

**THE  
CHINTHE**



**656 SQUADRON ASSOCIATION  
JOURNAL  
SPRING 2010**

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# OC's REPORT

In the last 12 months the Squadron has deployed to and returned from Afghanistan once again showing the rest of the AAC how Attack Aviation is done. The last OC, David Amlôt, has moved up to Regimental Headquarters to work for the current Commanding Officer and last, last OC, Andy Cash. And I, Mike Neville, have moved in as OC.

656 has always been at the forefront of military aviation and as I write we are about to innovate again. We are to become the AH Operational Conversion Unit (OCU). This means we will train all Apache Pilots in fighting the aircraft. We will also be reinvigorating the maritime capability as well as taking on the AH High Readiness role.

I see the next 18-24 months as decisive in shaping the Squadron's new role. There is tremendous opportunity in delivering operational relevance beyond Afghanistan – and we are going to drive it.

Early 2010 will see us live firing on exercise at Otterburn, spending some time at sea, climbing in Spain and for the lucky few a bit of skiing in Austria.

We all need to undergo mandatory sea survival courses before building up the maritime capability with deck landings and an embarked exercise later in the year. The hard work will continue with the OCU starting in September. However, the rewards will come; it was not difficult to sell the appeal of exercising in Arizona. The attraction of doing bespoke, unusual soldiering where real team-work and initiative make the difference is certainly motivational. 656 has a great bedrock of talented young soldiers all raring to get on with the task.

Finally, I had the pleasure of meeting many of you at Middle Wallop last year at the Reunion. The committee did a fantastic job. This year we invite you all to Wattisham on the 3rd and 4th July. Preparations are well underway and we look forward to seeing you for what will be an enjoyable weekend.

Happy New Year and all the best for 2010.

*Mike Neville*



## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

I am writing this end of year report from Kabul Airport, Afghanistan where British Forces have completed another year of operations in testing conditions. It is humbling to hear of their unending commitment and professionalism. We can be extremely proud and respectful of what they continue to achieve on our behalf.

Our 2009 Reunion at the Museum of Army Flying was certainly a major event with a busy programme. I was delighted that the International Auster Club accepted our request to hold another Fly In. As Middle Wallop is an historic airfield, we were able to attract over 50 Austers to participate over the weekend. The Museum is a natural setting for such an event and the Saturday evening Dinner proved a lively evening. While the Sunday activities were varied and generally enjoyable, we did encounter problems with Air Traffic Control, which held up the flying programme. Therefore, if you were disappointed in not achieving an Auster flight we extend our apologies. Useful lessons were learned, and the Auster Club are very keen to retain a close link with the Association. We are looking to hold another joint event in 2011. Overall, it was a wonderful weekend with perfect weather, great flying and warm company.

We held a very enjoyable 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday Lunch for Ted Maslen-Jones MC DFC in early November, in the Officers' Mess, Middle Wallop. Also present were Ray and Alice Pett, and Arthur and Margaret Windscheffel. Great warmth and camaraderie were in large supply. A three Auster Flypast was the icing on the cake.

Sadly, two weeks later, Arthur Windscheffel passed away peacefully at home. He was a month short of his 101<sup>st</sup> Birthday. It is a measure of the man that he had a Squadron Guard of Honour at his funeral, which was a fitting farewell to a true gentleman and staunch supporter of the Association. He will be sorely missed, although I am delighted that his loving family will retain their close links with us at our annual events.

The Association also said farewell to three other Burma veterans, with the departing of Bob Henshaw, Basil Appleton and Gwyn Thomas. They were special gentlemen who played vital roles in the Squadron's support of the 14th Army in driving the Japanese out of Burma.

We honour all our departed members who served the Squadron, Queen and Country with loyalty, humour and professionalism. As a mark of our respect, the Association formed contingents at the Armistice

Parades in both London and at the National Memorial Arboretum, Staffordshire. Both were very emotional and fitting events.

Our committee members continue to undertake sterling work. I am delighted to report that John Heyes has recovered from his cancer with spirit and determination. It is a measure of his and Sylvia's dedication to the Association that they have both continued to serve us all throughout uncertain times. John Bennett enthusiastically maintains his responsibilities from France, while Mark Meaton has willingly tackled a broad portfolio including keeping our accounts in order. Mark and Derek Walker have also started to put our extensive archives in good order, with the help of a lottery grant. I am also delighted to welcome Reg Goodwin to the committee. We are very well served. It is therefore no surprise that membership numbers continue to grow. I extend a collective thanks from us all.

With an eye to the future, I am delighted that we have a good programme of events for 2010. We are arranging another trip to Singapore and Malaysia in May. The costs are remarkably competitive, and you can find details elsewhere in the Journal. I guarantee it will be a most memorable experience.

I am also delighted that the Squadron will host our reunion at Wattisham, Suffolk over the weekend of Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> and Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> July. Again you can find details in the Journal.

Wishing you a contented 2010, and I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible in Singapore and/or Wattisham.

*Andrew Simkins*



# SINGAPORE, MALAYSIA TOUR 2010

The tour dates are:-

Depart London Heathrow	Wednesday 19 <sup>th</sup> May
Return to London Heathrow	Saturday 29 <sup>th</sup> May

The tour will commence in Singapore for three nights. It is intended that we visit Kranji military cemetery whilst in Singapore.

After Singapore a luxury coach will take the party to Kluang to visit Malaysian Army Air Corps and after lunch, historically the Malaysian Army Air corps have entertained us for lunch in their Officers mess but this is still to be confirmed, we will proceed to Kuala Lumpur for four nights. Whilst in Kuala Lumpur we will visit the Malaysian Army museum at Port Dickson and pay our respects at the military section of the Christian cemetery at Cheras road. If possible we will also visit the site of Noble Field at Mindef.

The tour will go by luxury coach from Kuala Lumpur to Penang. We will call at Ipoh, where we will stop for lunch at The Casuarina Hotel, and then on to Taiping en route to Penang. We will spend two nights in Penang before flying back to Kuala Lumpur for the return to UK

You are not obliged to go on all the side trips. If you feel that there is somewhere that we have not covered then please let us know so that we can try to include your ideas.

Total cost for the tour is currently £1395 per person sharing and £1919 single occupancy. If the pound strengthens against the Malaysian Ringgit then the cost could go down. In today's financial climate, a cost of £126 per day for a holiday to the Far East is very competitive.

If you wish to join the tour, please fill in the form enclosed with the journal and return it to John Heyes before 28th February. ***Bookings may be made later than this date but there may be a financial penalty for the late booking.***

Contact details for John Heyes can be found on page 47.



# REUNION 3rd July 2010

## Wattisham Airfield, Suffolk

Schedule of events are as follows:

**1100hrs AGM** in the Briefing Room

**From 1200hrs** Buffet Lunch in the Crew Room  
Association Shop will be open in the Crew Room

**1300 hrs** Squadron Display:

There will be Apaches and other equipment on the ground for viewing. We are hoping that we will have a flying display by an Apache helicopter, Auster joy rides, care of the International Auster Club, and Glider joyrides, care of the Army Gliding Club. We are also negotiating for the use of the Apache simulator. All of the above is subject to confirmation at a later date.

**1800hrs** The coach will be leaving the Travel Lodge at Stowmarket, for the evening dinner.

**1900hrs Dinner** served in the Wos' & Sgts' Mess.

**2359hrs.** Coach leaving the Mess for the Travel Lodge, Stowmarket.

Please be aware that if you wish to take your car on to the airfield you will be required to give us your car Registration number, make and model of car and names of each person in the car, in advance. There is a form enclosed with this Journal. You should also carry photo ID, either a driving licence or passport or similar, both for the afternoon events and for the Dinner in the evening.

If you wish to attend the reunion and/or the dinner, please return the booking form enclosed with this Journal as soon as possible, but before the 14th May.

If you wish to take advantage of the pre-booked hotel rooms at the Travel Lodge, Stowmarket, please be aware that is strictly on a first come, first served basis. We have a total of 25 rooms reserved. There is a shortage of hotel accommodation in the whole area, over this weekend, due to a large stock car meeting taking place. These rooms can **ONLY** be booked through John Heyes using the enclosed form.

We look forward to seeing as many of you as possible.

## 656 SQUADRON - FALKLANDS TOUR 1985

*This article first appeared in the 1986 AAC Journal .*

*Unfortunately, we do not know who the author is, but have the kind permission of the AAC Journal Editor to reproduce it in our own Journal. Ed.*



*Port Stanley*

How does anyone describe a Falklands Isles tour and maintain the reader's interest? Indeed, what makes the Falklands 'special' when compared with Belize or Northern Ireland for instance?

