

THE CHINTHE



SUMMER 2016

656 SQUADRON ASSOCIATION
JOURNAL

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT SUMMER 2016

This year's reunion was a family affair, where we were invited to join in with the Old Spot Farm Fly In near Haywards Heath. The Report on the reunion weekend is elsewhere in the Journal, but let me add that it was a very enjoyable event where we were privileged to get up close with a mix of aircraft, including a few Austers, in a lovely setting. Thank you George Butler, our member, and John Randle, the farm owner.

My thanks also to Will Harrell and Val Powley for all the organisation prior to and during the weekend. Booking accommodation and arranging the Dinner take many hours of detailed work. Also behind the scene Sylvia Heyes produced the name cards and menus. These small touches turn a standard event into a special one.

I know I say it often, but our committee is never lacking work. Much of our regular effort is directed to archival work, spearheaded by Mark Meaton. I need not be shy in saying that our Association leads the way in giving accurate, detailed advice on Army Aviation historic records. Mark's attention to detail and encyclopedic knowledge has been rightly recognised with the award of a richly deserved Colonel Army Air Corps' Commendation.

While mentioning the committee, we are blessed with a very dedicated team, and I am delighted that Bob Thorpe has just joined us, having given us much needed advice about "social media" over the past year. However, we are in need of more "firepower"! We are all getting older, but not necessarily wiser! So this is a call to one and all. You need not have any particular skills (or so you believe) or even be in this country. All you need is the ability to offer some assistance to the cause. We only exist with an effective committee, and we always need new ideas. So if you have a little free time please get in contact with any committee member.

Last year we took the decision to upgrade our website, www.656squadron.org. The current site has served us extremely well for over 15 years, and has been an excellent site for researchers and so forth. The sections on our Roll of Honour and Honours and Awards are invaluable. I thank John Bennett and Ron Ward for laying the foundations and keeping the site up to date and relevant. Technology advances at lightning speed so it is timely to upgrade. I very much hope that in the next month or so we can advise members that we have switched to our new site. Feedback is important so please feel free to let us know how you find the new 656squadron.org. Don't forget that we also have a Facebook Group page, where we can let you know what is going on.



Details of this year's Cenotaph Parade are on Page 47/48. The procedures have been tightened up, but don't let that put you off. If you are uncertain in

Members at the A.G.M.

any way, please email or give me a call. It is so important that we maintain a contingent at the national act of remembrance.



Next year is the 60th Anniversary of the formation of the Army Air

Corps (AAC), and events are planned at Middle Wallop, including the awarding of a new Guidon. We therefore plan to hold our 2017 Reunion around these events. Once we know the details we will let you know.

On a personal level next year will mark my 15th year as President. I have therefore decided that, after the AAC events, I should step down and enable the committee to take the Association forward. That doesn't mean I will not look forward to attending our varied events and meeting up with all the fascinating members and family that make up our unique Association.

Andrew Simkins



656 SQUADRON OC's REPORT

Maj Alex Harris, OC

As I write my second report for the Chinthe, I reflect on the fact that I am halfway through my time as OC 656 Squadron. My replacement has been nominated and I only have 12 months left in this privileged position. It is a timely reminder that the Squadron is bigger than the sum of its parts and moreover, the soldiers and officers that are here serve as the guardians of its long history, traditions and good name.

The Squadron arrived back after an uninterrupted Christmas leave, slightly fatter but certainly well rested. We hit the ground running in our preparations for a challenging overseas exercise which saw all elements of the team deploy, operate and recover to a foreign base to practice our high readiness stance and to hone some specialist skills. In the margins we also managed to conduct some dinghy drills and wet winching in much warmer waters than we were accustomed to. The spirit of competition was high and starting from the harbour wall, the aircrew all tried their best to make their water entries the most flamboyant. All but Captain Musgrove managed a forward somersault, he deciding that the risk to his face was too much. He was perhaps wiser than me, as I ended up landing on my face and breaking my visor. To finish the exercise, we had a Squadron party which went on long into the night and gave all elements of the team a chance to unwind. The SSM particularly enjoyed a healthy game of beer pong with the 2IC although was dubious of Captain Francis's ability to judge volume of liquids!

Shortly after arriving home from overseas (the same day in some cases), some members of the Squadron found themselves heading for a more chilly climate as they made the eighteen hour minibus drive to Neustift in Austria for the 4 Regiment ski trip. Having snowed buckets the previous week, the conditions were perfect and there was powder in abundance for everyone to lose skis into. Airtrooper Court found it particularly hard to keep abreast of the location of his ski kit. He mistakenly took the wrong skis after lunch on a couple of occasions, which is an easy mistake to make with lots of similar hire skis, however, he did manage one day to also get the wrong boots, which was slightly more bemusing as the boots were about three sizes too big and the error was not uncovered until he

reached the top of the mountain! LCpl Childs did a fine job as one of the teachers; having only recently qualified as a ski instructor, he was instrumental in getting good numbers of the soldiers through their first ski qualification.

Another deployment to a cold place, took the Squadron 'up North' to RAF Leeming for exercise COBRA WARRIOR. Working jointly with 664 Squadron, we deployed aircraft, ground crew and REME in to disused hangars on the far side of the airfield for a week. The aim of the exercise was to plan and operate with the fast jet crews who were on the Qualified Weapon Officers course. We have very different ways of planning and focus on different parts of a mission so it was very interesting to work together. We took the opportunity to sell our skills to a different part of Defence and by the end of the week, found Apache at the centre of the missions. All the other players were at RAF Waddington, so all planning was done over an open video tele-conference. It took a while to get accustomed to this way of working and we discovered the very important use of the mute button which saved our blushes and kept our private conversations private. The SQMS had need for a hire car as he deployed at a different time and was very surprised to find that the hire company had given him a brand new, top of the range BMW. Needless to say, Staff Sergeant Rogers gave an exemplary service and was more than willing to run errands at the drop of a hat, especially if it necessitated a drive in the car. The sad part was when he had to hand it back at the end of the week.

The beginning of May saw 656 Squadron hand over our high readiness commitment to 662 Squadron AAC. For the first time since 2011, our soldiers and officers relaxed their very high readiness stance and so, did not need to have their bergens constantly packed or be at the end of a 48 hour leash. To mark this occasion we deployed on exercise CHINTHE KNIGHT, a battlefield study to the Normandy region. We visited Pegasus Bridge, Arranches, and the commonwealth cemetery on day one which gave us the chance to pay our respects and learn about warfare from a different perspective. Our guide was excellent at bringing the scenes to life and it was clear that we all had the desire to learn. On day two we focussed on the American cemetery and beach landing sites

which brought a rounded perspective to our study. The evenings brought the opportunity to explore the city of Caen and the chance to share a beer or two. We all learnt a great deal from the visit, especially Cpl Wood and Airtrooper Miller, who mastered the art of surviving a long coach journey with a punishing hangover. It was a real treat to be able to do something different at work which gave us time to reflect on our own operations and perhaps ones in the future.



HMS OCEAN

June brought a deployment on HMS OCEAN for BALTOPS 16 and the opportunity to refresh and develop our maritime skills. Although the Squadron enjoys a deep relationship with the Royal Navy community, it was the first time embarked

aboard an RN ship for about half the Squadron. Keen to preserve our excellent reputation at sea and train ourselves for operations afloat, all elements of the team worked very hard to ensure success. The deployment got off to a shaky start though when the aircraft were forbidden from conducting the planned landing off of the coast of East Anglia as the sea state was too rough. Cpl Peters was certainly feeling the rough sea as he presented his cabin for inspection to the officer of the day from the prone unsupported position of the deck floor. Already late for the exercise, the ship continued with her



Apache landing on HMS Ocean



Arming with 30mm

navigation track to the Baltic Sea which left the aircrew back at Wattisham furiously planning to meet her. After a day or so some head scratching, paper map searching, flight planning and diplomatic clearance seeking, the eight aircrew and four Apaches left Wattisham for an epic adventure. We took our

formation over the sea to Groningen in the Netherlands, then to Laage in Germany and finally, Ronneby in Sweden before setting out across the sea once more to meet Mother. It proved to be a long day of about seven hours flight time and I am very pleased to say that the aircraft performed impeccably the whole way, which was just as well as all of our REME were on the ship already and the remainder of the Regiment were in Bavaria! To sustain us on our long flight, Captain Briggs booked a



Sqn QHI, OC & 2i/c

packed lunch to be delivered with each of the three refuels. They were all impressive and I am pleased to announce that the German lunch won the day, however, eating Swedish meatballs and mashed potato from an airline style tray was a skill that I didn't think we'd need in an Apache!

The rest of the exercise went without a hitch and we achieved a great amount of challenging training against a very busy ship schedule. The pinnacle of this was live 30mm firing, which saw Apache arming on the ship, fly over the sea and fire on to targets in Sweden, which exercised the whole team. Watching the arming teams operating on a wet deck was very much like watching a formula one team work at a wet Grand Prix. The end of the exercise was awarded with a run ashore to Kiel, Germany, which coincidentally was holding a regatta that week. Prior to this I wouldn't have been certain that you could sustain ninety five soldiers for four days with only bratwurst and beer but I was certainly proved wrong. The members of the Squadron did our name proud as they represented us at the cocktail party, ship open to visitors' day, and multinational Officers' party as well as ashore in Kiel. After a lot of laughs we all made it back to the right ship before sailing home, although our ground support Flight Commander, Cat Fitz-Gerald narrowly avoided an impromptu attachment to a minesweeper class vessel.

