War heroes honoured
Adrian David talks to family members of the British Royal Air Force and Army personnel who perished 62 years ago when their aircraft crashed in the then communist-infested jungles of Kelantan.

A PAINFUL chapter was closed as eight Britons and a Dane were laid to rest at the Commonwealth War Graves in Cheras on March 15, 62 years after their aeroplane crashed in the jungles of Kelantan.

The officers and men from Britain’s Royal Air Force and Army perished along with three Malaysians when their RAF Dakota C4 slammed into a ravine near Kampung Jen- dera in Sungai Beliar valley in the communist-infested jungles of Gua Musang on Aug 25, 1950.

“The remains of all 12 were initially buried by a search and rescue team in a shallow grave near the aircraft wreckage, due to difficult jungle terrain and the prevailing security situation, on Sept 3 that year.

In 2008, their remains were exhumed for forensic tests to determine their identities.

On March 15, officials from Britain, Denmark and Malaysia joined the next-of-kin of the deceased to pay tribute to the war heroes for their sacrifices and loss of lives during the ceremonial reburial in Cheras, Kuala Lumpur.

“It is an honour for us to be here today. I thank the family members — wives, children, uncles, aunts, nieces, nephews and cousins — who made the long journey from their homes to be present. We are glad that the victims have finally been laid to rest with military honours.

“I hope this in a small way will soothe your losses,” said British High Commissioner Simon Featherstone.

He also thanked the Malaysian authorities, without whom the event would not have been realised.

British Defence Ministry historic casework manager Sue Raftree said it was a privilege to have worked from the start to the end of the episode.

“It has been an arduous task tackling the case from the beginning — from recovery of the remains and tracing the next-of-kin to bringing the whole event to a closure.

“I must say it has been a unique experience. I thank the families for their patience and cooperation, which closed with them placing personal inscriptions on the head stones of the graves,” she said.

Former 47th Air Despatch Squadron commanding officer Col Sean English, who is now 29th Regiment Royal Logistics Corps commander, praised the brave men for putting their lives at stake for the benefit of others.

“These were the men from different units who managed to work as a team to get the task done, just like how the men from the air force, army and navy still do it today.

“It is a privilege for me to be involved in this ceremony today,” he said.

Reverend (Group Captain) Jonathan Chaffey, the Royal Air Force assistant chaplain-in-chief operations who officiated as the padre of the graveside service, considered it an honour to be present. “I am honoured to officiate and be part of this ceremony which has served its purpose in many ways.

“This has served as a proper burial of the immortal remains recovered from a shallow grave (at the crash site) and will be a lasting memorial. It is also a thanksgiving for those who gave their lives at such a young age.

“Finally, this marks the completion and closure, a fitting event for their families.”

Chaffey added that the event was a sign of respect to those who had fallen but were not forgotten. “They will be cherished and remembered forever by the past and present generations and whomsoever they had served.”

THOSE WHO PERISHED
The Britons have been identified as RAF crew pilot Lt Edward Robert...
Talbot, 27, from Dorchester; navigator Sgt Geoffrey Clarence Carpenter, 23, from West Norwood; and signaller Sgt Thomas O'Toole, 34, from Merthyr Tydfil.

The Royal Army Service Corps air despatchers were Corporal Phillip Bryant, 25, from Southend-on-Sea, and privates Peter Edwin Taylor, 20, from Bournemouth, Roy Thomas Wilson, 21, from Birkenhead, and Oliver Arthur Goldsmith, 21, from Neston—all drivers.

The passengers were army officer Major John Harold Procter and land despatchers were Corporal Phillip O'Toole, 34, from Merthyr Tydfil, said she was just 3 when her father died.

"I can barely remember dad at such a young age. But as I grew, I learnt more about my father from mum (Thelma, now 84).”

Mohammed’s remains were reburied at his hometown, at the Bukit Terih Muslim cemetery in Muar, Johor, on April 6 last year.

Mohammed, then aged 25, was attached to the Kota Baru police as a traffic policeman and was roped in to help in the anti-communist operation.

The remains of Yaacob and Saiap have not been reburied as their next-of-kin are yet to be identified.

Unearthing WW2 bomber

APART from the the recovery of the Dakota C4, efforts are being made to recover the remains of a Royal Air Force B-24 Liberator bomber that crashed into the deep jungles of Malaya just after World War 2 had ended in August 1945.