It's a remote place as we all know, yet it seemed so very familiar when we first arrived, on a snowy day in May. There cannot be many of us who did not stare avidly at the TV screens during every phase of the conflict. Taking to memory such places as Mount Tumbledown, Goose Green and Stanley. We found it exciting and humbling to see these places for real; to pause and remember those scenes of conflict.

We were the lucky ones of course. With no roads outside of Stanley, helicopter transport had a tremendous bargaining power for those 'little extras' so hard to find down South!

Probably the majority of the Forces serving in the Falklands see so little of what the islands can offer and spend up to five months living and working in a hut like an oversized shoe box on a radio, radar or Rapier missile site.

At first glance, it's a desolate, windswept and barren place - similar to The Hebrides.. There are no fields and little indicating the presence of Man. We soon learned that a 'settlement' could mean just one house in an area. It was curious to see that all buildings had 'wriggly tin' roofs in a variety of colours, from pink to blue. It was the aircrews pleasure to visit as many of these places as possible, around normal sorties, to maintain contacts with the communities. More importantly, the coffee and home made cakes, made in the inevitable peat-burning Rayburn stoves, were delicious.



*Murray Heights, the Air Squadron base*

You may well ask about the sheep! Much to our surprise we saw very few. I'm informed that in the UK we farm approximately forty sheep per acre. In the Falklands, the grass being so poor, they manage three in the same space. Though the sheep are many, they don't stand out so well! All our meat including lamb, was shipped down from England courtesy of the Navy.

The Navy, with their floating helipads and ever open bars, formed one of the real pleasures of serving in the South Atlantic. At one time the Squadron Commander visited three ships in one day and found light blue berets welcoming him on all of them - a testament to the mutual admiration society we formed with the matelots. It was therefore no hardship to be ordered to South Georgia aboard one of the HM Ships, complete with Gazelle, to support troops there.



*Approach to South Georgia*

Arriving on the RFA Olwen after our 'Murray Height' haven, was almost too much of a culture shock to bear. It was warm! There were no draughts, the food was superb, laundry cleaned *and* ironed daily. We had a large heated hangar for the aircraft and joy of joys, one's own cabin complete with telephone - and a steward who

brought us tea in the morning and made the bed! It was beyond belief after braving the Falklands snowstorms to find a Portaloo!



*HMS Avenger*

My first doubts concerning the wisdom of the trip and the cushy existence of the sailors, were raised after two days at sea. It blew a bit! In fact, it blew so much that a wheelhouse on the top deck disappeared. At the same time, the hand rails were crushed by a wave and walking the exposed decks became rather unappealing. At this stage I began to believe that sailors earn every penny they get. The ship had to turn

around into the wind for nearly seventy two hours, to ride out the storm and to avoid breaking her back or hitting a submerged iceberg.

At last we arrived and anchored off the abandoned whaling station of Grytviken, now home to the troops in South Georgia. It was an incredible sight. The mountains and the gleaming walls of ice seemed to float on the sea. It was as if the Swiss Alps had been sliced off and laid upon the ocean giving an austere and forbidding beauty to the place.

It was time for the Gazelle to earn her keep since the sea was too rough to launch the ships' boats; with icebergs for company, we set about shuttling men and stores ashore. We lost count of the lifts at around forty, carrying either three passengers or 600 lbs of stores at a time. It was rewarding work and a pleasure to pay back some of the kindness shown to us on board. During the next few days, in company with a Lynx from HMS Avenger, we carried out a multitude of tasks including patrol insertions, route reces and area familiarisation trips. The sights were breathtaking, including giant elephant seals, reindeer, seal colonies and penguins beyond count! The land was so rugged that I found it hard to believe how Shackleton could have crossed these ice mountains and glaciers in 1914 following a winter afloat on an ice-floe and an epic 800 miles in an open boat, finally reaching help for his comrades at the Stromness Whaling Station. The ground was so rugged that given the option, I would ditch on the shoreline as I consider rescue overland to be impossible. Shackleton later died of natural causes and is buried in Grytviken. He was quite a man.

The rest of the tour and the trip home were uneventful. (If you can call three winter seasons in a row, uneventful). To see the Falklands, it's people and the South Atlantic, was a unique experience. Apart from the shoe box Portacabins which are shortly to be replaced, I would recommend the tour to anyone. (Safe in the knowledge that I'm presently at 32,000 feet in the back of a Hercules en route for Kenya and a well earned sun tan).

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# MEMBERS CONTRIBUTIONS

## KOREA

### **1903 Independent AOP Flight in Korea.**

Some memories from a REME VM1 attached

*by Mike Outridge*

A five year apprenticeship in the motor trade ended in 1951 and His Majesty decided that my newly acquired skills could be usefully employed in his Army, so I was invited to attend No.2 Training battalion REME in Honiton, Devon, as a National Serviceman, to learn the art of soldiering. Following my square bashing, (ah, happy days,) I was posted to 9 Central workshop at Bicester near Oxford. This, the reader will note, was a GUN workshop, Bofors and 3.8 AA but no vehicles to work on, but I suppose the Army, in its infinite wisdom, assumed that as guns were held together with nuts and bolts and I was skilled in the art of using a spanner, I would be of some use.

Shortly after arriving at Bicester, I had the temerity to tell an ASM that he was talking tosh, (at least, I think that was the word I used) on a particular subject related to vehicles and a week later I found myself on the way to Southampton bound for Korea where, on arrival in Pusan, I was posted to 1903 Independent AOP Flight at Fort George by Pintail Bridge on the Imjim River, to take charge of and be responsible for, the



*1903's location after moving to SW end of strip. Kamaksan in Background. LAD. and football pitch to right main MSR Parallel with strip.*

first line of maintenance of the fifteen vehicles on the unit, a mixture of Bedford QL's and Land Rovers. The CO at the time was Major Ronnie Levenson Gower. The flight personnel were a mixture of RAF (Ground crew) and Royal Artillery, drivers and radio operators, the pilots being RA Officers.

My duties were not all that demanding for a newly fledged motor engineer, mainly getting the fifteen strong fleet up to scratch mechanically and trying to keep the aluminium bodies of the Land Rovers on the chassis, a losing battle against Korean roads at the time. We later had Jeeps to replace the Land Rovers.

I discovered that it was possible to fly as rear observer in the M6 Austers operated by the flight and could earn 12/6d per week (62.5p or one shilling and a halfpenny an hour in old pence) if I could log twelve hours flying a week. That of course was impossible for me. However, I did manage quite a few trips in the back seat, my first being an introduction to the sharp end, chauffeured by the late Capt. Joe Luscombe, an Australian Officer. Joe, feeling it was necessary for me to understand the layout of the front line area, went down to about 1,200ft (the usual operating height

was up to 8,000 ft) pointing out the various features like hill 355, the Hook and the Sami-chon river etc., completely oblivious to the black puffs of smoke appearing in the vicinity. Sadly, we later lost Joe when, it was thought, his rudder cable was



*L - R Capt Tees (Canada) Capt Ken Perkins  
Capt Deacon (Australia) Capt Joyce*

shot through and, although he made it back over the strip, he lost control, swung away, and crashed into the north bank of the river. On one occasion, whilst flying with Capt. Joyce, I decided to make myself useful, so, from the map on my knees, gave him the co-ordinates of some flashes I had seen below. Fortunately *HE* knew where we were and refrained from calling fire down on the reference I had given him, it was

one of our 4.2 mortar positions, so I decided to keep quiet and admire the view.

Parachutes were only issued after we lost a spotter plane, I can't recall the name of the pilot, but this was fortuitous for my counterpart in 1913 Light Liaison Flight based at the opposite end of the strip. He was flying as observer on a recce when they were shot down. This was shortly before the end of the fighting, so he was only a prisoner for a short time. Apparently, he had been one to grumble about the quality of the food on 1913, so as one of the lads remarked, 'He's got something to moan about now'.

Capt. Ken Perkins (later Major General) was my boss as MTO and he was a good officer to work for. One day, during the monsoon season, I was struggling in the pouring rain to get a bolt undone on the hub of a QL, when I heard the 'squelch, squelch' of approaching footsteps and a pair of muddy flying boots stopped nearby. Without looking up I



*Capt Ken Perkins with Section Cat. Ken used to take it up on a sortie where it spent time on the floor under the rudder pedals.*

continued to struggle, a voice attached to the boots said 'Ah, Outridge I –' and before the voice could continue, I, without looking up and still struggling with the aforementioned bolt said, 'Oh, bugger off' whereupon the boots turned around and squelched away. I looked up and saw Ken Perkins, equally soaked to the skin, struggling through the mud. 'Golly gosh' I thought, or words to that effect, I'd better go and apologise. I located Ken at the entrance to his bivouac surveying his bed and most of his possessions floating in about 2 ft of water. Not the appropriate time for a humble REME body to apologise to a Captain. However, I did and typical of the man he said, 'You understand that I could have charged you with dumb insolence, but I could see you were in a sticky situation just as I am'. I decided that a little help was worth a great deal of pity and helped him clean up. I reminded Ken of this occasion at a Flight reunion a couple of years back and, again, typical of the man, he



*April 1953  
L: 'Lofty' Boocock  
R; Self , (Mike Outridge)  
Just back from road test*

said 'I probably deserved to be told to bugger off given the circumstances at the time'.