It has been a very busy period for the Squadron and I am proud to say that they haven't let us down. They soldiers and officers continue to work hard, play hard and protect the name of 656 Squadron AAC. As we go forward in to the next half of the year they are busy preparing for another hot deployment to the deserts of California for exercise BLACK ALLIGATOR. More to follow...



American Cemetery

OLD SPOT FARM FLY IN AND REUNION DINNER - 18/19 JUNE 2016

What could be more enjoyable than sitting on a straw bale in the middle of the East Sussex countryside, on a summer's day, watching as aircraft fly in and out



of a farmer's landing strip! As an association we have enjoyed a wide range of events around England, but there is something very relaxing about sitting about and watching others doing all the work!



Last year a few of us travelled to Old Spot Farm, near Haywards Heath, at the invitation of member, George Butler, and farmer owner, John Randle. John and George organise a Fly In each year and invite air-crew to drop in for a barbecue and chat. On average about 40 aircraft visit during the day; it is a very uncomplicated arrangement. So we were delighted when our Association was invited to join in.

We booked an excellent hotel, The Birch, on the outskirts of Haywards Heath which was a perfect location for our Reunion Dinner and AGM. Every year since we were formed, nearly 30 years ago, we have had representation from the Burma era. This year was no exception as Margaret Windscheffel (widow of Arthur) had travelled from Norwich, with Angela Ruthven and Gary Funnell to be with us. Thank you for making the long drive to be with us.

After the President's speech we held the raffle which included the generous donation of £50 from John Bennett. This was won by Michael Cain who

immediately handed it back! It was agreed that £20 would be donated to the RAF Association (who provided the barbecue) and £30 back to the Association. Thank you John and Mike.

The next morning we held our AGM where the President demonstrated the new website (which is explained in more detail in the President's Report).

We all then drove to the landing strip in good time to see aircraft arriving against the lovely backdrop of the East Sussex countryside. Amongst the mix of aircraft, of all sizes, shapes and vintage, were five Austers. What more could we ask for! Well, we had hoped that some members would go for a flight, but John Randle and the other aircrew organisers were kept busy and this plan never materialised. Sorry if you were disappointed.

With an Auster as our backdrop we took the obligatory photographs, but more importantly we presented Mark Meaton with his richly deserved Colonel Army Air Corps' Commendation. This is for service to not only 656 Squadron Association but also to Air OP Officers' Association and the Museum of Army Flying. Congratulations Mark.

After the excellent barbecue, organised by the local RAF Association branch, aircraft and members started to depart. For those that stayed on, we were rewarded with an aerobatic display against a cloudless sky.

This was a much more low key event than our normal reunions, but it proved very relaxing and enjoyable for one and all.
(more photographs of the week-end on cover pages)

NEW MEMBERS

We give a very warm welcome to the new members and look forward to meeting them at a future reunion.

Capt. Terry Musgrove AAC	Joined Feb '16
Mr. Tom Keates RAF	Joined April '16
Mr. Mike Crichton-Kane AAC	Joined June '16
Mr. Graham Keates REME	Joined July '16

THE MEMORIAL WALL.

The Museum of Army Flying - can you help?

The Museum of Army Flying is to build a memorial wall to commemorate all those who have fallen whilst in the service of Army Aviation, from the early Royal Engineer Balloon Units in 1878 to the present day Army Air Corps.

This unique monument will individually list all casualties of the Royal Flying Corps, Air Observation Post Squadrons, Glider Pilot Regiment and Army Air Corps Squadrons, including all attached personnel (eg REME), while the Royal Engineers that were part of early aviation trials will be commemorated communally.

Due for completion in 2017, the 60th anniversary of the formation of the Army Air Corps, the project has identified almost 5,300 named individuals so far, broken down as follows:

- Royal Flying Corps 4,365
- Air Observation Post 146
- Glider Pilot Regiment 592
- Army Air Corps 188

For each individual, the following information is to be shown on the wall:

- Surname
- Initials
- Rank held at the time of death (Temporary, acting, local and war substantive ranks will be taken as the final rank.)
- Post nominals
- Month and year of death

The list includes not only those who have fallen in action, but also those who died of sickness, accident or any other cause while serving in, or attached to, an Army Aviation unit.

Many Museum volunteers have for some time been busy checking and cross-referencing each name against several primary sources such as published volumes of casualty lists, the National Archives, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the Army List, the Museum's own archives, etc.

Typically, each name is checked by two or three researchers, against 5 or more sources, but as you may imagine, getting official records to agree on the spelling of a surname, the specification of initials, or the dates of a death can often be a challenge.

This is where you may be able to help. The Museum has published its current working list on their web site, and invites members of the public to download it and check for names that they may know about:

<https://www.armyflying.com/support-us/memorial-wall/>

Have a look and see if you think you can spot any errors and/or omissions, and contact the Museum's Archivist with any supporting documents/references that might help verify the information.

Thank you !

Mark Meaton, June 2016.

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EDITOR'S CORNER

As in the President's Report our Association is now in urgent need of a Chairman/General Secretary. There must be someone out there in our membership with good organisational and leadership qualities to steer our ship in the coming years. We also need a Webmaster to look after our new website, You will not need to be a website developer as we use PagePress and TablePress. If you already have experience with these, all the better. Please contact any Committee member to find out what may be involved.

With this year of celebrations for the Queen's 90th Anniversary, WW1 events and others we have the 'Ubique 300' (page 24). This is very relevant to us in many ways as our first pilots were Royal Artillery officers. I feel proud that the aircraft chosen to make the final leg of the journey of the Baton was our very own WZ706 !

Two of our lady members have contributed their thoughts and experiences as Service wives. (Page 33) It makes a good read and I hope now others will also contribute. It is a copy of a booklet they produced for their descendants and friends, again as I have said before, it is good to record your autobiography for posterity!

Welcome to the new members and I hope you enjoy reading your first Journal.

NFA GARDEN PARTY

by Martin Penn



My wife, Pam, and I attended the Not Forgotten Association (NFA) Garden Party, at Buckingham Palace, on Thursday 26th May. It was a fabulous day and here are some pictures to prove it. More photos at:

<http://www.nfassociation.org/2016/06/the-summer-garden-party-at-buckingham-palace-26-may/>.



TAYLORCRAFT AIRCRAFT

Taylorcraft Aeroplanes (England) Ltd was set up in 1938 by Alexander Wykes, who had acquired a license to build the popular US lightplane (designed by the Taylor brothers, originally from Nottingham), and set up a small manufacturing facility in a disused osier shed called the Britannia Works, Thurmaston. Completed airframes were taken to the airfield at Rearsby, Leicestershire and the Taylorcraft 'Plus C' began to be marketed to private owners and flying clubs around the UK. The steel-tube fuselage was relatively easy to produce (apart from a tricky weld near the front of the cockpit, where five tubes came together), and the wings and fuselage were then covered in the finest Irish linen and doped! At the outbreak of WW2, private flying ceased, and many light aircraft were 'impressed' by the armed services, to help support the war effort. Taylorcraft were no exception, and it was realised that the high-wing design could well act as an 'Air Observation Post' aircraft. Some aircraft accompanied Royal Artillery units to France with the British Expeditionary Force, and further tests led to an Air Ministry order for 100, as the Auster I (Latin for 'warm, southerly breeze').

RAF AOP Squadrons, (staffed by Royal Artillery officers as pilots) serviced the needs of the Royal Artillery, and spotted the fall of shot for every calibre of gun in service as well as being used for casualty evacuation and liaison. Various marks of Auster served with the RAF, RCAF and the RAAF in every major theatre of war (the Royal Australian Air Force No 16 and 17 AOP Flights served in the Pacific).

The Auster III was similar to the Auster I, except for the more powerful (130 hp) De H Gipsy Major engine, and was more suitable for 'hot and high' situations. No. 656 Squadron, RAF – motto "Volans et videns" , 'Flying and seeing' – was formed at RAF Westley, Suffolk on 31st December 1942 with the Auster III, and it was decided to send the unit to India, where support for the Fourteenth Army, then commanded by Lieutenant-General William "Bill" Slim (later, Field Marshal William Joseph 'Bill' Slim, 1st Viscount Slim, KG, GCB, GCMG, GCVO, GBE, DSO, MC, KStJ) was desperately needed. The Squadron took ship on 12th August, 1943, and on arrival became part of South East Asia Command. The aircraft was a little short on range (about 220 miles) for this theatre of operations with its immense stretches of jungle, but still did sterling work in both India and the savage fighting in Burma (the Squadron's official badge includes a Chinthe's head – the lion-like 'leogryph' of Burmese mythology).

