Engineer-Sgt. Cecil Quinn RAF.

1st wireless operator_ Peter Monoghan (196352) RAFVR from Portsmouth.
2nd. Wireless operator/OT Beam gunner_ F/S John Graham. RAF
Nose Gunner-Sgt Hedley Lamberty. RAF
Mid Upper Gunner-F/Sgt W. "Jock" Maclellan
Ball Gunner-Sgt A.W. "Taffy" Spencer RAF a Welshman from a mining area in South Wales.
Rear Gunner: Sgt. K.A. Kemp
On some ops front gunners & ball gunners weren’t taken.
W/O John M Clifford, finished his tour early as he had done ops. on Wellingtons & was replaced by a P/O Vise.
Sometimes crew members were temporarily replaced with others, owing to crew members being in the sick bay with malaria. Also a Sgt. Dineen & even the Group Captain (station commander) flew on one op.

Menu for Christmas 1944

Ken’s Memoirs:
“I joined my pilot, then Flight Lieutenant Roy Williams, RAAF at the conversion unit Kola Gold Fields, Southern India, where 215 squadron were converting to B24 Liberators Mk V1. and was allocated to him by our gunnery leader as rear gunner. After our training there we moved up to East Bengal where we did further training and then I flew as rear gunner with him on 32 operations. I did an extra operation with a New Zealand pilot, W/O Mazengarb when his rear gunner reported sick. Roy Williams was promoted to Squadron Leader & he took over “B” flight as Flight Commander. I stayed with him throughout; flying Liberators. he was an excellent pilot & a real gentleman. Stan Dyball, our navigator was also an Australian. Our bomb aimer for about 20 ops, Clifford was from Sydney. Peter Monaghan, our wireless operator came from Portsmouth & was a W/O when he joined us & a real veteran, being an ex-Blenheim aircrew from 1941 days & a very good friend. I think he was awarded a commission after his tour with us & became an airfield control officer. Len Russell, our co-pilot was an excellent mathematician & worked out our petrol consumption etc at certain revs & boost control, which improved our performance in staying in the air so long. He also came from Portsmouth. Unfortunately Len often succumbed to malaria & often had to miss operations. In the meantime we had several co-pilots to train as captains on their first operation, some were shaky, but F/Sgt Harling, an ex-boy entrant was an excellent pilot & would later finish up as a Wing Commander.
Another chap Wilf Tindall who sometimes flew as our starboards wingman when in formation was an excellent pilot & Squadron Leader Williams had every confidence in him. Wilf later flew in the Berlin air lift & also as an instructor on Dakota’s. All our bombing operations were carried out against the Japanese military. They had invaded Burma, Siam, Indo-China etc. in fact they got repulsed at Kohima & Imphal, 15 miles from the Indian border. Our job was to hit their supply lines, airfields, railways & bridges & support the 14th Army in their advance as we were now on the offensive. We avoided cities & towns where possible. We aircrew knew that if we were captured, our chances of surviving were nil, it was made plain by “Tokyo Rose”, we would be executed. We did lose aircraft & friends. Sometimes we had to go down under 500 feet to machine gun trains & bridges to stop the trains, dropping one bomb at a time, to put it out of action. They were very long operations. Liberator B24’s were the only aircraft we had with the range to reach these targets. We were operating from East Bengal & would go on these long trips down to the Margin Archipelago & fly inland from there. This was an entirely different war to the one in Europe. We were not allowed to take anything with us that were useful to the enemy, i.e. personal papers. We had escape overalls made up in Calcutta (designed by Squadron Leader Clive Vernon. Beadon DFC). These concealed different types of escape needs, such as compass, maps of the area etc., then we had our personal .38 revolver & 18 rounds of ammo. We also carried a dagger in our belt together with a full water bottle. A machete was strapped to the lower half of our right leg (for cutting through the jungle). We had 600 rupees to buy from or bribe the villagers for help. Leaflets in different languages to show the people we were RAF & friendly & needing help. We also had a gooley chit, a good pair of walking boots also, so you can imagine that I had to take off up front of the aircraft, as we were always tail heavy with a full bomb load. Directly after take off, I had to go through the bomb bay & put on all my gear, including parachute harness, Mae West, revolver etc., & get in the rear turret & report to the pilot by intercom. I then made my checks & gave the navigator the wind drift. Then, with the pilot’s permission, tested my guns with a couple of short bursts before starting my search & look out. I also operated an Aldis signalling lamp to give messages to other aircraft as we were on radio silence over enemy territory. I was also responsible for the First aid kit & the dinghy in case we had to ditch into the sea. I was also briefed to take over the Flight engineers duties, such as transferring fuel, in case he got injured. We all as a crew had to know roughly about other duties in case of injuries or fatalities and relied on each other for our safety. On 8th December 1944 we had flown over the Bay of Bengal to Tavey island, a pin point on the Siam coast, flying under 500 feet to get under enemy radar. We turned east to KancharBuri for our subsequent bombing run. However just as we had picked out target, we were hit by heavy machinegun fire from the ground. No 2 engines had been damaged & smoke emitted from it. We immediately gained height & jettisoned our bombs at about 1000 feet to lighten the aircraft. I was firing at the ground positions where the action was coming from to stop further damage. I could hear bullets hitting the aircraft & knew that we were in trouble. However we had a first class pilot in Roy Williams who banked over on a reciprocal course, opening up the power to escape further damage. The damaged engine was throttled back to save blowing up. We proceeded to fly about 5 miles out to sea following the coastline, in case we had to forceland & agreed the beaches would be the best place. Luckily the Liberator kept going, despite sparks & smoke coming from the damaged engine. We later found out it was oil burning as the oil tank had been hit. As a result we were an hour overdue when we reached base. We had been airborne for 14 hours 40 minutes. Next day we inspected “A” KG 830 & I noticed a row of bullet holes starting from about 3 inches from where my head was extending along the fuselage. Our wireless
operator remarked that they were ricocheting off the bombs & our co-pilot had them going under his seat. Luckily no one was injured but we lost a lot of sweat!
After completing my ops. with 215 squadron I had two months of rest & then I awaited posting for a jumpmasters course in Northern India. This was to be in preparation for the invasion of Malaya but as a result of the atom bomb being dropped, this course was abandoned.”