Another more amusing incident comes to mind. It concerned a certain NCO who was rather a nasty piece of work. He had no idea of man management and thought his tapes made him God's gift to the Forces. He was a bully. Toilets on the flight were shell cases at an angle pushed into the ground for urinals and forty gallon petrol drums dug into the ground with a wooden seat on top, for thunder boxes. The method of destroying the waste was to pour petrol into the drum via a chimney set in the above ground section of the drum, throw in a match and run like hell. One such thunder

box, a twin seater, was sited on top of a high bank above the Imjim, a pretty spot. Covered with hessian on a wooden frame at the sides, back and top, it was, in pleasant weather, a place to sit and contemplate and admire the view, something the aforementioned NCO did quite often. Comes burning out time and the RAF medic charged with sanitation duties, duly arrives at said thunder box, pours in the petrol in the time honoured fashion, followed by the match and runs. He was not to know (was he?) that a certain NCO was enjoying the view, but his description of said NCO legging it down to the river to cool his nether regions and with his shirt tails smouldering, earned him a few bottles of beer thereafter. The same NCO tried to charge SAC Ron Beynon for driving a Jeep. (RAF personnel were not supposed to drive Jeeps) He finished up with egg on his face because Ron had been given permission to use the Jeep by his Flight Commander.

Being a forward airstrip we were handy for 'lame duck' aircraft, damaged whilst on a sortie over the lines, to land in an emergency. Two such aircraft come to mind, the first an American Navy Corsair which landed, wheels up, having been hit in the engine which was belching smoke as it approached. Naturally, the prop was scrapped and the undersides of the wings were damaged too. However, the Americans arrived with a replacement engine and prop, borrowed a crane from the

local LAD lifted the aircraft up, pumped the undercarriage down, changed the engine and the prop, brought in a pilot and flew it away. The second aircraft that I recall using our facilities was a North American Harvard 'Mosquito' target marking machine, which, having been hit in the engine crankcase by small arms fire and lost its oil also crash landed on the strip, swung round, straddled the monsoon ditch at the side of the strip and burst into flames. About half a dozen of us rushed along the strip towards the stricken plane just as the crew were making a rapid exit along the wing. 'Watch out for the rockets!' screamed the pilot 'They're still under the wings'. Six bods hit the deck just seconds before the rockets decided it was time to leave the burning 'plane and bury themselves in the hills on the north bank of the Imjim. I don't know about the other five bods, but I can still taste the acrid smoke of the propellant as the rockets went over our heads at nought feet, or so it seemed at the time.



*L to R. Back Row :Gnr Hughes, LAC Goodfield, Gnr Boocock, WAC Wheat, LAC Henderson, SAG Master.*

*Front Row: LAC Pardoe, Gnr Harratt, Gnr Attreed, SAC Bennett*

Of course, there were sad occasions; there was a war in progress. The loss of my CO, Major Wilf Harris MC on Coronation Day in 1953, my 24<sup>th</sup> birthday. Members will recall the excellent article written in the Journal by his son Peter following his visit to the strip in the 1990's. The loss of SAC 'Tubby' Goodfield when the Auster in which he was flying crashed into the Imjim after hitting a cable strung across the river



*Maj Wilf Harris talking to Gen West  
I don't recall the names of the others*

to catch floating debris and protect the bridge. The loss of Alan 'Nobby' Bond, burnt to death when the stores went up in flames on December 9<sup>th</sup> 1952.

R and R (rest and recuperation) leave, was a welcome break and was spent in Japan. We were flown there in American Globemasters from Kimpo airfield just south of Seoul. On the first occasion, I stayed at Ibasu camp in Tokyo, this had been a WW2 midget submarine training base. On arrival we were allowed to swap our sweaty jungle greens

for clean ones and this we could do every day if we wished. There were no restrictions as to where we went, or what we did, it would have made no difference to men starved of female company even if there had been, the only 'must' was to be back at the end of the week to catch the 'plane back to Korea. I decided on sightseeing and travelled to Hiroshima to see the remains of a town devastated some seven years previously by the first atomic bomb, a very moving experience indeed.

Being attached to the RAF I could also go to Iwakuni, which I chose for my second R and R leave. This time I went with Peter Bellis a Gunner on the flight and we stayed at the Transit Hotel. It was quite an experience to sit at the same table for meals with Captains, majors etc., all bound for somewhere in the Far East. The rate of exchange on currency was, at the time, 1,000 yen to the pound sterling. With little or nothing to spend ones BAFS (British Armed Forces Vouchers) on in Korea, credits built up and £30 went a very long way in those days.

Weather wise, the climate went through three phases. Hot in summer, wet in the monsoon season, VERY wet and EXTREME brass monkey weather in winter. The Imjim River would freeze to a thickness of ice sufficient to support a 3 tonner and the ice creaked and groaned eerily at night. If you put your bare hand on the metal side of a truck you could lose the skin when trying to take the hand away. Rifle oil was thinned 50/50 with diesel oil to allow ease of movement of the bolt. The aircraft engines were shrouded in a thick grey blanket cover with a

sleeve that hung down beneath the engine cowl. An oil heater was put into the sleeve over night to stop the oil from congealing in the engine. I clearly remember the sound that the propeller of an overhead Auster made in the ice cold air. It was a hissing sound, the like of which I have never heard since. Our 'Hoochies' (huts made from anything we could scrounge) were heated by 'Chuffer stoves'. These consisted of a drum type body of the stove setting it alight. Care was needed in regulating the flow of fuel to avoid the stove going out of control. Great fun and very warm.

On July 23<sup>rd</sup> 1953, I was called into the flight office and told Her Majesty no longer required my services and I could go home. In a way I felt sad to be going, as 1903 was like a family. The Officers enjoyed a good relationship with the men whom they treated with respect and everyone worked well together. However, my time to depart had come, so I got a lift into Seoul, scrounged a lift with QANTAS airlines to Iwakuni in an old Dakota, (QANTAS operated from a scruffy hut outside an almost derelict school where I had dossed down for the night) Transferred to Kure (mislaying my rifle en route) and, having caught malaria (I had left my Mepacrin tablets in Korea) finished up in the Base Hospital in Kure (ah! Those lovely Aussie nurses) and then to the sickbay on the 'Asturias' with the first batch of returning POW's. The WO in the sickbay told me that my rifle had been found and handed in, so I removed the bolt from my pocket and told him what to do with it, politely of course.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> July fighting in Korea ceased. I used to tell my Grandchildren that the Chinese had learned of my departure from the forward areas and decided it was not worth carrying on the war without me, so signed the truce. They still believe Grandad, bless 'em.

In 2002 I made a return visit to Korea with fellow members of the BKVA (British Korean Veterans Association). We were guests of the Korean War Veterans Association and I only had to find my air fare and spending money (1,700 Won to the pound Sterling). We were treated like royalty wherever we went. Seoul, a city devastated when I left in 1953 had changed beyond belief. Magnificent buildings, broad tree lined avenues and the friendliness of the people was unbelievable. We attended a special dinner given in our honour at which we were presented with War Veterans Medals plus a set of cuff links and a tie clip. In some bars, drinks were on the house. A service held at Gloster Hill was very moving (I had been up that hill in 1952, twelve months after the battle) as was the trip to the Commonwealth Cemetery in Pusan where

I was able to pay my respects to Major Harris, Gnr Bond, SAC Goodfield and Capt Joe Luscombe in the Australian section. I could not help but note the many, many National Serviceman's graves in that cemetery identified by the service number on the bronze plaque which each grave carried. In fact, Korea is known as the National Serviceman's War.

The last place I visited out there in 2002 was the strip at Fort George, the wartime home of 1903. Prior to flying out to Korea, I had been in touch, via email, with the British Military Attaché, Brigadier John King, asking if it was possible to get to the strip. To his credit, he had arranged for me to be taken there with an escort (the strip was a military area). My escort was S/Sgt Kidd of the Royal Logistics Corps and Lt Jung of the Republic of Korea 25<sup>th</sup> Army. I was allowed to roam and I found the experience very emotional indeed.



