

# CONTENTS

OC's Report	3
President's Report	5
Secretary's Report	7
Treasurer's Report	9
Anniversary Reunion 2013	11
Cenotaph Ceremony 2012	13
History of 656 Squadron	16
How it Started	17
Reception at Buckingham Palace	19
Auster Picture Offer	20
Members' Contributions	21
Association Shop	34
Notices	38
Committee Member's details	39

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# OC'S REPORT

With the Squadron having now passed the 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday, we look towards a year of variety and celebration. The latter obviously in the form of the Sqn 70<sup>th</sup> and book launch this summer.

At the end of the last report, we had just recovered from the Joint Warrior exercise in Scotland, and were catching up on some well earned leave. Since then, we've managed a veritable feast of differing opportunities and changes. The ability to conduct Sqn level Adventurous Training in North Wales last summer was the first of these, and proved a superb success, especially on the kayaking and mountain biking fronts. Shortly following this, we went 'back to basics' with a week living in shell scrapes in Thetford training area. This we perceived as essential following the year-after-year of Afghanistan 'normality' for the Apache force (Bastion is far from 'austere!'). This also included live firing, navigation serials, and a BBQ on the last night; all a superb success orchestrated by the Sergeant Major.

Ex Cougar was next on the horizon. Another two months at sea on the now very familiar HMS Illustrious proved a mixture of frustration and pain for the first half, yet, significantly better for the second half. Within the exercise, we managed time in Spain, France, Sicily, Albania, and Malta, not to mention live firing in the Gibraltar sea ranges. All this, with no repeat of the 2011 Cougar exercise termination in favour of the Libya operation!

Since recovery from Cougar, we managed three weeks of Christmas leave followed by two deployments of Sqn personnel to Norway. This was to conduct a recce of Bardufoss for the possible inclusion of Apache to cold weather flying training, but also to ensure a good cohort of the Squadron are trained in Arctic survival. This was a superb opportunity. The digging of snow holes, use of snow shoes, and survival in significantly sub-zero temperatures was only topped by the last day of swimming in ice holes in a frozen lake.

The look forward has the Sqn deploying again on Joint Warrior this Spring, albeit unfortunately not on HMS Illustrious due to higher priorities unfortunately impacting on our training.

Although we are currently managing the challenges of the latest tranche of redundancies, we are now benefiting from the rotation of personnel in and out of the Squadron at a regular basis. This not only allows that Sqn personnel don't stay at 5 days notice to move for too long, but also that we can move those who have not deployed to Afghanistan to Squadrons where that opportunity still exists.

To conclude, the end of last year finally saw the award of ELLAMY medals to those who took part in the operation. This also saw a number of awards being presented, with congratulations to A/Cpl Symonds who received the Dannatt Trophy for best groundcrew in the Corps. Also, congratulations to WO2 Walton for promotion and posting to SSM 664 Sqn and welcome to Capt David Mills who comes as 2IC, SSgt Steele as SQMS and Sgt Mather as the Training SNCO.

*Piers Lewis*



# PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Firstly, here's wishing a happy 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary to 656 Squadron Army Air Corps. The Squadron was officially formed at RAF Westley on New Year's Eve 1942, which seems rather unfair for the founding servicemen! Gradually more personnel were posted to the Squadron, and by March 1943 there was a nucleus of men, aircraft and equipment, under the command of Major Denis Coyle RA. Little did these young servicemen (even Denis Coyle was only 25 years old) realise that the Squadron would go on to serve, with such distinction, in countless operational theatres throughout the world. Little did they foresee their Squadron operating Apache Attack Helicopters in the Afghan desert and in the Mediterranean from RN carriers in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Given the significance of 2013 we are planning a range of celebratory events in conjunction with the Squadron. **Major Piers Lewis, the Officer Commanding, has kindly offered to host a Families Day followed by a Dinner in the Officers' Mess on Friday 7<sup>th</sup> June at Wattisham Airfield, Suffolk.** This event will coincide with the official launch of *The History of 656 Squadron: 'From Auster to Apache'*. The book is a worthy and very readable tribute to all those that have served in the Squadron, and a credit to the author, Guy Warner. While the jacket price is £25, we are able to sell it for a preferential pre-order price of £18. Full details of the day's events are on pages 11 and 12, and an all-purpose return form is enclosed.

