Memories take flight for Changi airfield veterans

Visiting old haunts, ex-British airmen based here recall the turbulent 1950s and 60s - plus Changi Village bars

By Soh Chin Lian

IT LOOKS no different from any other HDB coffee shop now, but to former Royal Air Force (RAF) technician Mike Smith, the Airfield Restaurant at Changi Village was once a bar where he had spent his 21st birthday away from home in Coventry, England.

'me had a quiet meal and a drink, just eight of us,' said the 67-year-old Briton, who was posted to an airfield at Changi between 1956 and 1959. 'I didn't miss home. I liked it here, the camaraderie, the people, the variety of shops.'

He visited Changi Village last Wednesday with more than 40 RAF veterans and their wives, on a trip arranged by the Bristol-based Royal Air Force Changi Association.

This is the fourth trip to Singapore that the association has organised since 1998 for its members to visit old haunts and re-live their memories. It's done once every two years.

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He said: 'It was rather frightening. Some of them were groaning, and each time the ambulance rocked, it upset them.'

Mr Beverley Steed, 65, was pelted with bricks and bottles once by some people when patrolling the streets in a Land Rover in 1964, at the time of the Konfrontasi (Confrontation).

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of the old barracks in Changi were demolished last year, he said.

'We have half a brick from Billet 121,' said Mr Dicks, the association's archivist.

He also has 3,000 pictures of the RAF Changi days, some taken as early as 1927 when the camp was still being built near Changi Village. The pictures were given him by former veterans and their relatives.

The association has passed copies of some pictures to museum officials here for their records.

Once, it had helped a Singaporean trace a picture of his coffee shop in Changi Village when it was a bar run by his grandfather.

Mr Dicks said: 'We'll eventually die, so we've made arrangements for all the photographs and archives to go to the Royal Air Force museum in Britain. Hopefully they'll be around for many years after.'