*April 2002 almost 50 yrs to the day I arrived in Korea. back on the Airstrip.  
S/Sgt Kidd of British Embassy on left.*

Naturally, nature had taken over a lot of the area in the last 50 years, but the strip was still there, though with metal obstructions to prevent unauthorised landings, other than that, little had changed. The brooding mass of Kamaksan Mountain helped to bring many memories flooding back and I must admit a lump in my throat while I was there. However, the two thunder boxes overlooking the Imjim had gone, though two depressions in the ground bore testament to their previous existence.

Pintail Bridge, a pontoon type when I arrived in 1950 and replaced by a high metal structure, had gone, washed away in the monsoon floods when the river rose by some 30ft and doubled its speed.

My return trip to Korea, even though 50 years after my first stay, seemed to bring my brief military career full circle. I was privileged to serve alongside some first class officers and men, some of whom I see every twelve months at the Flight reunion. Ken Perkins retired from the Army with the rank of Major General after a very distinguished career, gaining a DSO and a DFC amongst his many decorations. When he left Korea, Ken commanded a Flight in Malaya. John Hoare, another pilot who retired as a Lt Col, also DFC now lives in Germany and Don Browne, who retired as a Major, also with a DFC sadly passed away three years ago, but he is remembered with affection and for his very low level pass over us just after takeoff when we were playing football against the local LAD whose pitch was just about 300 yards off the end of the strip. He was so low that we all hit the deck and even then felt the prop wash as he went over. All three fine pilots, very approachable and men who cared for those under their command and who I feel privileged to count as friends.

All ex servicemen have memories of their service careers, stored at the backs of their minds most of the time. Rarely do we refer to them, except at reunions when they can be added to. In writing this article I have enjoyed a trip down memory lane, even if some of the memories are sad and I thank John Heyes for giving me the chance to, mentally, relive my time in Korea with 1903 Indpt. AOP Flight.

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## HONG KONG

### HONG KONG MEMOIR 1963

by CJC

I joined 20 Independent Reconnaissance Flight in Hong Kong on 22 April 1963 from 14 Flight (656 Squadron), with which I had flown Auster 9s and Beavers in Malaya and Brunei/Borneo for most of my three-year, first flying tour. It was customary then for 656 Squadron to provide the pilots for its independent Hong Kong cousin, usually towards the end of their Malayan tours. The Flight Commander came straight from UK.

When Lieutenant Colonel Bob Begbie, CO 656 Squadron, gave me the chance of finishing my tour in Hong Kong, I was delighted. Borneo had gone quiet, but should operations re-intensify, as a Beaver pilot, I would return to 14 Flight. Meanwhile, as a mid-20's bachelor, I would enjoy the change and bright lights of Hong Kong.

Hong Kong was indeed a great change. Not only were the terrain and weather very different from Malaya/Borneo but also, whereas in 656 Squadron 40 to 60 flying hours a month was usual, in Hong Kong more than 20 hours was good going. The Flight's base was another big difference, with the simple conditions of the 656 Squadron locations contrasting the comforts of RAF Kai Tak and the facilities of Hong Kong International Airport. 20 Recce Flight had been at Shatin, a small airstrip by a cove in the New Territories, but Typhoon Wanda had done for that in 1962. Unit lines and aircraft were hit by a sea-surge up the cove and the Flight had to be evacuated. It was well-settled at Kai Tak when I arrived, with only the officer married quarters remaining at Shatin.

Awash from Wanda in 1962, the opposite occurred the following year in the form of drought. Unlike wet and green Malaya, Hong Kong was even more arid and brown than usual as no rain fell for months. The reservoirs dried out and people in Kowloon queued at standpipes with jerricans, with water available for four hours only, every fourth day. It was the same at Kai Tak. Eventually China provided some water, which eased the situation and as the mainland had no shortage, the novel idea developed of taking the ferry to Macau for a "clean weekend".

The 9 to 5, Monday to Friday, routine of RAF Kai Tak also contrasted with the more testing and varied conditions of 656 Squadron. In 14 Flight, especially at Paroi Camp (Seremban) and in Brunei, the challenges strengthened the bond between ranks and cap-badges. 20 Recce was part of 48 Gurkha Infantry Brigade, deployed in the New Territories on the Chinese border, with its HQ at Sek Kong. Although the

Flight was only 15 minutes flying time away, the field force atmosphere was absent at cushy Kai Tak. Brigade exercises and operations could be supported from base, although occasionally we set up under canvas at Sek Kong to refresh field skills. Back at Kai Tak, there were "smokers" and other unit get-together's, enlivened by the Flight's excellent, Shadows-like group, but the attractions of Kowloon tended to dominate free-time. Sport was mostly found in RAF teams and facilities.

Despite the restrictions of terrain and air space, Hong Kong was not bad for flying training. We did photo reconnaissance on the border, message and supply drops to patrols on the hills and islands and plenty of low-flying. Supplies dropped included straw and hay for the RASC's mules in remote places and much of the best low-flying was at water-skier level over the sea. There was Air Op on the sea-ranges at Port Shelter and also live Forward Air Control with 28 Squadron RAF's Hunters. The latter liked to play seek and evade games with us, using a cine-camera to record the action. With just one Hunter in pursuit, the Auster 9 had a good chance of escaping with low-level, tight turns, but a pair of Hunters did better. The de-briefs with film were interesting.

In Brunei/Sarawak, I had made good friends in the Fleet Air Arm Wessex and Whirlwind Squadrons from HMS Albion. So, when the carrier came to Hong Kong in September 1963, we gave its pilots their border familiarisation flights, as we also did for Ark Royal and other carriers, some of whose fast-jet pilots had difficulty staying within bounds. I recall Tai Mo Shan radar calling a Navy Phantom, "Turn 180° immediately. You are closing fast on Canton." We did deck landings on Albion and also practised sea-survival, being dropped, with life-raft, for a day of de-salination and fishing before being "rescued" and winched-up by a Wessex.

Malaya was better for operational movement with good areas for setting-up and running Advanced Landing Grounds, especially on the east coast. In Hong Kong, without padangs, jungle strips or suitable beaches, a cordoned-off area of Sek Kong airfield or stretch of road had to do. Another important missing element in such a confined area was long-range navigation. In 14 Flight, I had Beaver'd to the Thai-Laotian border, recce'd the Mekong, crossed the sea from Singapore to Sarawak and, with the Auster 9 as well, routinely plied the usual Malayan liaison routes.

All 20 Flight ranks flew regularly on air tests and recce - names from my log book include Adamson, Baird, Barrett, Booker, Collier, Docherty, Evans, Hardy, Kenny, Myles, Smith, Taylor, Walton, Watson and Winspear. Hong Kong is a spectacle from on high, especially at

night, and all were keen to get off the ground and away from base. Visitors too liked a spot of aerial sight-seeing.

I received the Editor's request for a piece about Hong Kong just before the 46<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the accident in which three of the Flight's five pilots were killed. My logbook entry for Thursday 25 July reads "Auster, XN 409, self, JFV, Kai Tak – search for XN 420 – Kai Tak, 2 hrs 20mins". The casualties were Major Peter Richardson (Flight Commander), Captain Ian Horsley-Curry and Captain Ian Stevens (the pilot).

The crash occurred on a 48 Brigade Study Day. I had set off early for Sek Kong in XN 409 with John Valenzia (JFV) on board. Ian Stevens followed later, delivering Peter Richardson and Ian H-C, and then returning to base. The Study ended in the late afternoon and I left with JFV for Kai Tak as XN 420 arrived to collect the other two. Just before Tai Mo Shan ridge, looking back towards Sek Kong, I could see 420 taking off, a few minutes behind me. Having landed at Kai Tak, we still had not heard 420 checking in, but thought that they might be returning by a longer, low-level route. In dispersal, I checked with air traffic control but they had heard nothing from 420. As this seemed odd, we got airborne again, made a few calls and, no contact made, raised the alarm. Even with radio failure, 420 should have appeared by now. Back at Kai Tak, we re-fuelled, removed the doors and took off to search. Failing to spot anything on the more likely routes, after a while I began some slow, half-flap descents down the gulleys running off the Tai Mo Shan ridge, with JFV hanging out of the open door peering into undergrowth not far below. On one of these, he spotted the wreckage, just off the top of route TWISK (Tsuen Wan Into Sekkong). We reported the position to Kai Tak. There were no signs of the crew but there was no fire either, so we remained hopeful. We saw Gurkha patrols starting to climb the ridge from the Sek Kong side and vehicles moving up TWISK and in the dusk tried to guide them. Eventually, the wreckage was reached by a Brigade rescue team, which found that no-one had survived.

The day had been very hot but the flying conditions not too bad. These can change quickly, however, and the enquiry, I believe, concluded that 420 had encountered turbulence or a downdraft near the ridge. The impact signs and damage indicated that the aircraft had stalled and spun in.