We will also hold a **further launch of the Book at the Museum of Army Flying, Middle Wallop on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> June, starting at 14.00hrs.** This will enable those who cannot attend the earlier event to join us. Of course, you are welcome to attend both events, which I feel certain will be memorable and enjoyable.

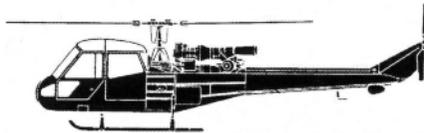
We form a contingent at the **National Act of Remembrance at the Cenotaph, Whitehall** every Remembrance Sunday. I reiterate that I firmly believe every veteran should march at this stirring and emotional event at least once in their life. This year I feel we should set our sights at forming a considerably larger contingent. I believe 70 on parade should be our target. The contingent can include dependents (wives and offspring), preferably wearing family medals. Further details will be in the Summer Journal, but the date to put in your diary is Sunday 10th November.

Sylvia has reluctantly decided to hand over her secretarial role after over 12 years of dedicated, selfless service to the Association. For 10 years she worked alongside John, and then took over his duties on John's sad departure over 15 months ago. Nothing is ever too much trouble for Sylvia, and the Association's administration has been streamlined during her tenure. She also made the excellent and much applauded Journal her own. It has been fun to work alongside her, and I believe we all owe her a huge debt of gratitude. The Association is blessed with an excellent committee, so someone taking over Sylvia's secretarial duties will find all the advice and support necessary.

I have the sad duty to report the death of Claire Clark BEM (wife of Nobby) on 28<sup>th</sup> December. Nobby Clark was one of the original members of the Squadron, and known as the 'radio wizard' (read about him in the book!). Nobby formed 656 Squadron Association back in the mid 1980's, and remained the driving force for many years. In all his countless voluntary endeavours Nobby was ably supported by Claire; they were an impressive couple. The Association made a donation to the Gurkha Welfare Fund, at the funeral, at the request of the family.

I hope to meet as many of you as possible this Anniversary year.

**Andrew Simkins**



# SECRETARY'S REPORT

Today I am looking out of the window at *more* rain and wishing my life away to the summer! It should be a good one too, as it's the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year of the birth of 656 Squadron and, as I'm sure you are all aware, we will be celebrating it with our annual reunion at Wattisham with the Squadron, it should be one to remember. Do come if at all possible.

Because of the anniversary, we are also hoping for a massive turn out at the Cenotaph this year, at least 70 of us is the aim. I shall be there with my grandson, wearing the medals of my late husband John. So, we would like all members or ex members, widows or relatives with direct connections to the military to join the contingent. Lets make it a year to remember. Please try and join us, it is such an emotional affair that you never forget.

Then, of course, there is the book launch to look forward to. Guy Warner's book 'From Auster to Apache' the history of 656 Squadron, is due to be launched this Summer and should be a very interesting read. I have enclosed a returns form with this Journal, so if you would like to attend one or all of the above, please complete the form and return it to me, so that we have an idea of numbers etc.

Membership continues to be steady, with new members joining all the time. If you would like me to send you an up to date membership list, just call me or email me and I'll get one off to you right away. *Contact details on page 39.*

On a personal note, I'm afraid that for various family reasons, I am going to have to give up my position as Secretary for the Association and also give up the Journal. I will not stop doing either job until such time as we have someone to take over. I have listed the duties involved in both jobs so you can see what is involved. If you feel you would like to take over one or other job and would like to talk to me about it/them, please don't hesitate to call me with any questions you may have. *My contact details can be found on page 39..*

## **Association Secretary.**

Approximate number of hours worked each week is one to two hours, this varies, some weeks there are two or three things to do from the list below, other weeks there is nothing to do.

