

Abridged transcript of:-

XMAS NEWS LETTER. DEC 1995

Dear Association Member.

in the four months since the last News Letter, Squadron life has become increasingly busy. Indeed, as this is being written the Squadron is preparing yet again to deploy to the Former Yugoslavia. This time, however, deployment is virtually guaranteed and the New Year should find the Squadron settling into the somewhat wintery climate of Bosnia Herzegovina.

Some 52 members of the Squadron will be deployed as part of the 9 Regiment Army Air Corps package. The Squadron will be operating 6 LYNX and 4 GAZELLE aircraft in theatre and our duties could possibly encompass the full spectrum of peace-keeping and peace enforcement. As always with this sort of deployment, precise details of our role and operating base are not yet set in concrete but it promises to be an exciting and challenging time for all members of the Squadron.

EXERCISES AND COMMITMENTS

Since the last News Letter the Squadron has continued to support a variety of Regimental, Brigade and Divisional exercises as well as maintaining a high level of currency and proficiency in both new and existing equipment. In addition, we have provided personnel for rolement tours in Northern Ireland, Belize and Canada, often at very short notice due to operational commitments involving other regiments.

Captain Patrick Logan led a very successful 20 man detachment providing 3 GAZELLE in support of 1 RTR on Exercise Medicine Man in BATUS, Canada from August to October. Also in October the Divisional Artillery Exercise was supported with Air OP aircraft provided by the Squadron, and 3 aircraft with crews participated in a very worthwhile Aviation Reconnaissance Patrol Demonstration on Salisbury Plain for Officer Cadets from Sandhurst.

As the main exercising squadron, 656 Squadron also played a key role in the Regimental exercise EAGLE STRIKE in October. This took place on Salisbury Plain and concentrated on night flying, in particular Night Vision Goggle Operations. The two weeks provide some difficult and testing situations for both aircrew and groundcrew and served to prove our readiness for challenging times ahead.

CHANGE OF COMMAND

Sadly Major Garry Key leaves the Squadron shortly on a posting to a Joint Headquarters at Northwood. Garry has commanded the Squadron since June 1993 and has seen many changes over this period, not least the move of the Squadron from Netheravon to Dishforth in December 1993. Garry has been instrumental in providing a highly competent, well trained, professional and well motivated Squadron for the challenges that lay ahead. It is therefore unfortunate that his posting should fall at such a time to prevent deployment to Bosnia, especially as Garry has spent much of his two and a half years in command on standby for such a commitment.

The new Squadron Commander, Major Steve Marshall, has arrived at Dishforth from a tour with the Attack Helicopter Project Team at Middle Wallop and is busy re-acquaintance himself with life in a flying Squadron prior to taking command.

656 SQUADRON ASSOCIATION ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The AGM took place at Middle Wallop on 10 September 1995 during the Wallop Challenge weekend. It was strongly supported by the Committee and covered a wide range of topics. A copy of the Minutes of the meeting are enclosed along with a Statement of income and expenditure for the year ended 31 December 1994.

One subject mentioned at the AGM requires clarification: For some months the Squadron has been attempting to provide a 656 Squadron plaque for inclusion in the Malaysian War Memorial at Kuala Lumpur. Indeed a plaque has been dispatched but for some unknown reason has failed to arrive at its destination. A second plaque has now been dispatched and we hope to be able to report its safe arrival in the next News Letter so that this matter can be finally and rightfully resolved. Also discussed at the AGM was the introduction of a letters page to the News Letter. This is being coordinated by Mr Len Rogers and further details can be found, appropriately enough, on the 'Letters Page' that accompanies this news letter.

BRIGADIER D.W.COYLE MBE DFC RA

All Ranks 656 Squadron Army Air Corps were saddened to hear at the death of Brigadier Dennis Coyle on 8 December 1995. A wreath has been sent to his funeral on behalf of the Squadron and our condolences go out to his family, in particular his wife Valerie.

Brigadier Coyle was 656 Squadron's first commander back in December 1942. He had a long and distinguished flying career beginning after Dunkirk when he volunteered for Air OP duties. He was a founder member of 651, 652 and 656 Squadrons and served in a variety of flying and staff appointments both during and after the war. In 1960 he attended the Central Flying School and spent the two years as Officer Commanding Pilot Training Wing and Deputy Commandant of the Army Air Corps Centre.

656 SQUADRON REPRESENTATIVE

During the deployment to Bosnia a small Rear Party from the Squadron will be remaining at Dishforth. So it will still be possible to contact the Squadron. During this time, the Rear Party will be commanded by Captain Todd Braithwaite, our Royal Canadian Armed Forces exchange officer who has himself just returned from a 6 month tour in the Former Yugoslavia. Todd will 'be the nominated representative to deal with Association matters in Captain Guy Owen's absence, but please highlight correspondence with '56 SQUADRON ASSOCIATION' to ensure prompt attention.

The past year has been a busy time for 656 Squadron, but the New Year has potential to be significantly more so. The next Squadron news letter will, no doubt, contain much news of our deployment.

In the meantime it just remains for me to wish you health, happiness, and prosperity for Christmas and the New Year on behalf of the Officer Commanding and all ranks 656 Squadron Army Air Corps.

Signed:- G L Owen, Captain for OC.

656 SQUADRON ARMY AIR CORPS – XMAS GREETINGS TO ALL OF THE ASSOCIATION

The end of the year is finally with us and with it a time to pause and reflect on the past while at the same time looking forward to the future and all the promise that it holds. This past year has been a busy one for the Squadron, the most significant event of course being OP RESOLUTE the NATO led peace implementation force (IFOR) in the former Republic of Yugoslavia. Since the Squadrons return in the summer, there has been a chance to reconstitute the Squadron as a single unit, with several exercises in the autumn, including an exercise with 5 Airborne Brigade and a Lynx Flight deployment to Italy, which sadly the weather did not allow the Italians to reciprocate.

The most recent significant operational development has been the Government's announcement concerning the creation of the Joint Rapid Deployment Force or JRDF, of which 656 Squadron Army Air Corps is the lead aviation Squadron. What this has meant to the Squadron is that several vehicles are packed and ready to go, while members' interest in the news and in particular foreign affairs has been very keen. With each flare up of violence somewhere in the world the possibility of having to deploy as a part of a British response has become very real. These are undoubtedly feelings that many of you have experienced as you watched your country's response to world affairs and Indeed become part of that response.

As well as commanding Squadron's training and operations, the Officer Commanding, Major Steven Marshall continues to place high priority on improvements to the Squadron lines and the refurbishment and distribution of Squadron property. It is in re-hanging and repairing the many pictures, trophies and presentations that this unit's proud history is revisited by the present serving members. In the new year there will be a full Squadron Newsletter announcing the date for a Squadron Open Day, when hopefully many of you will be able 'to visit the Squadron and see much of your and our history on display.

On behalf of the Officer Commanding and all ranks of 656 Squadron Army Air Corps I would like to wish all of you the very 'best of holiday seasons and a prosperous and Happy Jew Year.

Signed:- J T Braithwaite Captain 21C 656 Squadron Army Air Corps.