A brief memoir like this cannot deal properly with the effect of such a catastrophe on all concerned – families in particular, friends and colleagues and their personal emotions. That is another, much deeper

story. The next day, Cpl Docherty, with camera, and I flew over the wreckage and photographed the scene. We also passed low over HQ 48 Brigade to show that 20 Recce was still in business. Bob Begbie arrived from 656 on the Monday to see for himself and support the families. The whole Flight rallied in the aftermath, as the funeral, family administration and enquiry were dealt with. Replacement pilots soon arrived from 656, Lieutenant Chris Brown (RNZRA) in early August and Captain Vincent Edwards in September, followed, later in the year, by Sgt Moreton. Major John Crawshaw AAC came from the UK as Flight Commander in January.

In February 1964, I returned to Beavers, refreshing at Middle Wallop and going on to BAOR (12 Flight), with lasting memories of my times with 14 and 20 Flights, the latter sadly marred by the accident. Although fatal flying accidents had occurred in 656 Squadron during my tour and in the past, given the Malayan operational conditions, though always shocking, they were not unexpected. The 20 Recce Flight crash in July 1963 was both.

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# MEMORIES OF 656 SQN AAC IN HONG KONG - DEC 1969 TO OCT 1971

*by Rob Welsh*

The 656 connection really started when I was posted to 14 Flt AAC in Singapore as a Scout pilot fresh from Scout course at Middle Wallop in April 1969. My first meeting with the OC Maj Mike Riches included the words "you do know that you will go to Hong Kong at the end of the year when the Aussies take over from us here - don't you" ? So duly and in early December and when our Chinese landlord discovered he could get more rent from the Aussies for our bungalow I went, with my family, to Hong Kong a little earlier than planned. Thus becoming the first Scout pilot to go to Hong Kong from Malaya.

After the heat of Singapore the temperature in Hong Kong was quite a shock to us all as the temperature was about half of what we had become used to. The first priority was to get some warm clothes. This was easy enough for the family but was a little more difficult for me as the Chinese way of producing larger garments than they used was to make the body larger but leave the sleeves and neck the same size! The next problem was that having originally been posted to Singapore and on advice from friends who had previously served there, I had decided to leave a lot of my UK kit, including No 2 Dress, back home as it would not be needed/used. Wrong! - and as a result I arrived in Hong Kong without a No.2 Dress . Luckily the QM was a reasonable chap (maybe it was because he had been the RSM in 99 Bde in Singapore where 14 Flt was located and he knew me from there) and he gave me enough kit to get by on - as you can see in the photograph below of a quarter guard for a visiting General where I was the Guard Commander.



We were allocated a married quarter at 'Dills Corner' in the New Territories which took about 20 minutes to drive South to the 656 Sqn location which was based at Sek Kong. The Chinese border was about 2 miles to the north of our married quarter - so and if, the Chinese decided that they would invade Hong Kong we would be amongst the first to know! The Sqn location in Sek Kong was about an hours drive North from Kowloon. Although the distance in a straight line was probably only 10 miles or so from Kowloon it was necessary to follow route Twisk over the hills which lived up to its name in respect of twists and turns. This road had allegedly been built by the Royal Engineers years previously and rumour had it that somebody had their fingers in the till and was Court Martialled having sold off lots of cement to some Chinese person. The Sqn location was by a long and disused runway. This runway was supposed (I was told) to be a diversion airfield for large aircraft in the event that the Kai Tak International airport runway became unusable for fixed wing aircraft. This was quite bizarre because one end of the runway finished just short of 'Tai Mo Shan' - which was some 3000 ft high! Thus any overshoot, for whatever reason, from only one direction could have disastrous consequences. However and in my time it was only ever used as a parade ground and never used in anger for the purpose that it was built.

Sek Kong was the home of HQ 48 Gurkha Infantry Brigade who provided the real estate and all of the various general administrative needs for the Squadron and other small units located there - such as the RMP's, a Squadron of Cavalry (14/20<sup>th</sup> I think). In the village, which was about a mile from the base, there was a smallish married quarter patch of bungalows, where many of the Sqn personnel lived and the local BFES school where, amongst others, my children were also taught.

The role of the Sqn under the command of Maj Peter Ralph was not much different to most other AAC Units at that time in that it was basically reconnaissance and observation, liaison, troop lifting, casevac and aerial AOP. Some of the flying training was new in that we were flying over water a lot and had to take a keen interest in ditching procedures for obvious reasons and practice engine off landings were carried out so as to try and land on an area the size of a paddy field - which would in many cases have been all that was available in a real emergency. Later on and under the command of Lt Col Woodford we developed a new and additional role of a 'Quick Reaction Force' where a Sioux would provide overhead command and control for a formation of Scouts, carrying troops, to enable them to quickly place troops on the ground at tactical locations in the event of an Internal Security situation

developing. This procedure was practiced and developed both by day and night until we became quite slick at it. It seemed pretty effective as we could move a small force of men quickly from one place to another as situations required. Thankfully it was never used in anger in my time.

The Sqn had (I think) 10 Sioux and 8 Scout aircraft. One Sioux was fitted with rubber floats which caused it to wobble around on start up and bounce on landing! A more interesting experience with this Sioux was doing engine off landings onto water (using a local reservoir - Tai Lam). Height perception was quite difficult over water, especially if there were no ripples on the surface, so it was easy to misjudge the timing when cushioning the landing and find yourself with a few feet still to go and nothing left or leaving it a bit late and having the bubble virtually awash! If a proper 'engine off' had been carried out and a restart was necessary then it was strange experience as there was absolutely no control over the aircraft until the rotor rpm had built up and the aircraft rotated slowly and drifted sideways until the controls could take effect. It was possible to taxi around on the water but this could be quite tricky as it was easy to overdo it and start to dig the floats in and tip up!

The general flying was in some ways quite challenging as we had to contend with hot and high conditions and the various wind affects in and around the many high hills and rocky outcrops. In addition to this the typhoon season produced it's own batch of violent storms and strong winds/gales. Some of the HLS locations were more challenging than normal - for instance Victoria Barracks on Hong Kong island had a landing platform built into the side of a steep hill and which jutted out towards the sea. There was only one approach which was directly towards the hillside and thus there was no chance of an overshoot! If the approach had been downwind then the take off was best accomplished by a transition backwards with a controlled right pedal turn into wind.

We (the Scout pilots) did quite a lot of troop lifting which worked very well. The requirement was usually to move something like a Company of Infantry a short distance from the base of a steep hill to some point further up which, in the heat, would be both difficult and tiring to climb taking many hours with the troops exhausted at the end. It took us only a matter of a few minutes with each load to cover some really difficult terrain. Sometimes the RAF with Whirlwinds would work with us and it was weird to see the much bigger Whirlwind helicopters just lifting 2/3 troops whilst the Scouts were taking 4/5 soldiers.

Another different and interesting experience was the practice of dingy drill at sea! We were carried out a few miles offshore in a Whirlwind and jumped from it into the sea from about ten feet. This was nice and

realistic but the big drawback was the possibility of sharks being present. So it was 'all speed' to get the dinghy inflated and get out of the water and into it quickly! Some people were so quick with their inflation process that it seemed they were in the dinghy before it touched the sea! It was sobering sight once in the dinghy to see the local RCT launch on station with lookouts armed with rifles to pick off any marauding sharks - luckily no sharks appeared during my time - although I did see some whilst flying over the sea. Another and unforeseen problem to contend with was the fact that we were in our dinghies for about four hours and being out to sea, were subjected to the rolling caused by the waves. This resulted in seasickness from the constant motion on the waves.

The downside of flying in Hong Kong and the new territories was that it is only a small area (about 40 miles East-West and 30 miles North-South). The area became so familiar that often there was no need for reference to a map to get to a place and navigation was limited to very short distances indeed.

Social and family life was pretty good in Hong Kong as there were many diverse attractions for all who lived there. The wives loved the shopping areas of Nathan Rd in Kowloon and Hong Kong island plus the fact that clothes could be tailor made to your own specification both cheaply and speedily. Indeed many people continued to buy items from their tailor long after they left the Colony. There was plenty of night life with many restaurants, bars, clubs, cabaret and hotel functions.



*Summer Ball*

The local sailing club based at 'Gordon Hard' close to Castle Peak had racing every weekend in Enterprise and Bosun dinghies with full family participation along with barbeques on the beach. Water skiing using the club speed boats enabled many to learn the art or have a lot of fun failing! The Squadron also had a very nice and largish speedboat which could be used by members. It was a very sleek and powerful boat which unfortunately only survived for about a year. It came to grief in a bay in the Sharp Peak area, which was fairly remote on the Eastern side of the New Territories when the engine failed and it was washed ashore in heavy surf. I think it was Jeff Croot and family who were in it at the time and who managed to scramble ashore safely. They were eventually rescued after the Squadron duty pilot flew out to see where they were, when their return became overdue and alerted the emergency services.