The role does not require much travel, apart from Committee meetings, on average two per year, and can be done mainly from home, a working knowledge of Word and Excel are needed as most work is done via the computer and liaising with the Committee by email.

Although your time is voluntary, all expenses are paid promptly, by direct transfer, if you wish, by the Association Treasurer.

- Maintain membership records. i.e. Enter new members' details, note, retirees and deaths.

- Maintain lists of members for despatch to new members, or to members requesting current lists.
- Taking and distributing minutes of all Committee meetings and AGM's.
- Notify members by email when a member dies so that the Association can be represented at funerals of deceased members.
- Send condolence cards to relatives of deceased members.
- Notify Journal officer to publish new members and deaths, in the bi-annual journal.
- Arrange meetings and functions in conjunction with the Treasurer.
- Take telephone calls from members with enquiries or orders from the Association shop.
- Maintain shop stock sheet and post items that have been ordered, enclosing an invoice. Copy of the invoice should be emailed to the Treasurer.
- Send out 'Welcome Packs' to new members.

### **Journal Compiling.**

This job is ongoing. I usually start the next journal as soon as the last one has been sent out to members, this way the work is spread over several months instead of having a mad rush at the last minute. I find that articles seem to magically appear from members after each journal has been posted out! So they can be put into the journal as they arrive. I use a programme from Serif, called PagePlus X6. This is a personal choice and you, of course, can use any programme you may prefer.

Again, it is hard to say how much time is spent doing the job as it varies so much. I would say it averages about one to two hours a week. There is usually a bit of a flurry around the time of distribution, twice a year. Please find the list below to see what is entailed in the job.

- Laying out the Journal. Entering regular reports from the current OC, the President and the Secretary.
- Prepare and insert articles and any accompanying photographs.
- Prepare and print any forms that may be inserted in the Journal.
- Send an electronic, PDF file of the Journal to the printers.
- Print envelopes.
- Stuff and stamp envelopes.

I have been using a local printer for several years, they are very helpful. I send the journal to them via email; they send me back a proof to approve. I then collect the printed Journals myself, but the printer will deliver them if required.

Don't forget we are always looking for new committee members, where you will be made most welcome

I am looking forward to meeting up with as many of you as possible in the Summer, and I sincerely hope you've managed to avoid being flooded or snowed in and that you all have the very best 2013 you could wish for.

*Sylvia*

# TREASURER'S REPORT

## 656 Squadron Association

### Statement of income and expenditure for the year ended 31 December 2012

Income		Expenditure	
<b>General account</b>			
Subs	2,870.50	Journal costs	1,811.91
New member subs	127.50	Printing & Stationary costs	159.01
Reunion income	1,719.00	Reunion costs	2,128.92 <sup>1</sup>
History Book income	700.00 <sup>2</sup>	History book costs	1,001.73 <sup>4</sup>
Archives income	1,115.00	Archives costs	1,085.98
Event income	0.00	Events costs	122.68
Donations in	23.82	Web & PC costs	14.15
Postage paid income	60.11	Postage costs	543.15
Adverts income	350.00	Committee costs	163.00
Misc income	0.00	Donations out	42.98
Interest	1.23	PayPal fees	9.30
Payments from debtors	3.70	Payments to Creditors	0.33
<b>Totals</b>	<b>6,970.86</b>		<b>7,083.14</b>
<b>Surplus (or overspend)</b>	<b>(-112.28)</b>		
<b>Sales account</b>			
<b>Sales</b>		<b>Cost of sales</b>	
Shop sales	274.39	Opening shop stock	1,570.67
Shop profits	-58.47 <sup>3</sup>	New stock added	0.00
	<b>332.86</b>		<b>1,570.67</b>
		Less closing stock	1,237.81
		Cost of sales	332.86 <sup>3</sup>
		(Includes write-offs)	114.05 <sup>1</sup>
<b>Total income</b>	<b>7,245.25</b>	<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>7,416.00</b>
<b>Overall surplus (or overspend)</b>	<b>-170.75</b>		

## Notes

We actually received £162 more in income than we incurred in expenses over the course of the year - the overall paper loss shown here is due to the shop write-offs detailed below.