Here we can see an excellent example of the Auster III, MT 438, formerly of No. 656 Sqn., RAF; she can be at the former RAF Hullavington, and is well secured with screw pickets under each wing. MT438 is in typical SEAC camouflage scheme – Dark Earth/Dark Green on all surfaces, with roundels and fin flash being painted in Light Blue/Roundel Blue. This removal of all traces of red from the national markings was to prevent any confusion with the Japanese hinomaru (and thereby minimize ‘friendly fire’ incidents).

After the war, the aircraft was put onto the Malaysian Civil Register as 9M-ALB, and eventually recovered back to the UK in 1960, by the redoubtable Mike Somerton-Raynor. It would be almost impossible to list all of Mike’s talents – Army Air Corps officer, inventor, record-breaking aviator, would be a sample, and I have had the great privilege of meeting him on numerous occasions, particularly when I used to frequent the AAC Museum, Middle Wallop, Hampshire.

After a string of owners (which included the Laarbruch Flying Club, Germany) MT438 is now in the hands of Richard Webber, of Essex, and is often seen at fly-ins and air shows. A truly classic aircraft, and a living reminder of the ‘Forgotten Army’, and all who served in SEAC.



MT438 - Burma

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DEATHS

Sadly, we announce the death of the following member and offer our sincere condolences to his relatives and friends

Maj Gordon Fielder BEM RN/REME Died Jan.'16

WZ706 - WHERE SHE SHOULD BE !

FLYING AGAIN

By Peter Gill



I am lucky enough or daft enough to own 3 Auster aircraft; I guess that depends on your point of view.

The first one I bought was a 1945 built J1 Autocrat with a Blackburn Cirrus 2 engine in it. It is a pleasure to fly and will teach you everything you want to know about adverse yaw and keeping the aircraft in balance. The second Auster is a super J1N with a Gipsy Major 10-2 engine in it and a belly tank, it is the ideal touring aircraft, with 2 up and full camping gear, it will take off from central UK and deposit you in eastern Belgium in about 3.5 hours and you can do that whilst flying in and out of rough grass strips, not many comparable aircraft can do that.

The third Auster is an AOP9. This was the last of the Military spec Austers that were built as AOP platforms before helicopters took over their roles. It is a big beast, with an 180hp fuel injected Blackburn Bombardier engine in it, 3 seats one facing rearwards, hydraulic main and tail wheel struts. Also, when the flaps are lowered the ailerons droop, so it is like no other Auster built.

The Auster AOP9 I acquired came with all of the Form700's and the Traveller F700's. This is its service record sheets, i.e. its complete logbooks from the day it was born at Rearsby until the day it was demobbed at RAF Netheravon.

From these books it was easy to follow its working life and it was a very busy aircraft with a good "war history." It worked in Malaya during the insurgency with 656 Squadron AAC. The good news about that is the fact that this Squadron is still active, and it also has a very active Squadron Association, which was going to come in very useful over the next few years. Many of the Association members had either flown it, flown in it, or serviced it, and when I attended some of their reunion dinners it was a treat to see the smiles on the faces when they saw their signatures and write ups they had made over 50 years ago, obviously they also had great photos, technical notes and mementoes which they have given me and all of this has helped with the authenticity of the rebuild, one member actually had still got the emergency grab bag, now residing in WZ706.

During its working life, it had two incidents in service, and on one it had to be winched out of Thailand by a RAF helicopter, it had also been painted on duty

by the famous artist David Shepherd, the original painting now stands in the entry foyer of AAC Middle Wallop's Officers' Mess.



How I acquired this Auster was a process of being in the right place at the right time, I happened to be in the Museum of Army Flying at Middle Wallop organising an Auster Club fly-in, when I was introduced to the previous owner of WZ706. We got talking about the fly in and Austers in general and I just happened to mention I always had a soft spot for the AOP9. The comment was made, that it was my lucky day as he had one for sale, anyway, to cut to the chase, 14 days later WZ706 was taken from number 4 hangar at Middle Wallop on 02/12/2008. We used a low loader with a hydraulic lift on it, and took it away to Eggesford to start its rebuild.

Why Eggesford? Well it is Auster heaven. There are probably more Austers and AOP9's on this airfield, than any other place in the world, it is owned by Nigel Skinner, who loves aircraft. Importantly it had two very experienced restorers based there, Richard Webber who has probably restored more Austers than anybody else. Also a long time owner of an Auster himself, which he had rebuilt from scratch, and a very competent engineer, Dave Coleclough, all watched over by the resident LAA inspector Roger Benson. These people were instrumental in getting this project through to the flying stage.

I know many people who have restored or rebuilt old aircraft, and as you know it really is not quite the same as building one from scratch or from a kit, you have all the bits (hopefully) just not in the correct order. They are going to want sorting, cleaning, checking for damage, wear, corrosion, then corrosion proofing repainting and reassembling, and that's just the airframe. The engine its ancillary gear, electrical wiring looms, lights, new radios, not to mention the instruments and so many other items that you need a large space just to store them as you work on it. Bit by bit, all these items need to be looked over checked and re-certified or accepted as fit for purpose. Once you have your new toy, your brain re-engages and you realise what a very daunting task you have set out to conquer.

The last time the Auster had flown was from RAF St Athens (MU) to RCMS Shrivenham on the 19/6/1964. This was great news because it had been prepared to the latest flying order spec at St Athens for the flight and I had a complete aircraft plus spares.

The first thing I did, was to go through the F700's and check what I had, against what the forms said I should have. As luck would have it, everything major item wise, was there, plus a lot more besides. The other lucky thing about having the form 700's, was the fact that all the MOD (Modification) state of the aircraft was listed in there, vital for all the paperwork to come.

I had decided that the AOP9 would be restored to how she looked on active duty in Malaya; David Shepherd's picture gives a flavour of the sort of airfields she operated out of and how she looked then.



As you can see from the Middle Wallop hoist picture, the AAC had started on the restoration of the fuselage. All of the control cable runs were in and the fabric was on. However, the metal paint work was surprisingly, not so good, the metal work had not been primed properly and the paint just came of in sheets and all would need to be done again.



The engine had been inhibited and been drained and redone over all the years it had been stored so was in great condition.

However, I had new old stock (NOS) piston rings, oil scraper rings, gudgeon pins, valves, valve springs, rocker carrier plate, and carrier plate cover, two new

fuel pumps and all these NOS parts were put on. So effectively it was a zero timed top end, the bottom end was immaculate and we gave it a thorough clean, with a detailed borescope inspection, which was relatively easy.

With all the ancillary gear stripped off for inspection as well, the ancillary items were cleaned tested, rebuilt and painted and slowly put back on the engine, I say that in one sentence, but in truth it took 5 years to achieve.

A good friend of mine, Ben Cartwright did the electrical rewiring of the Auster. He did such a good job, and sleeved it so it looked just like it had when leaving Austers Rearsby factory (but with modern cable). We put in modern strobes and navigation lights as well, but they were easily disguised in the original perspex covers, so it does not look out of place.



The avionics and intercom system was built into the original cockpit panel, so it would be hidden when the aircraft was on the ground, and all you would see was the original HF set front. We also laid in the HF winding gear and trailing wire system. You can make out the wire and drogue chute for it on the tailplane.

The ancillary gear took an age to clean, inspect and repair. If needed, things like the inlet manifold, exhaust manifold had to be

Borescope inspected internally, pressure tested and in the case of the oil and fuel pipes they were replaced with the latest applicable spec pipes, with the original ends swaged on them and then pressure tested.

Roger Benson, a LAA inspector working out of Eggesford airfield, where most of this work took place, ably oversaw all the airframe, electrics and avionics systems installations and refit. He made sure all of the required modifications

and changes were properly installed and the required paperwork was kept in good order and sent off to LAA Engineering as required.



It finally became time to move the AOP9 from Eggesford to Spanhoe, to fully rig it and finish off the engine rebuild, under the eye of the well-known Auster expert, Carl Tyers at Windmill Aviation. The wings went on the first weekend and she started to look like her old self. Flaps and fuel lines were done next, then the ai-

lerons were connected and the runs tensioned, and after checking full and free in the correct sense, they were wire locked. The landing lights and strobe connections were the next, and the last connections for the wing / fuselage assembly; the aircraft was now complete for the first time in over 55 years. It was no longer 20 steps forward and 18 back, it was two steps forward and one back or 99% done with another 80% to finish. The people who have built or restored an aircraft will know exactly what I mean.

With the fuel connected and fuel flow tests all satisfactory, 3 gallons of engine oil put in and propeller pulled through 110 revolutions to fill the engine galleries, she was ready for first trial engine runs. Starting a Bombardier engine is normally an easy thing, it normally starts on the first prop swing, to start it for the first time was going to be very nerve racking and we went through the procedure several times to make sure nothing had been missed. Chocks in, brakes set, fuel selector to run / prime, the book says for the temperature 4 primes of the kygas primer then pull the engine through four times to vaporise the fuel air mix. Gary was going to do the hand swinging and I followed his instructions, chocks in, brakes set, throttle set, contact, swung and nothing, just the click of the impulse mag. This went on for several hours, checking things as we swung her to no avail, after three hours hard work and not a glimmer of hope, it was back to the drawing board.