Ex-British Army Association of Malaysia president Che Onn Neo said the bomber was piloted by Flight Lt John Selwyn Watts, 24, of Crofton, Yorkshire.

His seven crew, aged 20 to 31, included a flying officer as co-pilot.

The aircraft, registration KL654, was based in the Cocos Islands and flew to then Malaya for a mission but instead, reportedly crashed, killing all onboard.

Che Onn and his committee were present to pay tribute to the reburial of the eight Britons and a Dane at the Commonwealth War Graves in Cherms on March 15.

“These fallen officers and men were one of us. We pray for their souls,” said the 71-year-old.

Che Onn also said his association, registered in 2009, has 1,000 members who had served the country between 1957 and 1971.

Its members include association treasurer Joseph Scully, 67, and committee member Mohamad Isro Jabar, 71.

These members had opted to continue serving the British crown after Malaya’s independence in 1957 and are now working closely with the Royal Commonwealth Ex-Services League (RCEL) based in London.

Britain provides needy Malaysian members with annual stipends of between £300 (RM1,500) and £720.

Che Onn will attend the RCEL’s 31st conference in Malta from May 5 to 10 and bid to host the 2016 conference in Kuala Lumpur.
The greatest sacrifice

ALTHOUGH the deceased are foreigners, Malaysians should appreciate the sacrifices of the eight Britons and a Dane who gave their lives to defend the country.

The country’s only serving military clinical psychologist Major (Dr) Shahidah Leong Abdullah says Malaysians should, likewise, appreciate other nationalities such as the Nepalese gurkhas, Indian sepoys, Kiwis and Australians who defended the country during times of war and the Confrontation.

“We, especially the younger generation, tend to forget this because that chapter closed. We ought to give them due honour for all they had done for us and our future generations. These officers and men, many of whom were away from their homes and families, had served diligently to protect us from harm by giving their lives.

“ Their contributions are immense and should be lauded,” says Shahidah, a senior lecturer at the National Defence University of Malaysia’s faculty of medicine and defence health.

Shahidah, the only such specialist in the Armed Forces, was commissioned in 1992 and became a military psychologist in 1996.

Asked about the sentiments of the next-of-kin of the deceased, Shahidah says there are many perspectives to look at.

“The final rites (the burial) at the War Memorial cemetery is a touching moment for them. The family members can now breathe easier after having waited for such a long period.

“The next-of-kin also can take pride that there is a proper, honourable tomb for their loved ones, a place they and the future generations can visit.

“It has been very sentimental for the families as they see Malaysia as part of them. The journey of waiting is now over. They can finally see the light at the end of the tunnel,” she says.

Shahidah has been actively involved in the provision of psychological support to the military community and has been participating in the development and promotion of mental health programmes for troops’ deployment overseas like in the United Nations peace-keeping missions.

She has addressed many military conferences on issues related to stress management and deployment psychology.

She has written papers such as The Evolution Of Psychological Stressors In Peacekeeping Mission: From The Malaysian Armed Forces Perspectives, which outlined language barrier, being away from family, lack of proper guidelines and varied leadership styles as psychological stress factors for Malaysian troops.

Meanwhile, Malaysian-born psychotherapist Raymund Augustine, who is practising in Germany, says the impact of the findings and reburial of the remains on each individual will differ.

“A relative can find the sudden news disturbing and difficult to forget, especially when the deceased is someone they had loved very much. But he or she must be able to let go and carry on with their normal lives. Otherwise, it can affect their daily routine,” says Augustine, who has now made Schwelmruhr near Wurzburg his home.

Augustine also helps his German wife Jenny tend to special children at the Körpersbehinderte Schule for the extremely handicapped.

He says news of death of a loved one can be traumatic and one has to be strong to handle it.

“Some may take it badly, as God’s punishment, to lose someone at a very young age. One has to overcome and move on with life as other avenues will continue to happen,” says Augustine, who is here to give lectures and a talk at the 1st World Congress on Healthy Ageing held at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre.

Adrian David
War heroes honoured

They will be cherished and remembered forever by the past and present generations.

Reverend (Group Captain) Jonathan Chaffey
Sisters Vickie Betsworth (left) and Sheila Tebbet showing a photograph of their late brother, Cpl Philip Bryant

Two British officers helping to recover the remains of the deceased at the site of the RAF Dakota crash in Gua Musang.