<sup>1</sup> Reunion costs shown here do not include the additional £84.09 of shop stock written off as raffle prizes.

<sup>2</sup> History book income includes £500 of advance royalties, of which £166 is now owed to Headley Court.

<sup>3</sup> Paper loss shown for shop sales was due to selling old books at below cost price in order to reduce stock levels, and providing several raffle prizes.

<sup>4</sup> Total expenses to date on the book project, from Dec 2010 to Dec 2012, were roughly £ 2,400.

Total income for the same period from grants, donations & advance royalties was £ 1,600.

## 656 Squadron Association.

### Balance sheet for the year ended 31 December 2012

	2012	2011
<b>Current Assets</b>		
Cash	3,251.30	3,089.19
Stock	1,237.81	1,570.67
Debtors	50.00	3.70
Assets	45.38	64.67
	<u>4,584.49</u>	<u>4,728.23</u>
<b>Current liabilities</b>		
Shop stock	0.00	0.00
Unpresented cheques & transfers	166.00	0.33
	<u>166.00</u>	<u>0.33</u>
<b>Net current assets</b>	<u>4,418.49</u>	<u>4,727.90</u>
<i>(Represented by)</i>		
Funds B/F	4,659.86	6,736.29
General surplus	(-112.28)	(-2,310.70)
Shop profits	(-58.47)	234.27
Plus Debtors - current year	50.00	3.70
Minus Creditors - current year	(-166.00)	(-0.33)
Assets	45.38	64.67
	<u>4,418.49</u>	<u>4,727.90</u>
<b>Reserve account</b>		
Opening balance 1 January	2,503.69	2,502.44
Transfers in	0.00	0.00
Transfers out	504.62	0.00
Interest received	1.23	1.25
	<u>2,000.30</u>	<u>2,503.69</u>

These are provisional, unaudited accounts.

January 2013

Mark Meaton, Treasurer

Derek Walker, Deputy Treasurer

## **656 Anniversary Reunion, Wattisham Airfield, Suffolk**

### **Friday 7<sup>th</sup> June 2013**

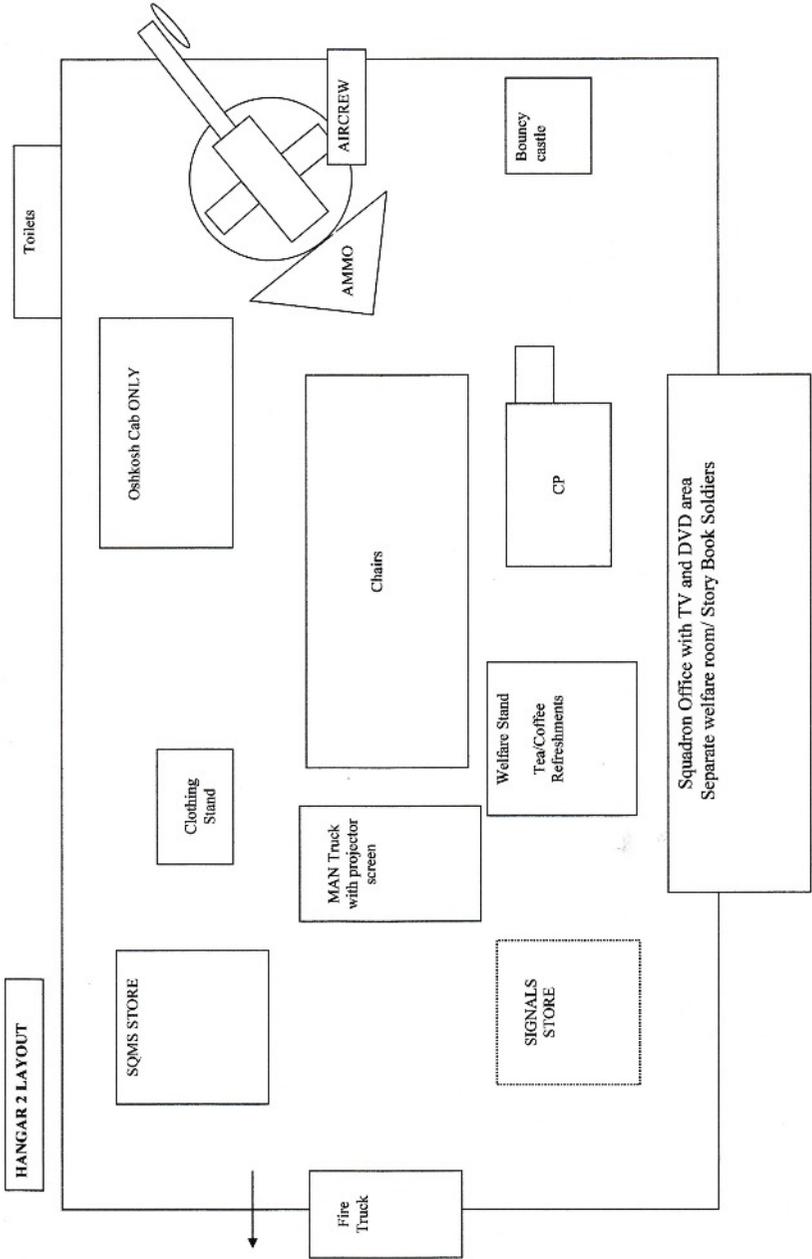
The OC, 656 Squadron AAC, Major Piers Lewis, has kindly agreed to host the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Reunion Day at Wattisham Airfield, Suffolk on Friday 7<sup>th</sup> June. The event will coincide with the official launch of the book, **656 Squadron RAF/AAC: From Auster to Apache**. We will be afforded an insight into Apache operations in their Aircraft Hangar.

