



# THE CHINTHE



## 656 Squadron Association Newsletter

Spring 2001

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### YOUR ASSOCIATION CONTACTS

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### **Please remember to**

**notify the membership secretary of any change of address, or phone numbers.** The members using **Email**, remember, when you change your ISP you lose your old address. The ability to send you these newsletters by Email saves quite a cost to the Association in postage, stationery and labour! Not to mention full colour pages!

I know we don't like to talk about it, but please, leave clear instructions for your next of kin to contact membership records, so firstly, if possible, we can get a representative to attend the funeral, and then to also avoid sending distressing correspondence. As Membership is open to any relatives of persons connected to 656, they may wish to continue with the Association in their own rights.

## Secretary's report

This report will be very difficult to write as my guiding light is no longer able to give his expert advice. I have tried sitting down many times to get the newsletter under way, but I am lost for what to say. Nobby and I had planned some good articles to include, the first of which will be in the Autumn edition. I have included a supplement on Nobby's sad death which has an obituary by Ted Maslen-Jones, a write up of the service and thanks from Claire.

On March 14, just 6 days before Nobby hung up his cap, we had a round table meeting at Joint Helicopter Command HQ at Wilton, with Brig. Gary Coward, Col Andrew Simkins, Maj Tim Sharp, Maj. Neil Dalton (OC Designate), Captains Ian Johnson, Alex Rogers and Jake Van Beever representing the Squadron, Nobby and myself. The purpose was to make a final decision upon a suitable gift for the Squadron to celebrate 60 years. Very early on in the session Nobby took a set of drawings out of his brief-case to show his concept of a showcase to display squadron items. These were immediately accepted by all, which saved a lot of alternate discussion, so we were able to look at them in detail. After our return I had a number of phone discussions with Nobby to finalise the details, and then sent the drawings off to three manufacturers for quotations. As these and also an artists impression of them are not yet finished they will be a main item of the AGM and included in the next newsletter.

Owing to the need to include the supplement should members wish to preserve it, I am sending the newsletter to all members by post this time. In future I intend to send them by Email where possible, to speed delivery and keep costs down. This way you also get them in colour. They will be in Adobe Acrobat form, and if you don't have this on your computer then go to [www.Adobe.com](http://www.Adobe.com) and download the free acrobat reader. Will **all** members with a PC on the Internet, (and anyone getting one in the future) please Email me at

656-sqn-assn@BTInternet.com

so I have an up to date record of your Email address. Even if you know I have your address, please resend it as I have a new PC and have lost most of the original address book.

John Bennett

## **Squadron Commanders report.**

After a long break, that included post operational tour leave for many, and the Christmas block leave for all, the Squadron regrouped on 8 January fresh and raring to go. With a large influx of new Airtroopers and changes in virtually all the key positions, the first priority was a shake out exercise. The Squadron therefore moved to a Forward Operating Base in Driffield for 36 hours. This gave us the opportunity to practice basic drills that needed to become second nature by the time the Squadron deployed on the Tactical Engagement Simulation Exercise Druid's Dance in March. It also helped us get back into the air assault mindset after nearly a year away from it.

Having got rid of some of the rust, the next challenge was the Brigade Exercise Eagles Flight. This was a chance to do some Squadron training, rounded off with a live firing raid on Castle Martin. Despite the best laid plans of mice and men, the weather was to curtail much of the training. By the end of the first day, only two helicopters had made it to the Forward Operating Base on Salisbury Plain. The rest were strewn out across the country as Aircraft Commanders and Patrol Commanders had rightly listened to the old saying – it is better to be on the ground wishing you were in the air than in the air wishing you were on the ground. By the end of the next day seven of the Squadron's ten aircraft had managed to reach Salisbury plain. With four Lynx TOW and three Gazelles we had enough combat power to do the raid. However, the forecast weather was again marginal. After a five hour delay whilst we waited for the fog to clear the decision was made to give it a go and the raid was launched. Sadly we only made it to within about twenty miles of the target location where we were again frustrated by fog and had to turn round. With the weather closing in around us we only just made it back, arriving at the same time as the missing three Gazelles. With better weather forecast, we needed to make the most of it before we had to hand over the aircraft to 664 Squadron around midday the next day. With some hasty planning we managed to put together a very

concentrated scenario that practiced most aspects of our role. After the disappointment of the previous day, this 'successful' mission was just the tonic that was needed and the Squadron was able to return to Dishforth satisfied with having achieved something despite the weather.

The highlight of the second week of Eagles Flight was an 'escape and evasion' exercise for the aircrew. The hunter force consisted of the groundcrew, a troop from the QDG and three tracker dogs. The weather was suitably cold and wet. After a search of their kit to ensure no contraband was taken, the aircrew were dropped in pairs at different locations around Catterick training area. The wet weather proved to be a blessing in disguise as the dogs were unable to pick up the scent of the evading aircrew. Despite the best efforts of the hunter force only two of the escaping teams were captured. All the aircrew were then picked up by a Lynx the next day. The cost to the OC in bottles of champagne for those who managed to evade was considerable!