Our conclusion was that either the magneto was incorrectly timed, (we had proved the spark in between swings) or the fuel pump incorrectly timed, (not so easy to prove one way or the other) also two cylinders were poor on pressure, or could it be the fuel shut off control was not working correctly? All in all a very disappointing day.

So over the next month or so, the plugs came out, they were all cleaned, gapped and pressure tested, they were fine. Injectors out, cleaned, fuel spray patterns tested, also fine. The magneto, which it is a single driveshaft with impulse on cylinders 1 and 4 only (hence the double yellow flash on prop to show prop position for hand starting, the Coffman cartridge starter had been removed for weight, and legally can't have starter cartridges without a shotgun licence, that's if you could get them anyway?) this was taken apart again and points, contacts cleaned checked, HT leads re-tested.

While all this was going on, we had dropped the cylinder barrels again, to get to the mystery of why we had two pots, that were low compression, with the help of my friend Gary Siddall, who was the only real knowledgeable person with experience of rebuilding and working on a 50 year old 180 HP Blackburn Bombardier engine, the complete top end was worked on again, tolerances checked, barrels re-honed and everything put back together again. I can tell you timing the camshaft on this engine, can only have been thought up by a British engineer, nightmare does not go anywhere close to describing the time, sweat, skinned knuckles and cursing that went on. Finally after several more months the time came for another try.

Re-oiled, fuel flow checked again, and it was, fuel to run/prime, keep primer up to squeeze fuel in, if faltering after start, pulled the engine through 4 times and Gary was again doing the swinging. Chocks in, brakes set, throttle set, "Contact". Great, two hearty coughs and nothing, ok lets prime a bit more, and try

again, 3 more coughs, more priming, and try again, and thank you God, a mighty roar from the engine, and it starts, the oil pressure goes straight up to 50psi. It is the first time this engine has run in 54 years, I can tell you, that it felt and sounded great, I have the picture taken by my friends, of my face, and it was a big grin.

While all the big stuff was going on, all the last minute details such as doors, the pilots door although fitted correctly the metal on the fuselage had worn over the years and the door would not stay shut, it needed a little bit of welding to build it up, welding and fabric and fully built aircraft are not comfortable bed fellows, and thank goodness for my mate Arthur Boon, who put all of his expertise into doing that job for me with all the myriad of small detail finished or nearly finished.

It was time to apply for its first permit to test, Carl sent off the application to Francis Donaldson at the LAA, and very quickly the approval arrived. 15 landings needed to be done, an unspecified amount of flight time, enough to be sure the aircraft was ready for its full air test and not further than 25 miles from Spanhoe that was the requirement.

Can I say whilst mentioning the LAA, what great support I had, and had throughout all of the re-build. Advice on what paperwork was needed and when, modifications were needed they were approved, manuals and checklist approved. Talking about paperwork I kept a detailed work sheet and summary of the whole rebuild it is 238 pages long, not including the pictures and was a requirement of part of the restoration process. Old aircraft of this type need a sympathetic but watchful eye kept on them, the process for mine had taken place under the LAA's inspector process. Thanks again Carl and Roger.

The flight testing was fairly uneventful, a couple of simple fixes, the rudder trim tab needed to be bent about an eighth of an inch to the left to make the aircraft fly trimmed hands off at cruise speed. A weep leak from a cracked aluminium casket on the inlet manifold and an intercom that was intermittent, now that was a result after all the years of hard work on her.

At the end of flight testing, we stripped the oil filters and checked them for any debris, thankfully nice and clear, I also dropped the fuel collector to see if there was any muck or debris that had washed through the tanks, pipes, etc. and that was also clear.

Finally she was ready for her air test, Carl applied for the Air test permit and come the day with full fuel, loaded for bear in the cabin at AUW off we went. Two hours later we landed and there were no snags, aircraft stall speeds and handling all right on the numbers the ROC was above what was expected, not bad for an old girl of nearly 60 years of age. The paperwork went off to the LAA and then onto the CAA and I went on holiday. When I returned 20 plus days later there it was, a great bit of paper, The Permit to Fly. That bit of paper was worth the nearly seven years of rebuilding it took and the flying I have done in her since, just keeps me smiling,

If you are thinking about a restoration project, go for it, it will drive you mad, challenge your willpower and give you great pleasure all on the same day, but the end result will definitely be worth the wait.

The AOP9 is a biggish aircraft at 1.1 m tonnes and was built to survive the rigours of military service, I can tell you it flies like a dream. It can handle any sort of rough strip that you care to throw at it; it takes off in about 140 yards fully loaded and will climb at 700fpm. It will land and stop, in about the same distance, stalling speed is 48 kts clean and full flap 42kts, the ailerons droop as the flaps come down and that makes the flying at slowish speeds really pleasant, with 32 imp gall tanks she will cruise at 82 knots for about 3.6 hours with reserves.

It is not pretty in the accepted sense of the word. She looks big and fairly menacing on the ground and when the engine starts it has a real muscular sound to hear, she is very well balanced and handles very well at all speed ranges. Her only down side is her thirst for fuel, but hey you can't have everything!

So would I do it again? Unequivocally, yes.

Auster AOP 9, WZ706 G-BURR



A LITTLE LIGHT HUMOUR

(extract from Flying with the Army Air Corps by Derek Palmer)

In Aden I was allocated the call sign “Zulu 56”. One morning I was on ‘long finals’ to Khormaksar when the duty Air Traffic Control Officer (DATCO) called, “Z56 we have a report smoke is coming from your Port engine”.

This came as a big surprise as I’m sure the Auster 9 I had pre-flighted earlier was fitted with only one engine! In fact, to the best of my knowledge all Auster 9’s were powered by only one Blackburn Bombardier engine.

I replied with “Z56, thank you for your concern, but I don’t have a Port engine; this is a single engine aircraft”.

DATCO, infuriated and embarrassed by his mistake, responded with “Break, break Z56, I am calling H56”, a Twin Pioneer.

Well, we all make mistakes.

One afternoon I was joining ‘Downwind’ at Khormaksar after being ‘up country’ all day when a Beverley, a large transport ‘plane not unlike a block of flats with two wings, four engines and fixed undercarriage, reported “Delta 19, Downwind”.

DATCO responded with “Roger Delta 19, call finals, three greens”.

D19 answered with “Delta 19, Wilco”.

A little later the Beverley captain replied with “D19 Finals, wheels down and welded”!!

(The full story will be published in a future edition, ed)

A Blonde Joke.

A blonde was travelling on an aircraft from Heathrow to USA with a second class ticket, but she took a seat in the first class. The Air Hostess approached her and asked her to move to the front of the plane, to the correct class. The blonde point blank refused to move, saying she had her ticket to Boston and that was where she was going. The Senior Steward was sent for but again the blonde refused to vacate the First class seat. This called for desperate measures so he then went forward and told the flight Captain of the problem.

“Leave it to me” the Captain said as he stood and went back to the blonde. He stood a few moments talking to her and she politely vacated the seat and moved to the front compartment.

Flabbergasted the Steward and Hostess asked the Captain how he managed what they could not. “Well” he said, “I’m married to a blonde and know their ways, I just told her this half of the plane only goes to Chicago, you need the front half for Boston”

THE DUTY CREW
A TALE OF TRIUMPH AND TRAGEDY

by Geoff Mansfield

It was July 1964 and I had just returned to dear old Blighty after a three year tour in the Far East, having served with the renowned 656 Squadron in Malaya, Brunei and Borneo. After a few days settling in to my new posting at Middle Wallop I was “volunteered” to be camp entertainments officer by Regimental Sergeant Major Wenham. This was hardly fair as I was only a corporal at the time but anyone with army experience knows that you don't argue with the RSM, who ranks second in line to the Almighty in the general pecking order. When the RSM says jump you jump, and you hover 'till he says you can come down.

So it came to pass that I organised a dance, to be held in the NAAFI one Saturday evening. This proved to be more difficult than I first imagined. To get anything done in the army requires “clout” and “clout” is directly proportional to rank. Thus my “clout” was about as effective as a wet sponge on a forest fire. Nevertheless, high powered landing strip lights arrived from hangar 5, for the attention of Lieutenant Mansfield, and the PA system from the guard room was signed for by Major Mansfield. (The Duty Officer at the time was a captain, so I had to outrank him, didn't I?). Luckily the RSM took a lenient view of my self administered promotion when he interviewed me the following Monday. This was possibly due to the financial success of the dance and a considerable reduction in the number of squaddies arrested in Andover that weekend. However, I digress.....

A chappie called Lance Barrett was the agent for most of the rock groups in the area, and for an extortionate amount of cash he provided a group called the Troggs. The more senior citizens among us will remember that this group went on to fame and fortune with such songs as “Wild Thing”. Halfway through the evening the group stopped for a well earned beer or six, thus initiating the birth of the Duty Crew. Les Kehoe, a mate of mine, was given permission to have a twiddle on the lead guitarist's fabulous Gretsch guitar. One thing led to another, and before you could wave your wiggle stick I was tapping out a beat on the drums, Chris Watkins was giving a good account of himself on rhythm guitar, and John Balague was thumping away on bass guitar. By this time Les was giving the Gretsch full throttle, so Mick Brogan picked up the microphone and gave a very acceptable rendition of “under the boardwalk”.