*Sailing club annual prize giving*

I also remember a very good family outing which was organised by Maj Paul Walters when a group of families went by an RCT landing launch (the small one used for troop landings) from castle Peak to Lantau Island, which was at that time virtually uninhabited only having a few fishermen and a monastery on it, to have a picnic and beach party on one off the really nice beaches in a small cove.

Many of the children (including mine) of the Sqn personnel belonged to the local Cub Scouts which was very ably run by Jace

Sturgeon (our Sqn AQMS) and his wife. I remember the summer camp that they had at Gordon Hard at which the children had a great time.

We had good representation in a variety of sporting activities. The squash team performed very well and had some good players. The soccer team suffered from a lack of people to select from as did the water polo team but we managed to take part. I remember that several times we fielded a water polo team with no reserves thus every player had to be in the water for the whole match. This led to some spectacular cries and scenes when cramp set in amongst our players. Needless we never did very well - but, as you all know 'it's the taking part that counts' even if you nearly drown in the attempt.

A purely good fun sport that we took part in was the annual Hong Kong dragon boat races in which we entered two teams. One team sank because they were far too heavy and I think they started to sink before the race even started. The other boat managed to complete the race but was full of water at the end so there was no way we could compete with the well trained lighter Chinese. It probably would have been unacceptable to win anyway, even if we had been capable, as it would have been a big loss of face for the Chinese!



*Dragon boat and team*

Another annual sport (although I cannot remember any Brits entering) was the annual, so called, Kud race where very fit Ghurka soldiers raced up and over the top of a hill in Sek Kong called 'Nameless' which was about 1500 ft high and very steep on both sides. I was told that on the

downside the soldiers would leap forward and take up to 20 ft strides! It was a great honour to whoever won this race and all the participants trained very hard to give themselves the best chance of success.

I had the privilege to be invited to witness the Gurkha festival of Dasher. When the Gurkha soldiers dress up in their national dress and the ceremonial slaying by decapitation of a bullock takes place. It was pretty gruesome to see but it was a great insight to some of their religion and culture. It was a great honour for the soldier who was selected to represent the Regiment and who also some responsibility - because, he had to cut through the neck in one blow with a huge ceremonial Kukri. Needless to say that the soldier selected looked like an oriental version of Charles Atlas.

A few other and isolated memories of my time in the Sqn are:-

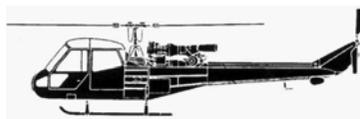
That of the Sqn dog 'Rebel' who was a great favourite and lived in the barrack block with the soldiers. She wandered around the Sqn area and was friendly to everyone. She used to like to take part in formal parades and would quite often investigate inspecting officers! I heard that some years later and after I had left the Sqn she met an untimely end when a bowser she was laying under (presumably asleep) moved off and badly injured her.

Another was our Char Wallah 'Muckergee' who produced the most amazing Spanish omelettes. I remember seeing much of Muckergee's kit falling from an under slung load net into Tolo harbour as it was being transported to a remote Sqn exercise location. Again I heard some years later that he had gone to the 'great rest home' for char wallsahs.

The last one was a call from the RMP's to tell me that my young son had been involved in an incident with the Chinese. It turned out that he had thought it would be great fun to ride one of their cows!

After note: I have tried, from memory, to provide an insight into life during my time in 656 Sqn AAC. Please forgive and bear with me if some of the detail is wrong - after all it was nearly 40 years ago.

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## HONG KONG 1975 TO 1977

*by David Swan*

One morning early in 1975 I was sitting at my desk in MOD when the telephone rang – not an unusual occurrence you would say - but this was different. “Would you be prepared to move to Hong Kong at short notice and take over 656 Sqn.?” It was Terry Reynolds from AG14, the AAC manning branch. “How soon?” said I. “In about 3 months – and by the way it comes with promotion, subject to all the clearances and approval.”

I did not hesitate in saying yes and immediately telephoned home with the news. I then asked Barbara if she had posted the signed contracts for our next house to the solicitor that morning. She had!! There followed a hectic 3 months when the appointment was confirmed, we moved into our next house, furnished it and arranged for it to be let. We managed to find a boarding school for our son to attend in September, I attended a Scout refresher course at Middle Wallop, we packed and finally arrived in Hong Kong in May – immediately before the Queen arrived for her first State Visit to the colony! Thank goodness for Chinese tailors who made me a tropical Service Dress in a matter of a week.

That was the start of a fascinating two year tour in the Far East. My official title was CO 656 Squadron AAC but also “Commander Aviation Far East” as there were squadron detachments in Brunei (C Flight) and Singapore (11 Anzuk Flight). 11 Flt closed down in September 1975 so sadly there was only time for me to be able to make one trip to Singapore.

Although 656 Sqn had a Far East commitment it was actually under command of 48 Gurkha Inf Bde in Sek Kong which subsequently became the Gurkha Field Force. The squadron was based at Sek Kong airfield in the New Territories and had been equipped with Scout helicopters for the last 6 years in the colony. However that was short-lived as it had been decided that all available Scouts would be concentrated in BAOR to boost the AAC's anti tank capability. There was much prior discussion, some heated, on the suitability of the Gazelle for the Hong Kong operations but, having been involved in that decision in my previous appointment, I had to make it work. The chickens had come home to roost! C Flight in Brunei remained equipped with Sioux.

The manning of C Flight in Brunei was on a 6 month rotational basis from Hong Kong. The personnel were looked after by the resident Gurkha battalion and the flight was based in a small hangar close to the



beach. Regular washing of the Sioux was required to keep the corrosion at bay. Almost all the flying was over the uninviting jungle of Brunei but fortunately we had no accidents.

Squadron flying operations in Hong Kong consisted of border patrols, joint training with the RAF Wessex squadron and the usual liaison flying. It was amazing how many visitors “required” an airborne familiarisation trip around the island and the New Territories. The border patrols along the Chinese border were predominantly dawn sorties searching for and intercepting illegal immigrants seeking their fortune in Hong Kong. The aircraft usually carried 3 armed Gurkha soldiers whose role was to disembark and attempt to catch the culprit(s) when spotted by the aircrew. This was not always successful as the Chinese became very adept at hiding in the undergrowth, crossing the water at night using all sorts of inflatable devices and hiding up during the day. Once they reached the built up areas they would be impossible to trace.

The changeover from Scouts to Gazelles required some major reorganisation within the squadron. The pilots had to return to Middle Wallop for conversion flying courses. In order to maintain our aviation support to the colony half went at a time leaving the others to fly the Scouts until the Gazelles were up and running. The REME technicians had to learn about the innards of the new arrival. However some already had Gazelle experience which was a bonus. The first three Gazelles arrived at Kai Tak inside a Belfast on 26 November 1975 and the next

day the same aircraft took 3 of our Scouts back to UK. After an overnight stop and a quick check over at Kai Tak the Gazelles were given clearance for the short formation flight to Sek Kong where we were welcomed by various dignitaries and the squadron families. The aircraft were then impounded by the LAD for acceptance servicing and modifications. The remaining 3 Gazelle arrived in Hong Kong and the last 3 Scouts departed the same way on 16th/17<sup>th</sup> December.

To avoid damage to the Gazelle airframes, which are a little more delicate than the Scout, walkway strips were fitted on the skids and door frames and rubber mats in the boot and on the passenger floor. Locally manufactured freight floors were designed and produced before flying began. Eventually two aircraft “reappeared” for air testing on 3rd December. No problems were encountered and the squadron work up took place from 3 December to 9 January 1976. This was followed by a proving exercise (Exercise Swan Around III!) in support of a 48 Gurkha Bde exercise, Exercise Frozen Gleam, where the aircraft were successfully used in support of units for the first time. We were declared operational on 19 January 1976.

As the weather warmed up and the South west monsoon rains arrived there was some trouble with separation and holing of the rotor blade leading edges and 3 sets of blades had to be changed in a short space of time. However the aircraft proved reliable and popular with passengers and the “extras” fitted (rubber mats and freight floors) kept damage to the minimum. We had some concerns about the possibility of rifles making holes in the canopy but there were no such incidents, mainly through careful training and briefing of passengers and troops.

We had only one major incident when a pilot misjudged his approach to an LS over water at night and landed in the water. Fortunately the pilot and aircrew got out safely but the aircraft was completely drowned. We had, coincidentally, carried out our dinghy drill, jumping out of a Wessex helicopter, in the preceding week! It gave the local press some exciting news including pictures of the Gazelle being hauled out of the water by the Royal Navy patrol craft HMS Wasperton.