Foot and Mouth then reared its ugly head and all exercises were cancelled, including Druid's Dance. The focus of the Squadron's efforts has therefore now shifted to an operational deployment to Kosovo and three Overseas Training Exercises. A detachment of two Gazelles has already departed to Kenya and another detachment of two Gazelles is preparing to deploy to Kosovo in mid May. Later in the year we have a two Gazelle detachment going to Canada and a further two Gazelles supporting an exercise in Kenya. Our groundcrew, whilst supporting these deployments are also catching up with their career courses.

Finally, the Squadron would like to pay tribute to Nobby Clark, the founding member of our association, who sadly passed away on 20 March. The OC represented the Squadron at the funeral. A Gazelle and an Auster did a fly past as the mourners emerged from the church - a fitting send off.

# YOUR ASSOCIATION

NEEDS



YOU

## AGM 2001.

Would all members please note that this year the AGM is more essential than before. With the loss of Nobby we need to now get a formal working committee to continue his excellent work. I would like to see as many members as can, attend at Langport on Sunday 10th June. It will start with the wreath laying at Huish Episcopi church at 12:00 noon. We will then move off to the Langport Arms for the meeting, prior to luncheon at 13:30. The cost of the lunch is unchanged at £7.50 per head, and children under 5 years is £4.00. You are welcome to bring along guests for the lunch. There is limited B & B / Hotel accommodation nearby for those who have to travel far, and Claire will guide you as to what is available. (Call her direct on 01458-250009).

### Agenda

Volunteers/Proposals needed to fill the following positions:

- A) Treasurer
- B) Vice treasurer
- C) Deputy secretary / Newsletter editor
- D) Review of Subscriptions. (added cost of postage etc)

*(Continued on page 7)*

*(Continued from page 6)*

For these positions it would be advantageous if the nominee has use of a PC and Email, so all the committee can 'talk' and make decisions for the good and benefit of the Association quickly, without needing an 'eyeball' meeting. Please do your utmost to attend, and notify me of numbers, enclosing a cheque for payment for the lunch, as soon as you can.

If you are unable to attend, please complete the proxy form. If you should volunteer or nominate someone, please ensure they are aware of it, and that they would accept the position should it be voted in.

### **CHARITY**

One of Nobby's last charities was the Gurkha Welfare Trust, and for his funeral donations were requested for this very worthwhile cause. Nobby had also 'adopted' a Gurkha soldier, (which Claire is continuing to support)

I would like to think the Association would support these gallant men who served alongside us, but at the end only receive a pittance to survive on. The Trust provides a 'pension' of £20 per month to over 1100 individuals, all of which comes from 'adoptions' or donations to the fund. I would like to see a proposal from a member that we continue Nobby's work and donate to this Trust in whatever way we can.

An increase in subs to £3 per year would not only cover our increased expenditure, but also provide a pension for a Gurkha. Any other fund raising will help provide medical assistance. To start the ball rolling, at the Dishforth reunion, Eric Downing will offer short flights in his Auster at £10 a time. This will be split 50 / 50 between his operational costs and the GWT.

I need to know your vote so please complete the enclosed proxy form and return it to me before 1st June if you are not attending the AGM.

## THE BURMA CHALLENGE 2000

Traditionally, when an AAC Squadron deploys to Bosnia, it takes the opportunity to raise funds for charity, be it for a local Bosnian cause or a UK charity. Prior to 656 Squadron's deployment last year it was decided that there could be no better way to keep fit than to raise money along the way, thus turning sweat into money! The "Burma Challenge" was born.

The challenge consisted of a 6719 mile run and row, to be completed collectively as a Squadron. This was the distance the Squadron travelled on its first operational deployment to Burma back in 1943 during the Second World War. The aim was to raise a pound a mile or in other words a total of £6719. We were going to run or row every mile, depending on whether the route took us over land or sea. The original route would have meant us rowing most of the way, so we decided to modify it because most of our PT would consist of running and there were only a limited number of rowing machines in theatre. The final route thus reflected the one we would have taken today. This consisted of a two third running, one third rowing split.

With the idea in place our next task was to promote it and seek sponsorship. The Squadron Second in Command wrote to all of the 656 Association members (400+ as at last February), and all squadron members took a sponsorship form home on pre-tour leave. All that was left to do was to complete the 6719 miles!

Once in Bosnia it soon became apparent that for three reasons it was going to be more of a challenge than we first thought: it was hot, it was going to get hotter, and we were at a density altitude comparable to Ben Nevis! Despite these handicaps, the Squadron hit the ground running...quite literally! Our target of 1100 miles a month was being achieved as the temperature rose and we entered into the summer season. Concurrently we were raising even more money from within by the implementation of "Burma Tax" on all prizes at our pool, darts and quiz nights.

