

# THE STORY BEHIND THE CROSS

St Eval Church (Southern Wall)

—'MEN ON ATOLL' REPORT SPARKS DUAL DRAMA

## RAF bomber disappears with ten aboard



SHIPS, PLANES IN HUGE  
SEARCH OVER CHINA SEA

SINGAPORE, Wednesday.  
PLANES and ships are combing in wide day and night sweeps off the east of North Borneo for a Singapore-based RAF Shackleton missing with a crew of 10, and for the survivors of a lost schooner.

The Shackleton vanished yesterday while on anti-pirate patrol over the South China Sea.

This was the headline in the Singapore paper in December 1958. The other drama mentioned was the disappearance of an Australian schooner which had been missing for 10 weeks. A non stop search was initiated for the missing Shackleton. British aircraft from Singapore were joined by those of the US based in Manila and those of the Philippines Air Force. The British aircraft included 4 Shackletons and a Sunderland of 205 Squadron, Seletar, 2 Bristol Freighters from 41 Squadron New Zealand, 4 Hastings of 48 Squadron and 6 Valettas of 52 Squadron

WHERE IS MYSTERY BOAT? WHAT OCCURRED NEXT?

## Missing plane: A double poser for air force

The Shackleton had taken off from Labuan at 6am on a regular anti-pirate patrol. At 8am it was diverted to a position where a United States Navy aircraft had reported sighting 13 people marooned on a reef. When the Shackleton arrived at the scene it directed a nearby fishing vessel to the reef. The plane notified Seletar that the boat had successfully completed its rescue at noon. It then said that it was continuing its patrol. That was the last that was heard from the aircraft.

SINGAPORE, Thursday.  
THE Far East Air Force were faced with a double mystery today as they continued one of the biggest search operations in their history in an effort to trace an RAF Shackleton which has been missing north of Borneo since noon on Tuesday.  
They want to know what happened to the aircraft after it made its last radio report to Seletar on Tuesday. And they want to find an unidentified fishing vessel which picked up 13 men from a shoal about 200 miles north of Labuan.

## VOLUNTEERS JOIN THE BIG AIR SEARCH

SINGAPORE, Fri. — An unidentified fishing boat which rescued 13 men from a coral atoll north of Labuan on Tuesday is believed to have headed for Furmusa.

The United States Navy base at Sangley Point near Manila reported today that this was the only information it had received about the missing boat.

Meanwhile, a round the clock search for an RAF Shackleton aircraft which disappeared on Tuesday continued today.

The Shackleton, which had dashed to the atoll about 200 miles north of Labuan when it heard that the

men were marooned, sent its last radio report when circling the boat which had gone to the rescue.

The big search has been extended to cover more of the adjoining areas around the position last reported by the aircraft — 9.50 degrees north and 114.25 degrees east.

The operational base for planes taking part in the search has been switched from Singapore to Labuan to make it easier for them to take a "breather."

Altogether 20 planes are in the search.

A British-registered ship, the 3,189-ton Kimanis, has sailed to the search area to

join the 9,189-ton La Sierra despite warnings that the region was "bad waters" for shipping.

Early today, two Hastings and a Shackleton, which left RAF Changi to join the search, carried a total of 17 volunteers who were to act as "extra eyes" in the search.

The FEAF later reported that all aircraft taking part in the search were carrying volunteer observers.

A statement said the search had taken in adjoining coastal areas and was being pushed inland.

As search planes returned to Changi last night, the ground crews worked

feverishly to get them in the air again early this morning.

All the aircraft were making hourly reports as they flew over the atolls, reefs and largely unfrequented waters of the South China Sea at a height of only 800 feet.

Late tonight, an RAF spokesman said one of the Shackletons would return to Changi to refuel.

It was doing this to cover the sea between Singapore and North Borneo once again in case the missing plane might be lost in the area.

All the other FEAF planes landed at Labuan or bases in North Borneo.

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## Day 4—hunt for lost plane is still on

SINGAPORE, Saturday.

THE Far East Air Force's big search for an RAF Shackleton missing since Tuesday, entered its fourth day today.

Twenty aircraft combed in ever widening circles large areas of the South China sea and Borneo. But it was all in vain.

There were no trace too of the unidentified fishing boat, which rescued 13 men from an atoll 40 miles north of Labuan on Tuesday. It was last seen, heading for Formosa.

The Shackleton, which had dashed to the atoll, when it heard about the marooned men sent its last radio report as it was circling the rescue boat.

But the air force authorities have not given up hope.

A spokesman for the RAF said that the operation would continue "unabated until further notice."

Participating in the search are one Sunderland, four Shackletons, five Hastings, six Valettas of the RAF, two RNZAF Bristol Freighters and two U.S. Air Force planes.