Another of our activities was developing air mobile operations deploying Gurkha infantry around the colony in conjunction with the RAF Wessex. We practised whenever the time and opportunities arose and wrote Standing Operational Procedures (SOPs). Basically 656 Sqn did the reces and the RAF did the troop lifts. Our mutual activities attracted the attention of the Joint Warfare Establishment in UK whose team paid us a visit while on tour and were quite complimentary about our humble efforts.



Inevitably some appointments attract various other roles and in my case it was the Vice-Chairman of the Joint Services Parachute Centre (Hong Kong) – the Chairman was the Brigade Commander so the Vice Chairman and the Secretary took on most of the running of the centre. I have always subscribed to the principle of not jumping out of a perfectly serviceable aircraft - and I kept to that to the bitter end despite the efforts of the members! They were an enthusiastic group and I thoroughly enjoyed being in their company.

In June 1977 my tour came to an end. At the same time the 656 Sqn title was transferred to a squadron at Farnborough and the rest is history. In Hong Kong the resident unit became 8 Flight (the unit that was in Kenya where I was posted in 1964 on completing my initial flying course on Beavers) and it stayed there until the colony was handed back to the Chinese. It was a fascinating tour full of interest and history. I remember visiting the location where the Austers were based. The railway line ran past it on its way to the Chinese border. Memories of the Chinese way of life, their culture and the integrated British colonial system still remain strong. It was certainly one of the highlights of my military service.

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# HONG KONG DECEMBER 1974 - JULY 1977

*by Simon Fogden Flight Commander 656 Squadron AAC*

## **“I Learned About Flying From That”**

I was on my first flying tour as Flight Commander 656 Squadron Army Air Corps based at Sek Kong airfield in the New Territories, Hong Kong. I had just completed a new Helicopter Landing Site (HLS) directory and had discovered a new HLS on an island in Tolo Harbour which formed part of the perimeter of a fresh water reservoir with vehicle

access along the major reservoir causeway.

During an exercise in February 1977, I was commanding a detachment of three Gazelles from the Flight which was based on the island HLS. A standard NATO ‘T’ was being used as a night landing aid and the approach to the landing aid was over the sea. At 2305 hours on the night in question, I flew off with the intention of just visiting an alternative HLS but I was tasked in the



*Tolo Harbour*

air to carry out other sorties including taking two compassionate cases back to base and then a casualty evacuation (casevac). By the time of the casevac, it was close to 0100 hours and the ambient light levels were low and there were patches of mist on the water on a windless night. The casualty who was suffering from stomach cramps was located at a rebroadcast station high on an isolated mountain and I was reluctant to make an approach direct to the mountain top without more clearly defined reference points. I therefore decided to make an approach to the shore line from where I hover-taxied up the mountain using my landing

light. I managed to land and recover the casualty but low cloud prevented me from flying over the Lion Rock ridge into Kowloon where I had intended to drop the casualty off at the military hospital. I therefore returned to Sek Kong where I was met by an ambulance which set off with the casualty on the relatively long and twisty journey by road into Kowloon.

At Sek Kong airfield I picked up a replacement aircrewman as well as a groundcrewman to fly back to the Tolo Harbour HLS. By this time it was nearly 0200 hours with further reduced light levels and a barely discernible horizon. Initially, I found it difficult to locate the HLS but eventually sighted it and set up a right hand circuit for landing. I noted that in the final turn onto finals my height was 600 feet and the speed was 50 knots. At a range of 400 metres, I switched on the landing light and was temporarily dazzled by the reflection off the mist. I adjusted the light down to illuminate the area of the 'T' and still further down to pick out the shore line short of the 'T'. When I looked up again at the 'T' I realised I had lost height and at the same time the aircraft struck the water. In attempting to lift and fly the aircraft away, the rota blades struck the water and stopped almost immediately. The aircraft settled into the water and turned over with the landing light still on illuminating the area. Luckily, we were all able to escape unscathed and with the aid of the dinghy from the aircraft's survival pack we made it to the shore.

An RAF Wessex was called and, significantly for me, the pilot also became disorientated on his approach to the HLS when he descended to within 40 feet of the sea some 300 metres from the 'T'. He was alerted to the danger by his crewman who was monitoring the approach from the rear door. Clearly the still air, the mist and the glass-like surface to the sea made the approach to the island more difficult than I had realised even when using the NATO 'T'. The Wessex picked us up and recovered direct to Kai Tak airport for the pilot was able to undertake an instrument approach, before then diverting to the military hospital where we were all admitted to hospital for observation.

The Board of Inquiry came to the conclusion that the cause of the accident was my failure to monitor the instruments during the approach and that pilot fatigue was the main contributory factor to that failure. I was found excusably negligent. It was significant that I had been awake 19.5 hours, on duty for 18 hours and had flown 2.6 hours in the day and 2.1 hours at night including 8 night landings. I had exceeded by 4 hours the maximum crew duty time of 14 hours laid down in the Squadron's Flying Orders. It was decided that justice had to be seen to be done and I was charged with exceeding Crew Duty Time and was fined two weeks pay

which might have been particularly painful but for the fact that I received a fairly generous Local Overseas Allowance which could not be confiscated as part of the fine.

So what did I learn from this rather traumatic incident? Certainly, I felt chastened and very lucky that nobody had died. I also learned something about judgement for at that time I was a fit, athletic and very determined individual and the idea of not taking on those additional tasks did not really enter my head. I had that commendable 'wilco' attitude, which I like to think I still have, but in retrospect I should have had the judgement and moral courage to realise that I should not have taken on that challenging casevac. The most sensible and correct thing to have done would have been to direct another pilot to undertake that task.

During the Board of Inquiry, when I often felt rather embarrassed about my actions, the turning point came when there was a break in the proceedings to watch the Khud race. This was an annual running race in Hong Kong which commemorated the manoeuvres practised in Victorian campaigns in the Far East when foot soldiers were sent to picket and dominate the mountain heights during an advance by the major formation in the valleys below. The race was straight up a 3000 foot mountain and back down the same route; of course the Gurkha units always won by a mile. I took part in the race that year and felt refreshed and exhilarated after torturing my body to the extreme; it seemed to clear my mind. It also allowed me to see the whole incident in perspective and to appreciate the somewhat amusing and bizarre 'twists in the tail' in this unfortunate episode: -

\* I reached the Kowloon military hospital before the soldier I had evacuated. I had a somewhat surreal conversation with that soldier the following morning when he ended up in the bed next to me; he initially refused to believe that I had been the pilot that had undertaken the rescue for which he was so grateful!

\* After all the trauma and criticism, I received a Commander British Forces Hong Kong commendation for "showing great flying skill and a high degree of determination" in successfully completing the casevac!

\* On the same day that I was charged, I received a letter of congratulations from the then Director Army Air Corps for being selected to attend Staff College. It raised my sagging spirit!

\* When my 'Summary Trial' was reviewed back in the MOD(A), the punishment was considered too severe and it was amended to read: "To be reprimanded and fined £35". I received a rebate of nearly £300!

\* Gazelle XX409 was recovered from Tolo Harbour by the Royal Navy and was subsequently rebuilt and flew again in Germany. About 15

years later, I was visiting my godson at his home and he invited me to see his latest helicopter poster and sure enough it was XX409 flying again. However, that helicopter poster subsequently looked rather more impressive alongside a photograph of XX409 hanging off the side of the RN patrol craft the definitive 'before' and 'after' pictures!



*HMS Wasperta with injured Gazelle XX409*

When I was serving in MOD 24 years later, I found myself working with the friend who had been the OC LAD at 656 Squadron Army Air Corps at the time of the accident. He had liberated a few mementos from the badly damaged XX409 including the instrument panel face. When I left the Army, he presented it to me on a suitably inscribed wooden mount and I find myself gazing at it now on the wall of my study as I finish writing this article!

\*\*\*

# ASSOCIATION SHOP



Travel Alarm Clock £8.00\*

Black Leather Case depicting  
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2 ½ " x 2 ½ " when closed

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*List available upon request*

## BOOKS

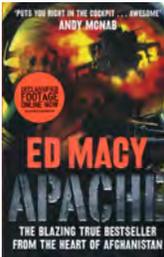
**'APACHE'** by Ed Macy

Signed by the author Hback edition

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From the cockpit of the world's deadliest helicopter comes the true story of a rescue mission so dangerous they said it couldn't be done – and the man who dared to make it happen. 'APACHE' is Ed's story – an adrenalin-fuelled account of one of the most daring actions of modern wartime, and a tale of courage, danger and comradeship you won't be able to put down.