We aim to hold flights in the Auster aircraft and a helicopter, where there will be a charge for fuel.

**The day's events will commence at 11.00hrs and conclude at 16.30hrs.**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
1045	Guard Room, Wattisham Airfield ready to accept guests	
1100	Hangar ready to accept guests	Follow signs
1120 – 113	Welcome and introduction	OC and President
1130-1300	Static stands in Hangar including role demonstration of Apache operations	
Throughout	Refreshments available	Donations appreciated
1320 – 1500	Auster and helicopter Familiarisation Flights	Details to be confirmed
1330 – 1630	656 Sqn Association presentation and book launch signing	BBC and BFBS invited
1630	Event ends, depart for hotels	
1830	Coach departs Premier Inn for Airfield	
1900	Dinner in Officers' Mess	Lounge Suit/Blazer and Tie.
2300	Coach leaves for Premier Inn	

**We will hold our AGM on Saturday morning in the Premier Inn commencing at 09.30hrs.**



# Cenotaph Ceremony 2012

*by Andrew Simkins*



*656 Squadron Association contingent taking the salute at Horse Guards*

Given the atrocious weather this year, we could not have had better conditions for this year's Cenotaph Ceremony. The sun shone brightly from a clear sky, on a cold but crisp day in central London. Our group formed up on Horse Guards Parade, when it is always fascinating to observe the sheer variety of contingents, and to renew old friendships.

This year we were, again, joined by members of the current Squadron. They had driven up from Wattisham, and made it just in time to march with us through the archway into Whitehall. As ever, the atmosphere helps to remind us all of sacrifice and the debt we owe to fallen comrades. It is particularly moving to see young families on the pavements throughout the route back to Horse Guards.

After the Service of Remembrance, lead by Her Majesty, The Queen, we stepped off to march past the Cenotaph, under the direction of Ross Skingley. As we were tracked by a roaming BBC film crew we

were conscious that our standard of turnout and drill were under wide scrutiny! It is somewhat amazing that as a small contingent we have been mentioned by the BBC for most of the years we have paraded. The appreciation of the crowds, the solemnity of the Service and the stirring music makes for an emotional occasion, and one that leaves a lasting impression.