One of the Shackletons is patrolling 8,000 ft. above the others acting as a master aerial radio station giving maximum range to the signals exchanged between the searching aircraft.



## Search aircraft spots wreckage

### IS IT THE MISSING PLANE? CONFIRMATION TODAY

AN AIRCRAFT taking part in the search for a RAF Shackleton missing since Dec. 9 today sighted wreckage on a reef in the China Sea, 300 miles north of Labuan.

The Royal New Zealand Navy frigate *Rotoiti* has been sent to the area to investigate. It is expected to land a search party on the reef soon after dark tomorrow.

Another Shackleton — one of six RAF aircraft sweeping the area on the seventh day of the search — spotted the wreckage this morning.

An Air Force spokesman said the Shackleton reported that it had sighted "objects which may be related to the missing air-

SINGAPORE, Tuesday.

craft" on the Sin Cove Reef, 9.50 degrees north and 114.20 degrees east.

This position is only a few miles from where the missing Shackleton made its last radio report at noon on Dec. 9.

The search aircraft reported that what looked like the markings and identification number of the missing Shackleton were visible on the reef.

But the RAF spokesman said this report should be treated with caution until the naval party had reached the area.

A North Borneo Government statement today said there was evidence the

Shackleton crashed near a reef in the area from which its last radio message was transmitted.

Air Force sources in Jesselton said there were indications that at least some of the crew had survived and placed signals on the reef to attract search aircraft.

Searchers, however, have found no sign of survivors.

A RAF spokesman said late tonight that reports so far provide no confirmation that there are any survivors.

Neither the RAF nor the North Borneo Government have been able to trace the mystery fishing boat YF 890,

which the missing plane reported had picked up 13 men from a nearby atoll.

The Far East Air Force today released names of the crew of the missing Shackleton.

They are: Flt./Lt. W.A.S. Boutell, of North Natal, South Africa; Flt./Lt. S. Bowater, of South Kirby, England; Flt./Lt. A.C. Moore, of Rugeley, Staffordshire; P/O. M.A.C. Jones, of East Croydon, Surrey; Master Signaller J. Stewart; Flt./Sgt. E.L. Owen, of Gwalfmal, Anglesey; Flt./Sgt. D.H.G.N. Dancy; Sgt. J.E. Sixsmith, of Romford, Essex; Sgt. P.C. Barnley, of Eppingham, Surrey; Sgt. P. Marshall, of Nottingham.

Mr. A.R. Miller, acting Deputy Commissioner of Police, North Borneo, was also aboard.



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## FLIER FOUND BURIED

### Atoll find deepens plane mystery

SINGAPORE, Wednesday.

THE 10 members of the crew of the missing Singapore-based RAF Shackleton aircraft are all dead.

Hope for their survival was abandoned today following a dramatic and mystifying discovery of the body of one of the crew in a grave on a lonely coral atoll about 300 miles north of Labuan.

An eleventh man in the plane, North Borneo's acting Deputy Police Commissioner, Mr. A.R. Miller, also died in the tragedy.

The grave was found by a landing party from the New Zealand Frigate, *Rotoiti*, which raced to the tiny atoll, the Sin Cowe Reef, to investigate reports that the wreckage of the ill-fated aircraft had been seen there.

The body, dressed in a flying suit, was taken to Labuan. From there it was flown by an RAF Valetta aircraft to Changi tonight for identification.

#### No wreckage

The frigate signalled the news of discovery to Singapore at midday. It was also learned then that there was no sign whatsoever of any aircraft wreckage on the reef.

"We are now convinced that there are no survivors in the crash," an RAF spokesman told the Straits Times tonight.

"We are now trying to establish," he said, "how the body came to be buried on the reef, why it was buried and by whom."

About two miles from the Sin Cowe Reef is a little island with a fishing village. The spokesman declined to speculate on the possibility that the villagers there might have found the body and buried it.

He also dismissed the possibility that the dead airman might have been buried by survivors of the Shackleton.



## A fisherman solves the mystery of the missing bomber

SINGAPORE,

Thurs.—It was a keen-eyed North Borneo fisherman who solved the biggest air mystery of the year here—the RAF Shackleton bomber which vanished over the China Sea on Dec. 9.

An RAF spokesman today told the incredible story of how the fisherman had seen the Shackleton plummet down to the sea and memorised its identification markings before it disappeared beneath the waves.

The fisherman had later marked the identification numbers of the crashed Shackleton in the grass on a tiny coral atoll nearby to attract searching aircraft.

It was these markings

that had finally led to the solution of the mystery of the missing aircraft and the end of the most intensive combined air and sea rescue operation in the history of the Far East Air Force.

The spokesman said the fisherman's story, as told to a Naval landing party yesterday, proved that all 11 men aboard the Shackleton had died in the crash.