And so the ‘Duty Crew’ was born. Chris was posted a short while later, so his



place was taken by Sean “Paddy” Kearney, a beanpole of a bloke from Dublin. We practised a lot, and with the help of a loan from the army, bought some passable equipment. We played at several dances at Middle Wallop, a local gig at Anna Valley, and even organised our own gig at Henley Town Hall (where they have the famous regatta). All good things come to an end though. Les was posted to Germany, I was due for demob. and postings for Sean and

John were imminent. That was not the end of the story though. Flash forward to 2008.

I won't bore you with details of my civilian life – suffice to say that by 2008 I was married with three children, Toby, Zoe and Oliver. I was working for a Canadian company at the time, living in a village called Holmer Green, four miles north of High Wycombe. I was surfing the web whilst at work one day when I came across an announcement that Sean Kearney, of some aviation company or other, had been awarded a bursary to become a barrister. It couldn't be “our” Sean, I thought, he would be far too old. It kept bugging me though, and a few days later, after more web surfing, I found a telephone number. No answer when I rang it, but I left a message, and the following day was greeted on my mobile by the rich Irish brogue of Sean. It was his son that had been awarded the bursary, and he passed my message onto his father. A meeting was arranged at a pub near Blackbushe Airport, where we decided to try and locate the rest of the Crew.

Finding John was easy. I knew he used to live in Reading, so the phone book was consulted. Only one number was found under the name Balague. It wasn't



John. But must have been a relative, as they gave me his address. A quick trip to Reading ended up with John and I staring at each other in disbelief. Forty two years on and we still recognised each other. John was keen to find the other two, and remembered that Mick had belonged to some Wigan Society. Again, no trouble in finding Mick – four down one to go.

Finding Les was to prove a little more difficult. The four of us decided to have a reunion at a hotel called the Talbot, somewhere near Hereford I think. There we had dinner with our wives, making eight in all, but we asked for the table to be set for one more. We drank to Les in his absence, and formulated a plan of action to find him. We didn't know if Les's surname was Kehoe or Keogh, so Mick produced a phone list of both names – about five hundred in all, but we did try several in the Merseyside in case we struck lucky.



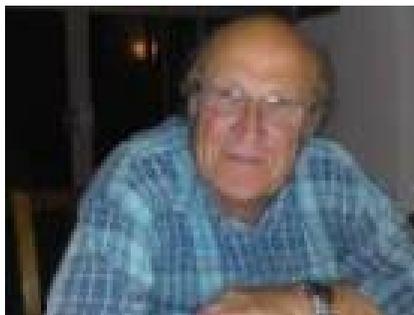
Eventually one of our strategies worked. I had written to the Army Pension Service, enclosing a letter to Les, asking them to post it to his last known address. It was almost two years later that I received a phone call. A recognisable Liverpudlian accent said “I think you are looking for me”. Les had been found. The letter from the Pensions office had been posted, as requested, but went to Les's ex mother in law. She put it in the pocket of his dinner suit, expecting him to come and collect it. He did, about two years later.

Anyway, the “Crew” was back in business. We bought, borrowed or stole more equipment, and met at my house for several weekends, to practise in the local village hall. Sean and John live fairly close, so could make a day of it, but Mick and Les came from north of the Watford Gap, so they and their wives used to stay at my house. We had some great times chewing the fat and opening the hangar doors.

Our practise sessions saw us slowly improving and we were about ready for our comeback performance. We were booked to play at a charity function to raise funds for Newlife, a charity that helps children with birth defects and health problems, when tragedy struck. Les was diagnosed with cancer, and was in great pain. He tried to put a brave face on it, but it was obvious that he was very ill. Unfortunately there was little that the doctors could do for him, and he died soon after, just two days after we had all gone up to see how he was.

The Crew never played again. Les was a great guy, and a very accomplished guitarist. He will be greatly missed by us and our sympathy goes out to Mary, his wife, and his children.

Rest in Peace my friend – you will not be forgotten.



(Sorry for the poor quality of photos, they are copies of pre-digital ones. Ed)

UBIQUE 300

Larkhill

by Peter Gill



Let me start by using the request and challenge sent out by Brigadier S.L. Humphrey OBE - Project Officer Ubiq 300 to all members of the Royal Artillery.

“On the 26th May 2016 the Royal Regiment will celebrate its 300th Anniversary. As part of the celebration of this significant milestone, we will conduct a west to east circumnavigation of the globe, commencing at our birthplace in Woolwich and finishing at our Regimental home in Larkhill.

A baton, designed to represent our 300 years, will be carried around the globe, before being presented to our Captain General (The Queen)

when she reviews the Regiment at Larkhill on the date of our Foundation.

The circumnavigation will provide an exciting and unrivalled opportunity for all corners of the Regimental family: Regular, Reserve, Veterans (through the RAA) and RA cap badged UOTC, CCF and ACF units, to play their part in an incredible journey. We will also seek the support and engagement of Commonwealth Artillery nations and our close Allies, alongside Industry Partners. I urge you all to get involved, think imaginatively, seize the opportunity to lead and participate in an adventure to a far flung corner of our planet, and play your part in living up to the motto given to us by King William IV – *Ubique.*”

There was an invitation issued by the organisers of UBIQUE 300, to Jerome Mostyn, one of our International Auster Club members, and an ex National Service, Royal Artillery Air OP pilot to involve the IAC in this event, he gladly accepted the challenge and so the event was put into the planning stage. Can I say that without Jerome’s local knowledge and contacts in the local area and Army in particular this event would have proved a very daunting task?

So what was the plan? Well it was to fly the Brigadier and the Captain General's Baton on the last leg of its around the world tour, from Old Sarum to Larkhill. The Austers had to move a high ranking Military Officer and what effectively is the Queen’s Captain General Baton. OK, so no pressure there then.

Anyway over several weeks the task to escort the baton was given to the following aircraft and the crews.

Mk V	TW511 / G- APAF	Jerome Mostyn/Philip Piper.
Mk I	LB312 / G-AHXE	John Pothecary.
Mk IX	WZ662 / G-BKVK	Jeff Houlgrave. Rob Cotterill
Mk V	TJ534 / G-AKSY	Steve Farrant. Roger Lane
Mk VI	WJ368 / G-ASZX	Nigel Skinner. Jackie Skinner
Mk IX	WZ706 / G-BURR	Peter Gill. Brigadier Humphrey + Baton.

Plan for the day:

If weather precludes doing the event JM and/or Philip Piper will call, text, or telephone all pilots before 0800 hr otherwise land at Old Sarum by **1100**.

Refuel if necessary. Have a bite in the flying club café.

1130: Brigadier and baton arrive.

1200: Briefing by Philip Piper (Head of Salisbury Plain Air Ops) in Boscombe Down Aviation Collection Conference Room behind control tower.

1310: Take off. Route to Larkhill in loose formation (staggered line astern) led by JM and Philip Piper.

1345: Arrive Larkhill, over-fly racecourse (500ft agl) and land. (JM/PP first, Peter Gill and Brigadier with baton last).

1355: Engines off. Hand over Brigadier/baton.

1400: Start of live firing display.

1600: Depart Larkhill for home bases.

Where is Larkhill, I hear you asking, well it is right in the middle of Salisbury Plain Military Training Area, which is covered by areas such as D120, D127, D125, D124 Porton Down, and is also just inside the RAF Boscombe Down MATZ and control area. What does all this mean? Well, from a civil pilot's point of view, it's an area, which you probably will never, ever fly, over, or in. It is tank and artillery live firing grounds, live firing to 40,000 feet!! Low flying

aircraft and helicopters at all heights and you must have MOD permission to enter it 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year.



The day before this was due to happen, Jerome, Rob and I drove to Larkhill Race course to look over the race track, which was going to be the landing ground, either the southern end, east / west strip or

eastern side, north south strip, We got there and were shown around by Capt. Bernie Burnett and WO2 Si Dimbylow and the race course manager. They had done a grand job of preparing the two strips, shaving and rolling the ground (Still plenty of hoof prints and divots), as it had been used as a race track the weekend before.

Thanks to Jerome and his co- pilot, who just happens to be Lt Col Philip Piper AAC retired and is also in charge of the Salisbury Plain Military Area, and will be the Radio Operator and Navigator for the flight, but most importantly will give us our final briefing before we take off.

The briefing was comprehensive and covered all aspects of the flight including the landing on either of the two strips, plan "A" a west / east strip, 450+ meters x 45m. Plan "B" a north /south strip 900m x 80m, all with the furlong markers and white fences on either side, plus various holding points enroute and emergency plans, landing in the middle of a live fire zone, Hmmh.... More to this than meets the eye, me thinks?

A flight of 6 Austers in Military Colours is quite a sight and Old Sarum had a good few photographers lined up taking pictures. Come the time, we loaded up and started up for a stream take off. That must have been a grand sight from the ground. It was from my position, number 6 to take off and tail end charlie in the conga chain for the flight.