* Squadron Leader Clive Vernon Beadon: Distinguished Flying Cross awarded as per London Gazette 17th August 1945.
Citation from Air Ministry Bulletin 19448: “This officer has completed three tours of operational duty, two of which have been served in the Far Eastern theatre of war operations. He has led the squadron on several occasions achieving excellent results. On one occasion he flew his badly damaged aircraft safely back to base, a distance of over 1,000 miles, after attacking, at low level, trains on the Bangkok-Chiangasi railway. Squadron Leader Beadon is an exceptionally able and courageous flight commander who by his enthusiasm and fine fighting spirit have set an inspiring example to the other members of his squadron”.

Ken had to get a “home-made” badge made up when his other one wore out.

While Ken was acting as rear gunner, unbeknown to him, the man who was to become his future brother in law, Victor Hunt (Royal Artillery Anti-Tank gun section) was a P.O.W. in the same area. Victor left England on an overcrowded troopship going round South Africa to Mombasa. Here the Navy Eastern Fleet escorted them to Singapore. In another quirk of fate Ken’s brother William was a marine on the cruiser Emerald, part of the escort to take them to Singapore. The Japanese were almost there and their aircraft bombed the troopship as it entered harbour. Victor and the other soldiers had to jump into the sea in just a pair of shorts. He was lucky enough to be picked up by natives in boats before being captured by the Japanese. In the melee the escort ships were ordered to withdraw and William Kemp’s ship was in collision with a destroyer, both damaged and ordered back to Durban for
repairs. Victor had to work on the notorious Burma Railway for two and a half years before being shipped to Saigon to build an airfield for the Japanese. Nearing Saigon they were bombed by American aircraft and again had to abandon ship. During his time as a P.O.W. he had to endure appalling conditions till the war ended and he was repatriated and coincidentally, met Ken’s sister Jean and married her. Although Ken and his crew attacked the railway yards on several occasions, they did not know there were P.O.W.’s there. After the war Ken and Victor talked about Kanchanaburi and their experiences in the Far East. As a result of his time as a P.O.W. Victor had a leg amputated. He was a modest, hardworking devoted family man who died recently aged 85.

Maps of Prisoner of War Camps
Map given to Ken by W. Davis of the P.O.W. camp he was in at Tamakan.
Made famous by the Bridge over the River Kwai which was completed in June 1943 using P.O.W.’s as slave labour. Many died of malnutrition and disease or beatings by guards. Tamakan was also used as a hospital camp.

Of Ken’s original crew, Roy Williams is in a nursing home in Melbourne; Hedley Lamberty is in a nursing home in Carlisle, Stanley Dyball and John Clifford have sadly died.
Ken is now in touch with Len Russell and Peter Monoghan but would be pleased to hear from any of the rest of the crew or anyone who knew him in the Far East..
After the war:
“With my job as rear gunner redundant, I was elected to help out in the accounts department at Group H.Q. Bangalore (older airmen who did these jobs were going home). I did day parades & jobs pertaining to airmen’s pay. I was then posted to R.I.A, F Bombay to learn RAF accountancy. I had Sergeant Barber as my tutor and we became lifetime friends (he has since died). I played cricket, swam and went on leave to Darjeeling for 3 weeks. In fact I had a wonderful life living in smart flats on Marine Drive, Bombay seafront before moving to Red Hills Lake, Near Madras. In 1946 I was repatriated back to England, leaving many good friends behind. I arrived home to a very drab, still rationed England in early January 1947. After only seven days I was recalled to RAF Marham to assist with the paying of airmen going home on leave due to heavy snowfall and frost, and also no fuel to heat the place for 500 personnel. I bought a motorbike and met the girl I later married. As she did not want me to stay in the RAF, I got de mobbed and joined the Air Ministry Civil Service, but after becoming bored, joined a large group of farming companies in Lincolnshire as their accountant till I retired”
"66 Years Later"

In October 2007, Ken Kemp had a reunion with Len Russell, the co-pilot on the Williams crew. The meeting took place on the Isle of Wright, near Len’s home.

Acknowledgements & thanks to: Ken Kemp, Len Russell, Robert Quirk, Matt Poole.

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