The target was achieved with the last mile completed on the Corps Birthday (1<sup>st</sup> Sept).

So how much did we raise and where did it go? The final total was £6010.48p, although slightly short of our target of £6719 it was still a creditable amount. We donated £1000 to each of the two local schools in Gornji Vakuf, in the form of reading material. Our UK charity, Action Against Breast Cancer received £4010.48p.



The Burma Challenge was finally rounded off with the visit of David Jason to the Squadron on 5 April 2001 to receive, as their patron, a cheque on behalf of Action Against Breast Cancer. Also there was John Bennett who braved the elements and drove up to North Yorkshire to represent the Association. A special thanks to everybody who helped us to raise the money as well over half the total raised came from the Association in the form of personal contributions and a generous donation of £500 from the Association Raffle at the MWIAS 2000.

Once again thank you,

WO2 Carl Evans.

## Deaths

Regretfully we announce the deaths of the following members, and offer condolences to their friends and relatives.

Mr S.O. Taylor	(38)	Died 4th November 00
Maj S. Bristow	(280)	Died 26th August 00
Mr S.G. Butcher	(79)	No dates known
Mr J.A. Crossen	(373)	No dates known
Mr R.A. Beynon	(227)	Died 10th March 01
Mr H.C.Clark	(2)	Died 20th March 01

## Diary Dates

A.G.M. & Burma Luncheon.

Langport                      12:00 hrs                      10th June 2001

Reunion—Dishforth                      8th Sept 2001

Dinner See notices

## DISHFORTH 2001

The main reunion will be as usual at the airfield, meeting in the new hangar at 11:00 for introductions etc. Various entertainment will be laid on, as well as a finger buffet and beer. This will need to be paid for by members as before, at a cost of £8.00 each. Please let me know names of members and guests, along with your cheque (to 656 squadron Association) to cover. A major attraction this year will be 2 members flying in with their own Austers, and there may be a chance of a short flight, but at a price! See AGM page.

I am trying to arrange a dinner night after the daytime reunion. I had hoped to use one of the units Messes, but it was refused, so we are looking to some local hotel/restaurant. As there won't be a further newsletter before the date if you want a dinner night please ring me during July and I should by then know where and how much. I have asked that the cost be kept below £18.00 if possible, and again names and monies to me before the date.

## History and Archives

How many times have you heard that someone regretted when an elderly relation passed away their memorabilia and artefacts were disposed of, as they were meaningless to others? It happens all too often as 'house clearance' men dispose of un-saleable items into the rubbish, or relatives have no care after the initial sorrow phase passes, and dispose of them.

PLEASE do not let this happen to anything you own connected with 656 Squadron. Get your relatives to be aware of it, put it in your will, do what you may but please, ensure that anything, no matter how minor it may seem, is sent to the Secretary of the Association. Photo's, letters, diaries all contain an historic aspect of the Squadron.

Even better, why not send them now so you can guarantee they are preserved. We can then decide if and where items should be best kept or copied

I would like to thank Claire Clark for the donation of Nobby's medals and his trophy to the Squadron. It is hoped to run some form of annual competition for the trophy, whilst his medals will be displayed in the new showcase.

### NEW MEMBERS SINCE LAST NEWSLETTER

518	Mr S.J. Beauchamp	RAF	Seletar, Ipoh, KL Korea '49-'51
519	Mr D.C. Key	RAF	57 Noble field '57-'58 Sembawang/ Kluang
520	Mr O. R Merrick	AAC	80-84 Farnbro', Falklands, N'Avon
521	Mr P. Fissler	REME	53-66 Kluang
522	Mr P. Murray-Hoodless	RA	56-57 1902 LL Flight. Ipoh
523	Mr L.P. Brighton	REME	58-60 2 Flt Ipoh
524	Mr P.F.B. Cuppage MiD	RA	48-50 1907 Flt KL
525	Mr M.J. Outridge	REME	52-53 1903 Flt Korea
526	Mr A. Dobson.	RAC/AAC/ RM	79-81 F'boro
2	Mrs C. Clark BEM	Associate	Keeping Nobby's place
527	Mr K.R. McCartney	REME	98-01 Dishforth
528	Mr C.D.A. Evans	AAC	99-01 Dishforth

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### **SPECIAL OFFER**

*To 656 Squadron Association Members only:*  
Limited edition prints, **signed by David Shepherd**.  
Print only £80 each. Framed £140 each



656 Squadron, Auster in N. Malaya 1962  
by David Shepherd oee



Falklands Casavac, by David Shepherd oee

If you would like a copy of these fine pictures, or to find out what other paintings are in stock, please call Dave Whiteley direct. (David is a member of the Association)

This is a paid advert. To promote your business in the newsletter, call John Bennett