I was carrying the Brigadier and the Captain General's baton on the last leg of its world tour from Old Sarum back to Larkhill, so problems were something I did not need. We had ticked the boxes by arriving early and doing a strip survey, we had had a meticulous briefing by the Area Boss, which covered everything we needed to know, the aircraft had been checked to within an inch of their lives and a W&B had been calculated. All we needed was the weather to say fine and the wind to stay easterly. The route had been plotted, contingencies talked over and finally it was time to go.

We called Salisbury Plain Ops and Larkill to get the latest winds, decided it was plan "A" the easterly runway, decided take off was to be in 15 minutes and we got our passengers onboard, final preflight checks. All the engines started nicely and we taxied out for the stream take off, so far so good.

Auster 1 was doing the radio calls and calling frequency changes, so it was follow the leader down south to VPR Alderbury and QSY to RAE Boscombe Down and we would be on our way. On Boscombe's instruction we were cleared on course direct to our first holding point, the village of Stapelford, which just happened to be Jerome's home village. And coincidentally, the whole village was out to wave. Then on to Salisbury Plain Control and clearance,

onwards to Long Barrow, passing the stone circle at Stonehenge. Then descending into the race course circuit and extending the line to allow for landing, from the back of the flight line. I could see the smoke that was being blown from a smoke grenade on the easterly strip and it became obvious the wind had changed in the 15 to 20 mins since take off. We were now going to have to land on the southerly runway, which actually worked out very well, with the right downwind passing right over the crowd line.



As the last to land I had to slow down and extend the circuit to allow the landing strip to clear in front of me. After landing, we taxied along the east/west strip and I stopped on the west end corner to allow the Brigadier and the Captain General's Baton out with a lot of photos being taken.

We were loaded into buses and taken up to the spectator's area and the VIP tent for afternoon tea and biscuits before the artillery shoot began, and during this time I was introduced to the Master Gunner, the most senior gunner in the Royal Artillery and the Queen's personal representative. About this time the live firing started showing guns from various periods from the Artillery's past, with the gunners in period dress. I thought Auster's were noisy, but I can tell you when they are shooting for effect the noise, smell and smoke is unbelievable.



Too soon the guns fell silent and the visitors were allowed to visit the guns and Austers and effectively the show was over.

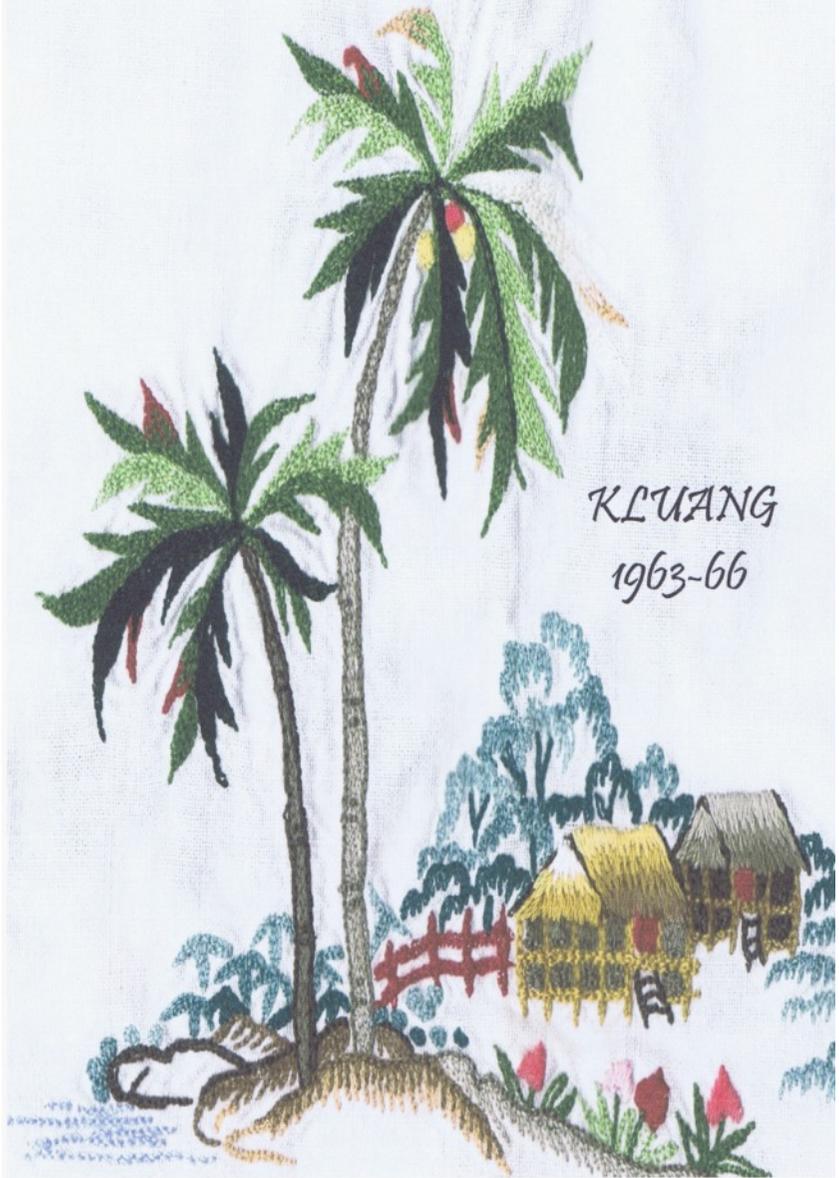


We had noticed during the afternoon, the wind direction had changed and was now almost due east, so that was the one to use for takeoff. The Royal Artillery had positioned one of their AS90, 150 mm self propelled guns in the field next to the eastern edge of the strip to take some pictures of the gun and us taking off, I am sure the pictures will be wonderful.



Anyway we took off and headed for our home airfield, reflecting on what a wonderful day Austering we had all had.

MEMORIES OF TWO ARMY WIVES



KLUANG
1963-66

KLUANG, MALAYA 1963 to 1966
Memories - from two wives' perspective
during the Borneo Conflict

By Anne Warner & Doreen Denton

The background for this article is to tell the story of our recollections and memories of how we and our families coped during this Conflict. Records are obviously kept about the military side of Conflicts and Campaigns, etc, but not much if anything, about how the wives and families managed during these times, so we thought it would be a good idea to write a few words about our experiences.



Doreen and I were stationed with our husbands in Kluang, Malaya from 1963 to 1966. We have kept in touch since then and have recently met up quite regularly and our conversation invariably turns to our time in Malaya. We have also spoken with other wives whose husbands were

stationed in Kluang.

In spite of the unrest which was happening in Borneo, and because of the comradeship amongst the wives we never felt threatened or afraid (even though we were told that the Indonesians managed to get within 60 miles of Kluang). If they had managed to reach Kluang the wives and children would have been evacuated



to Australia. That was ok but we were told that only one suitcase per wife and one per child could be taken. We weren't bothered about going to Australia but how could we manage with only ONE suitcase each??

The Army was obviously very supportive as were the Gurkha's (6 Gurkha Rifles) who were renowned for their loyalty and military expertise, and we certainly felt safe when they were around. Despite all that was going on at the time looking back we both agree that this was one of the best times of our lives.

Our husbands were both Royal Electrical Mechanical Engineers attached to the Army Air Corps stationed at the Army Air Corps Centre, Middle Wallop servicing fixed wing aircraft and helicopters. Having received their posting to Malaya we then faced having to get all the vaccinations required for that part of the world. How painful some were!

Some of the husbands had had to travel ahead of their wives, so we, very young wives, who had never travelled outside UK found ourselves faced with an 18 hour flight from Brize Norton flying in a Britannia aircraft. We stopped at Istanbul and Bombay for refuelling and at the time it seemed an exciting adventure. The aircraft was very noisy and seemed very cramped and 18 hours is a very long time to sit in a metal tube especially with young children. We were well looked after on board, and a sky-cot was available for those who had a baby. It was all so new to us but exciting and daunting at the same time. Obviously at Istanbul the weather was warmer than UK and by the time we stopped at Bombay the heat and humidity was something else. I don't think anyone had really thought about cooler clothes to change into – how foolish was that!

We arrived at RAF Changi, Singapore, where we were met by our husbands. The first thing we did once in the hangar, even before our bags were off-loaded, was to hand our babies, who were beginning to get fractious, straight to our husbands with words to the effect 'We're hot, tired, smelly, and in great need of a bath!!' It was so lovely to see them. It only took a short time to go through customs, and we were on our way to Kluang. I suppose with us all being 'military wives' passengers into a military airport we got through passport control very quickly.

It was on the way to Kluang that our husbands told us what was actually going on in the area and the possible danger. That really frightened us.

HQ Army Aviation Borneo was based at Labuan, and 7Flt and 14Flt were serving three monthly rotations between Brunei, Kuching and Kluang. Our husbands left for Borneo for their 3 month tour shortly after we arrived, and because of these rotations, we spent a lot of time without them.