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**'HELLFIRE'** by Ed Macy

Signed by the Author Hback edition @ £18.99\*

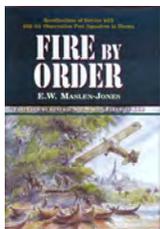
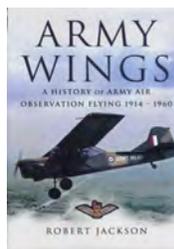
**Macy unleashes the first Hellfire missile and the rules are rewritten!**

May 2006. Ed Macy and 656 Squadron arrive in Afghanistan along with the Apache AH Mk 1 on its first operational tour. It's an unfamiliar combat zone with a limited role for the Apache and Ed's time is spent escorting Chinooks. But one month later, during Operation Mutay, with 3 Para pinned down in Helmand, the arguments about the Apache's potential are thrown out and Ed deploys the first Hellfire missile in combat. That squeeze of the trigger changed the war for the British and the Taliban alike. The £4.2bn Apache programme was dramatically redirected to fighting the enemy head-on and turned Ed and his squadron into one of the British Army's greatest assets.

Ed recounts the intense months that followed Mutay: the steep learning curve, the new missions, the evolving enemy and the changing Rules of Engagement. He also sheds light on his early career as a young paratrooper, his operational baptism as a pilot and how both shaped his ability to fly, fight and survive during that fateful first Afghanistan tour against a cunning and ruthless enemy. It was here, in the dusty wastes of Helmand that Ed, his colleagues in 656 Squadron and the Apache found themselves on trial for their lives and for the reputation of a machine on which the British government had staked a fortune. The crucible of fire that awaited 656 Squadron in Helmand would cement the fate of man and machine forever.

**'Army Wings'** by Robert Jackson @ £19.99\*

From its earliest days in WW1, small low-flying aircraft have flown unarmed into combat. This is the fascinating story of army fixed-wing co-operation units that were made up of specially trained volunteer army personnel. These men were trained to fly, to reconnoitre across the front line in search of enemy forces and then guide artillery gunners onto the target.

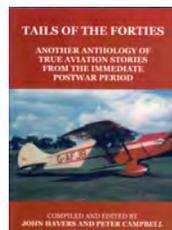


**'Fire by Order'** by Ted Maslen-Jones

Signed by the author

@ £19.95\*

Recollections of Service with 656 Air Observation Post Squadron in Burma



**'Tails of the Forties'**

Compiled by John Havers & Peter Campbell

@ £10.00\*

## PICTURES



**Apache AH Mk 1 ZJ233**

656 Squadron AAC, 9 Regiment AAC

Dishforth

Unframed. Size: 17 ¼ " x 11 ½ "

@ £5.00\*



**656 Squadron AAC**

HMS Ocean

Unframed. Size: 8" x 12"

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\*Postage & Packing on all items at cost.

Contact: John or Sylvia Heyes *details on page 47*

## FINE BONE CHINA MUGS



Chinthé & Crossed  
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Enamel Plaque on hardwood base

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\*Contact Sylvia or John Heyes to order, *Details on page 47*  
or order online [www.656squadron.org](http://www.656squadron.org)  
and click on 'SHOP' on the home page.

## DO YOU KNOW WHERE THEY ARE?

We have lost contact with the following members, their mail has been returned to us. If you are in contact with anyone on the list, would you please ask them to contact one of the committee members in order for us to re-establish communications. Thank you.

*Contact details on page 47*

Mr B.A. Angus AAC Thirsk	Lt.Col. F.M. O'Connor RE Fleet
Mr G.L. Baldwin REME Andover	Mr S.M. Perry REME Salisbury
Maj N.A. Banks AAC Ipswich	Mr J. Rigg AAC Templecombe
S/Sgt. S.G. Bickerstaff AAC Upavon	Mr P.G. Samways RA Solihull
Mr A Birkenhead R.A. York	Mr W.A. Sheahan RAF Nr Salisbury
Mr S.H. Broom AAC	Mr B.H. Sheppard RA Elland
Mr D.A. Budden RAF Launceston	Mr J. Smith AAC Hook
Mr A Chester RE/AAC Brighton	Sgt M.P. Smyth AAC Ipswich
Mr K. Corbett REME Amesbury	Capt R.J. Stokes AAC Glasgow
Mr H.L. George RAF Tolworth	WO1 (RSM) P.A. Tickle AAC Ipswich
WO2 R. M. Gillan AAC Salisbury	WO1 R Walker AAC Gutterсло
Mr G.J. Hall RA Bridport	Mr A. Wall AAC Milton Keynes
Maj P.M. Hayhurst AAC Swindon	Mr S.C. Walter Woolwich
Mr R.C. Hester RAF Hove	Mr J. White Nr Wareham
Mr S.C. Hives-Wood Alton	Mr S. Williams AAC Salisbury
Mr J.M. Hudson RAF Bedford	Maj A.H. Willman AAC Hook
Mr K. Hughes AAC Didcot	Airtpr D.J. Wood AAC Poulton-le-Fylde
Mr G. Jones AAC Thirsk	Lt.Col N.J. Dalton AAC Ipswich
Maj. G.J.F. Key AAC Thirsk	Capt R.I. Wright RA Northwood
Mr F.J. Leadbeater RA Abbey Wood	
Mr M Lord AAC Gosport	
Mr M.D. McDaniel AAC Hereford	
Mr G. McDonald AAC Feryhill	
Mr S.S. McIntyre AAC Hook	
Mr G Meek AAC Ashford	
Mr M.R. Mockford AAC Thirsk	
Mr B. Needham AAC Barton under Needwood	

## NOTICES

## LETTERS

Sir,

I enjoyed Malcolm Fleming's piece in the Summer 2009 'Chinthe', covering familiar incidents and ground. The crashed Canberra, by the way, was RNZAF and the navigator, Flt Lt Bevan, survived. I was in on finding it and also at Gemas, I believe, when Bevan was choppered in after having walked into a rubber plantation a few days after the crash.

*Conan Carey*

## NEW MEMBERS

Nigel Skinner	Associate	Joined	July 2009
Keith Smith	REME	Joined	Aug 2009
George Southon MBE	REME	Joined	Aug 2009
Christine Fletcher	Associate	Joined	Aug 2009
Mike Tapping	RA	Joined	Aug 2009
Audrey Appleton	Associate	Joined	Sept 2009
Steve Bradshaw	REME/AAC	Joined	Sept 2009
Colin Alderson	AAC	Joined	Sept 2009
Ian Park	AAC	Joined	Oct 2009
Andrew Parkes	AAC	Joined	Nov 2009
Darren White	AAC	Joined	Nov 2009
Joyce Litt	Associate	Joined	Nov 2009
Margaret Windscheffel	Associate	Joined	Nov 2009
Harry Hallsworth	RA	Joined	Dec 2009
Dave Cozens	REME	Joined	Dec 2009
Dave Lucas	RA	Joined	Jan. 2010

## COMMITTEE

We are always looking for new people willing to join the Association Committee. We would like some 'young blood' as most of us are starting to dribble a bit! So, if you would care to join us we would be delighted.

*Contact details on page 47*

## ASSOCIATION CONTINGENT ON ARMISTICE DAY PARADES

The Association has a fine tradition of forming a contingent at the Armistice Day Parade each year.

The contingent has always been well received and those attending take home strong emotions from the whole occasion. The Army Air Corps (AAC) Association noted our lead and now form their own contingent, which is normally in the same column as ourselves.

However, our contingent numbers have generally been small, and we believe now is a good time to review our attendance at the Cenotaph. We can either continue to form a contingent or join with the AAC Association. If you have any comments could you please email, phone or write to John Heyes.

We will also raise the matter at our AGM at Wattisham during our Reunion weekend (Sat 3 and Sun 4 July).

### DEATHS

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

E.G. Smith	RA	Died Aug. 2009
Basil Appleton	RA	Died Sept 2009
Jeremy Smith	AAC	Died Sept 2009
Ray Wheat	RAF	Died Sept 2009
R.D. (Bob) Henshaw	RA	Died Oct. 2009
Ken Perkins	RA	Died Oct 2009
Kenneth Litt	RA	Died Oct 2009
Arthur Windscheffel	RAF	Died Nov 2009
Peter Robinson	REME	Died Nov 2009
Gwyn Thomas	RAF	Died Dec 2009

## COMMITTEE MEMBER'S DETAILS

### **President:**

#### **Andrew Simkins OBE**

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### **Deputy Treasurer:**

#### **Derek Walker**

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Tel; 01373 825554 E-mail: [dchunkywalker@talktalk.net](mailto:dchunkywalker@talktalk.net)

### **Membership Secretary & Webmaster:**

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### **Member without Portfolio:**

#### **Reg Goodwin**

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