#### Observant man

*This is the official reconstruction of what happened:*

The captain of a small fishing craft saw the RAF Shackleton from 205 Squadron crash into the sea near a small atoll in the Sin Cowe reef about 300 miles north of Labuan, in the China Sea.

The fishing captain, who was a most observant man, memorised the identifica-

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tion number of the Shackleton before it crashed.

The fishing boat went to the scene of the crash and recovered the dead body of one of crew members of the Shackleton. No other bodies or wreckage was seen.

The fishermen took the body to a nearby atoll—only two miles away from their own fishing village—and buried it.

They erected a makeshift cross above his grave.

The captain of the fishing vessel then cut out the markings E/205, which he had seen on the aircraft, in huge 10ft. letters in the grass.

## Saw marks

Low-flying search aircraft first saw the markings on Monday. They returned on Tuesday morning and photographed the whole atoll.

It was seen from the aerial photographs that the markings on the sand were definitely the same as those of the missing Shackleton.

The Royal New Zealand Navy frigate Rotoiti was immediately ordered to investigate and a party was landed on the atoll early yesterday.

They found the grave of the dead airman, but no signs of life. The party disinterred the body.

Meanwhile, the Albion had sent a landing party to a nearby fishing village to try to find out whether anyone had seen the crash.

They found the fisherman who told them the whole story.

The body of the dead airman will be buried with full air force honour at Changi tomorrow.



The picture above shows the underside of the cross on which the fishermen marked the date and time of the crash -13h 55m TIME 9 DEC 1958

The grave to the left marks the body of Flt Sgt Dancy. His was the body found by the fishermen. He was originally buried in Ulu Panadan cemetery, but in 1975 the Singapore

government removed all the bodies and reburied them at Kranji, where there is a proper war memorial. All the newspaper cuttings came from The Straits Times, an English Newspaper in Singapore. They were sent to me via the Parish News On Line site by Dave Kelly who is the fiancée of Jane Dancy, the daughter of Flt Sgt Dancy. Jane was the younger daughter of Dave and Nancy Dancy who returned to Britain with her Mother and older sister Anne after the crash.

Dave is currently researching the events of that time and I would like to thank him for all the information which has enabled this article to be written.

The cross, together with the lid on the font, were brought back to UK in 1972 when 205 Squadron left Singapore. St Eval at that time was also used as the RAF St Mawgan Church and it was considered appropriate that they should rest there.

Gill Lovegrove

## Memorial Service 6th December 2008

The idea for a 50th Anniversary service began earlier in the year and over the coming months by spreading the word through various RAF organisations and contacts, relatives of several crew members were found as well as other people associated with the crash. In addition, delving through John Shapland's historical St Eval Collection, letters from other interested people were found. Contact was made with John Elias who was the captain of the crew who found the cross on Sin Cowe Island and with Alan Nichol who was the regular co-pilot on the crew but did not fly on that day due to illness. Through all the emails flying around it was even possible to reunite some people with friends with whom they had lost contact.

The Venerable Brian Lucas took the service together with Rector Graham. As Sqn Ldr Lucas he was the padre at RAF St Mawgan in 1971 and he met the aircraft and brought the cross and font cover to St Eval. St Eval at that time was used as the RAF Church.

After 50 years It was quite difficult to trace relatives of all the crew but at the service was Doreen Bowater, widow of co-pilot Flt Lt Stanley Bowater and Nancy Taylor, widow of F.Sgt Dancy the Air Engineer. Both had several of their family with them. Also present was Martin Sixsmith, brother of Sgt Sixsmith and Mrs Audrey Hext, sister of Sgt Peter Marshal. Mrs Anne Dorrell, sister of Sgt Peter Barnley could not come to the service but very generously paid for all the flowers. Over 80 people attended the service which was simple but moving and the Act of Remembrance took place in front of the cross. Mrs Taylor and Mrs Bowater both laid wreaths and the names of the crew were read out. During the service a facsimile of the "Shackleton Register" was presented to the church. This register lists all the names of aircrew that have lost their lives in Shackleton aircraft. The original is held at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire. This register has taken its place alongside the other two memorial books at the rear of the south aisle.

Refreshment time after the service provided an opportunity for people with a common interest to chat together. From relatives and friends of the crew we learnt how hard it had been at the time, not just because of their loss, but because little support had been provided to the families by the RAF authorities. Some of the families had never met one another as they all lived out in private accommodation. It was left to friends and other family to help pick up the pieces. The crash took place on 9 December and before Christmas all the families had left the Far East and contact in most cases with other crew members was lost. When the cross was returned to St Mawgan in 1971 none of the families were aware of the fact and it is only in the ensuing years that some of them have learnt of its location and managed to visit.