Leaving Singapore we crossed the Jahore Bahru Causeway into Malaya, and what seemed to us to be dense jungle, was in fact just a rubber plantation which brought back memories of school days when we covered this topic in a geography lesson – we were actually seeing the real thing! It's about 60 miles from Singapore to Kluang and the roads were not quite (!) like UK roads. It seemed such a long journey, but we finally arrived in Kluang.

We had private accommodation to start with until a quarter became available. This bungalow was like nothing like we had ever seen before. It was OK, very sparsely furnished, the floor was tiled throughout, a living/dining room, small kitchen, two bedrooms and a bathroom. Every family had an Amah (a lady to do all the housework) who was waiting. How different life was going to be. The Amahs absolutely adored English children, and used to fuss over them such a lot.

The local Kluang residents were friendly and kind. It was only a short walk into the village where we did quite a bit of shopping, although there was always Army transport to take us to the NAAFI situated on the camp.

We really thought we had to be exceptionally hygienic so boiling all water to keep in the fridge was a must and everything had to be sterilised. We heard that one of the really stupid things one of the wives did was put the brush end of her toothbrush in hot water to sterilise it. When she used it the next morning she ended up with a mouthful of bristles! The hot water had obviously dissolved whatever kept the bristles in place.

It was the bugs that really got to us – some hated spiders at home, but now to have to cope with these tropical beasts was not funny. You could hear the cockroaches running around at night and no amount of spraying would kill them



off, they seemed to become immune to it all. Then there were the chit-chats – what! Lizards running across the ceiling and down the walls! The kids loved to try to catch them once they realised that if they did the chit-chats tail would drop off and would then continue wriggling. There were lots of other huge bugs that flew around at night time once the

lights went on. There was one particular bug that made the most awful noise if it hit the lamp shade – we called them flying frogs. The other really big nuisance was of course the mosquitoes. We had to take a Paludrine tablet daily to reduce the risk of Malaria. We did have mosquito nets over the beds which tucked under the mattress. These nets were supposed to protect us at night, but not always successful, as occasionally one or two of the retched beasts would manage to get in. Nobody told us about all the things we'd have to cope with, but the bugs were the hardest.

Another problem was as far as cooking was concerned in that every bag of flour, rice or any cereals contained weevils. We were assured that they were edible, but none of us really wanted to test it, we would try to remove them. We were overrun with ants and not the little black ants like UK, but red ants which bit viciously.

We often saw snakes. Some of the bungalows opened out onto open fields which had monsoon drains close by, where the snakes would make an appearance from. These snakes were obviously not to be trifled with. The monsoon drains were really huge, being able to cope with the torrential monsoon rain. They were at least 3ft deep and 4ft wide and when the rain came they ran like a river, which made them extremely dangerous for our children. If a child fell in it would be swept away in seconds!!

Those families who were in private accommodation on arrival were moved into a quarter as they became available. Some were lucky and moved into Sunrise Park but others were not so lucky and were moved into a wooden Bungalow. The picture opposite shows what they looked like, although it doesn't show the

verandah side, so a bit more detail



It was a long building, made totally of wood, sitting on concrete stilts! Access was by wooden steps onto a long veranda (the length of the bungalow), the windows being louvred and only click-lockable. At one end was a small kitchen the other end a bathroom. I have to

stress that the veranda was totally open but all the doors leading off it to the rooms were lockable. The bedrooms and bathroom end were only divided by a metal grill, again lockable, but not a solid divider (and security was questionable!!!). We all hung fabric down the length of the grill which did reasonably hide the bedroom end. The only closure (if you can call it a closure) on the outside of the veranda were heavy weight bamboo roller blinds and they were supposed to help keep the rain out during the monsoon season as well as help keep the bugs out – what a laugh!

Humidity was very high, clothes went mouldy in cupboards and had to be hung outside regularly to keep the mould at bay, but there was always a musty smell to everything. Even after a cool or cold shower or bath our skin soon felt wet and clammy again and it was nice to be able to sit under the ceiling fan to try to dry off completely, air conditioning was certainly not a luxury.

How did we cope on our own?

We were looked after by husbands and wives who were with the flight that was in Kluang having completed their 3 month tour.

We attended social events at the Mess which included pictures, curry nights, and general get-together social events (including, bingo, cards and dancing).

BUT when our husbands were back with us in Kluang what a good time we had!!

There were Formal Mess occasions, when our men would be in their Mess Dress uniform and we girls in our ‘posh frocks’ made locally by the Chinese



Dressmaker. How handsome the men were in their Mess Dress and we felt we were the bees-

knees in our ‘designer’ dresses! (and fifty years on these designs

are now back in fashion!).

How else did we fill our time when we were on our own?:

We used the swimming pool virtually every day, after the children finished school at 1 p.m.



All the children were like fish at a very early age and were not in the least bit afraid of the water. Most of them would swim under water and just come up for a breath of air before they went under again.

It was also a lovely way to spend the afternoon and socialise with friends. During the Monsoon season when we had the thunder storms it wasn't safe to stay in the pool, and when the storms got a bit too close, the pool emptied so quickly. We all sheltered under cover until it had passed.

The Chinese carved furniture was very popular and the saying was that you either went home with a baby or a camphor-wood chest. Some were greedy and went home with both!!

Getting our hair done was never a problem at all, as all we had to do was go to the local shop, no appointment needed to get our hair washed and set, which we did regularly. The fashion then was to have all our hair piled on top in rather

large curls which lasted quite a few days as so much lacquer was used. We also had regular manicures as well.

Mess functions obviously required a new dress, so off we went to the local dressmakers, armed with our picture from a magazine which we had received from our family in UK, The dressmaker then made the dress in 24 hours (!) exactly as wanted and it always fitted perfectly. How we wish we could do that now!! One of the dressmaking shops offered a course to learn how to make our own patterns.

We had day trips to Mersing Beach. We would set off with our kids and cool boxes full of cold drinks and our picnic. The sand was sizzling hot and we had



to run to the sea, no standing around on the sand. The sea was also very warm (about the temperature we'd have in a bath at home!), so we had to swim out quite a way to reach the cooler water. What lovely days they were and a nice change from the swimming

pool.

Trips to Singapore were organised, and of course once there we just had to go to C K Tangs the big department store. A walk down Orchard Road was a must plus a visit to Change Alley which wasn't too far from there. It was great fun to do some bartering – what an experience that was! Singapore seemed so civilised compared with Kluang,

We had the option during our tour to go to the Cameron Highlands a Rest & Recuperation Centre in north Malaya. It was situated in the mountains and unlike Kluang and the rest of Malaya was very cool even bordering on cold, jumpers and cardigans were definitely a must. No humidity and quite often in the evening a log fire was burning. Temperature-wise it was a bit like home.

Towards the end of the tour it was time to think about packing up to return home. We were given 'MFO' boxes, small and large but which were a standard size, and so long as what we wanted to put in them fitted there was no restriction as to what we could take home. As we've already said furniture was popular and a lot was obviously brought home. Once these boxes had been collected it would be a number of weeks before we would see them again, as it took at least 6 weeks for the ships to get home.

Then the time came to say good bye to friends and our Amah, which was very emotional. We made promises to keep in touch.

Having had an Amah to do all our washing, ironing, housework and sometimes cooking for parties, and not forgetting a permanent babysitter for two and a half years, we would find it hard when we got home. The weather was something else that we would have to adjust to, having lived in temperatures of 80 plus every day.

It seemed that our tour had gone by very quickly.

Here we are 50 years on and what a lot has changed in the world. There was no telephone contact with families at home, and certainly no emails, skype, twitter, facebook and such technology. Letters took an interminable time to reach UK and get to us from UK.

Although I'm sure a lot of what you younger people have read here seems very ordinary and something you would experience when travelling the world, it was not so in the 60's, to us it was daunting and a great adventure. In those days it was usually only the Military Services and their families, and very rich people who were able visit all these exotic places. How the world has changed, in that Army wives are not able/allowed to travel with their husbands to places like this. In spite of all that was going on at the time though, we would have not have missed it for the world.

Anne Warner and Doreen Denton
January 2015

We would like to thank: Mark Meaton, Museum of Army Flying, Middle Wallop for his help trawling through archives and for photographs for us to use. Colonel Mike Sibbons, Corps Archivist, REME Museum, Arborfield, for the day we spent looking at files he held.

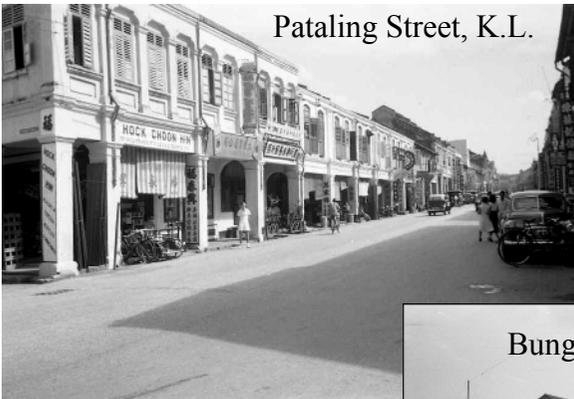
Phillip Denton for producing photographs.

* * * * *

Although this has taken much longer than Doreen and I thought to put together, we've had great fun and lots of laughter producing it. We've met regularly for Sunday lunch (G&T's and bottles of wine needless to say!). We lived opposite each other in Malaya (in the wooden bungalows!!). Doreen was always a great support to me and the other wives.

We hope that you have found it interesting and if you have memories or stories you would like to share, the Museum of Army Flying at Middle Wallop would love to hear from you to add to their archives. They have very little information on Army wives' and their children's experiences to date.

Other memories of Malaya

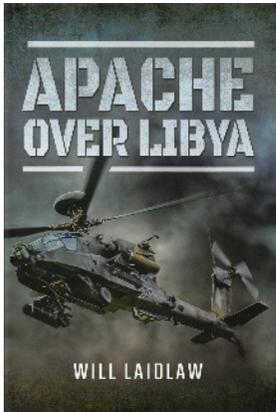


Pataling Street, K.L.



Bungalow in Kuching

Book Review by Guy Warner
Apache over Libya by Will Laidlaw



Having written *From Auster to Apache - the History of 656 Squadron*, which concluded with a brief description of operations in Libya, I was very interested to read this book. It begins with an excellent glossary and two highly useful maps, as the author soon takes us into an unfamiliar world. The hazardous and extremely challenging nature of the mission for this handful of Army (and two RN) airmen is underlined right from the start. The pressure on the OC was intense. The author gives a very deeply felt and honest account of stepping into the unknown – he is obviously a thinking soldier, ‘Politics isn’t about morality. At the heart of politics lies power.’ He writes lucidly and, in

clear prose, covers technicalities in a way which the lay reader can comprehend. He explains how the requirement to change the Squadron’s focus from Afghanistan to contingency and maritime operations was managed, as old skills were revived and new ones learned. The importance of the human factor – both aircrew and ground crew is emphasised. Making the Apache ready for going to sea was no easy task – overcoming intra and inter-service prejudice, marinising the airframes and working out procedures, logistics and training methods. When the Squadron embarked in HMS *Ocean* for exercise in the spring of 2011, he already knew that a contingent operation was a strong possibility and that the task was potentially formidable – interdiction against the supply line of the pro-Gaddafi forces – as the only NATO asset operating within the range of a massive amount of anti-aircraft artillery. This would be high-end war flying and light years from the relatively benign conditions faced in Afghanistan – low-level, no-lights formation flying over the sea, to a high threat environment and back again to a platform which would have moved in the meantime. This was the task facing just 10 aircrew and five helicopters – Britain’s only sea-borne strike asset. This is lean manning taken to the extreme. The author also makes the telling point that in contingent operations, ‘there is no handover and nobody there to tell you what to expect.’

He gives due prominence to the importance of mission planning, to the dedicated RN staff on board *Ocean*, to the two embedded AAC officers in the NATO planning cell in Italy and also to the very dedicated handlers and maintainers, not least the young soldiers programming the mission planning system – the data cartridge at the heart of any Apache mission. The aim was to identify and

hit legitimate and useful targets which would have the desired effect of weakening the pro-Gaddafi forces militarily and morally. Co-ordination with other assets was vital but as the author states, ‘Our lives depended on our flying skills and the effectiveness of our defensive systems.’ We are given very candid insight into the mind of an OC preparing to put his men into harm’s way. The reader also is taken into the cockpit of an Apache and learns something of what it is like to fly with two sources of information coming into his left eye and a third into his right – taking multi-tasking to a new level. And if you have ever wondered what it would be like to be under attack by a SA-24 ground-to-air missile, then you will find the answer here. This account is modern warfare under a microscope, a very personal and heartfelt story of the strains of combat and command, of planning, leadership, de-briefing, while at the same time coping with some long-handled screwdriving from London and the penny-wise, pound-foolish, parsimonious attitude of Whitehall.

The text is supported by an excellent selection of photographs. I thoroughly recommend this book and would urge the reader to dwell on the author’s comments on pages 166-7 and 169.

Apache over Libya by Will Laidlaw HB, 180 pages, 27 colour & 12 monochrome images, 2 maps. Pen & Sword £19.99 ISBN 1473867622

* * * * *

A Brief History of Wattisham Flying Station

The construction of Wattisham Airfield was started in 1937 during the RAF’s great expansion period in the late 1930s. Three farms disappeared as a result of its construction. Four large ‘C’ Type Hangars were erected along with Barrack Blocks and many other support facility buildings.

Wing Commander O R Gayford DFC RAF took command of the new Station on 6 April 1939 and the Blenheim Bombers of 107 and 110 Squadrons took up residence. Wattisham became synonymous for delivering the first bombing raid of World War II only hours after war was declared on 3 September 1939.

During the early war years Wattisham was attacked many times, and the Barrack Blocks and Hangars 2 and 3 received direct hits resulting in many casualties.

RAF Wattisham was transferred to the 8th Air Force of the USAAF in 1942 and the grass runways were replaced with hardened runways and taxiways. For the

remainder of the war the Lockheed B38 Lightnings of 434th, 435th and 436th were in residence, converting to the P51 Mustang towards the end of the war.

After the war the Americans returned home and the RAF once again took over. The jet age arrived and the Meteors of 257 and 263 Squadrons arrived in 1950. These were replaced by the F2 Hunter and NF14 Meteors in 1957. 257 Squadron was replaced by the world famous 'Black Arrows' of 11 Squadron, unsurpassed for the 22 aircraft loop. Javelin FAW 4 and the FAW 5 arrived in 1958 and in 1960 the mighty English Electric Lightnings of 56 and 111 Squadrons arrived.

These operated from Wattisham for the next 15 years, becoming a familiar sight in the Suffolk skies. The McDonnell Douglas Phantom replaced the Lightning in 1976. The final RAF squadrons to operate from Wattisham were Nos 56 and 74. The Phantom was decommissioned in 1992 and RAF Wattisham closed as an RAF Station in July 1993.

(Input from Andrew Simkins. During this period I was commanding 4 Regiment AAC in Detmold, Germany. I had been advised that the regiment would probably be moving back to Wattisham, and I was asked to conduct a discreet recce of the base, and assess whether it would be suitable for AAC operations. As Jane was brought up in Great Yarmouth less than an hour from Wattisham, I visited the base with my mother-in-law, which perfectly disguised the purpose of my visit! There was still a Phantom Gate Guard and RAF personnel, but no operational aircraft. While the base was well equipped it was optimised for fast jets which were accommodated in hardened shelters. I concluded that there would need to be a major rebuild programme to accommodate the Lynx and Gazelle, and subsequently the Apache).

During 1993 the Army Air Corps took over the Flying Station with 3 and 4 Regiments flying Lynx and Gazelle helicopters spread over 6 squadrons, with 7 Battalion REME providing specialist second line maintenance support throughout the UK. Both regiments, supported by 7 (Air Assault) Battalion, subsequently converted to the Attack Helicopter Mark 1, Apache. Wattisham is now home of the Attack Helicopter (AH) Helicopter Force.

RAF presence remained in the form of B Flight 22 Squadron RAF operating 2 Sea King Search and Rescue helicopters, while there it is also home to the Suffolk Constabulary Police helicopter.

Thank you to Alan Flint for finding this interesting article.

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Cenotaph Parade

Sun 13 Nov 16 - Ticket Allocation

The Royal British Legion has significantly tightened its ticket allocation for the Remembrance Parade. Categories 1 and 5 are mainly applicable to our Association. Andrew Simkins will need the following from those bidding for tickets in order to submit the bid by 16th September.

Ticket holders will need to provide photographic proof of identity and proof of residence at entrance to Horse Guards Parade.

Title/Rank:

First Name:

Last name:

Military Service number (if applicable) :

Date of Birth (dd/mm/yyyy):

Place of Birth:

Current Full address with post code:

Contact details:

Matched against the following criteria for attendance:

Cat 1 – Ex Service personnel with own medals.

Cat 2 – Civilians deployed in support of Military

Cat 3 – Ex Service without medals

Cat 4 – Bereaved spouses (of those who have died on operations)

Cat 5 – Veteran Association representatives.

Cat 6 – Military Charities and associated groups

Cut out this page and submit the form (over page) to arrive no later than 1st September with Andrew Simkins.

Thank you.

Remember you will NOT BE ADMITTED to Horse Guards Parade if you do not carry your photo identity and proof of residence





Application to join the 656 contingent on the Remembrance Parade
Sunday 13th November 2016

Title/Rank	
First Name	
Surname	
Service Number	
Date of Birth	
Current address	
Street 2	
Street 3	
Town	
Post Code	
Category	

If there is any change to these details I will notify you immediately

Signed :

Please post to:

Andrew Simkins
5 Farm Court Close
Winsham
Somerset TA20 4JY

To arrive by 1st September 2016





Raffle draw
during dinner



Joan Williams-Pam Drummer
Margaret Flint

-Margaret Windscheffel-
(L) Jane Simkins - Angela Ruthven (R)





Mark with Award



Bob Danton & Alan Flint



Members and guests at reunion 2016