Afterwards the majority of us made our way to the Naval and Military Club ("The In and Out") in St James's Square, thanks to Ross Skingley's detailed negotiations. Here we had the chance to get to know the Squadron soldiers, lead by Captain Gavin Boshier, and enjoy drinks and lunch in a great setting. It is an especial privilege to chat to the current generation of soldiers, who tackle the complexities of the Apache Attack helicopter with aplomb.

There was a general feeling that this year's Parade was one of the most memorable, poignant and enjoyable. I have often said that I believe that a veteran should march at the Cenotaph, at the Nation's Act of Remembrance at least once in their lifetime. As next year is the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the formation of 656 Squadron, I believe we should aim for 70 veterans, or family members, on parade. This would be a fitting tribute to former members, who have served with such distinction in such a wide variety of operational theatres.

*Below find letters from the Squadron regarding the ceremony: -*

Sir

I would like to thank you and the rest of 656 Sqn Association for the hospitality you showed the four soldiers that were privileged to attend the cenotaph parade on Sunday. I met up with them afterwards and they were clearly thrilled at having experienced what they all said was the best Remembrance Sunday ever. Considering that was Cpl Chapman's 21st parade, some achievement!

It has stimulated interest in joining the association, not only from those that you met but also some of those who remained behind on Regimental Duties. With such an interesting history, I believe it is important we maintain close ties with our heritage and feel that this would be the best way.

If there is anything I or the soldiers in 656 Sqn are able to do to assist you or any other association member then please do not hesitate to call.

Regards

S Sgt J Steele

Sir,

It was a great pleasure and privilege to take part in yesterday's Remembrance Parade. The opportunity for the serving soldiers and I to meet and talk with you and the veterans was truly humbling and uplifting.

The chance to hear first hand how different service life and Operations were was a fantastic insight to our heritage. Equally amusing to know that some things never change!

The powerful and poignant location that is the Cenotaph was a fantastic place to meet the members and please pass on our appreciation.

Regards, Capt. G. Boshier

*The following was sent in to me by 'Pop' Reading ...*

They ask us why we do it  
Why we still parade  
Now that we're getting older  
And just a little frayed  
It's not for the sake of Glory, Or the medals on our chest  
It's simply that we're comrades  
Who stood the final test.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of June that fateful day  
A day we will never forget  
Many a lad laid down his life  
And paid the final debt.

So when you see a Veteran  
Give the man your hand  
For the medals on his chest  
Were won in foreign lands

And when God asks the question  
'Who are you my man?'  
I will proudly answer  
Sir, I am a Veteran

## The History of 656 Squadron;

'From Auster to Apache' book project did not start with my 2010 email to Guy Warner, requesting that he consider writing our history. In fact the project goes back a number of decades, and has involved major contributions from many individuals.

Len Edgecock and Les Rogers played a pivotal role, by producing the highly detailed and authoritative Chronicles. The three volumes contain a wealth of factual detail which cover the periods 1942 to 1967. They have formed the cornerstone of Guy's book research. We are indebted to them both.

Along with many in the Army Air Corps we are also indebted to John Cross. To my knowledge, John was never in the Squadron. However, he was the oracle. His encyclopedic memory ensured that any enquiry would be met with a full and accurate response. He served us and many others in his self effacing manner.

Books which cover elements of our history have already been published, such as Ted Maslen-Jones's *Fire by Order*, and Ed Macy's *Apache*. These popular books and other personal accounts and records have all added to the overall, complex picture of a professional, cohesive, forward leaning unit, which is proud of its achievements, but always striving for higher standards.

Our committee of Mark Meaton, Ron Ward and Derek Walker have worked tirelessly to support Guy with material which they have collated over the past 5 years. Much of this material is now registered and held at the Museum of Army Flying, where much of the research and collation has been undertaken. Ron has also ensured that our Honours and Awards, Roll of Honour and list of commanders is accurate and up to date. He has also collated the vast library of photographs. No mean feat. While Mark has worked alongside the Curator to bring the Museum's IT cataloguing system (MODES) into service. I am certain that the project would not have progressed without their dedication to the task. I finally pay tribute to Guy in writing a book which is truly worthy of 656's rich and honourable history. The book brings alive the contribution of all those that have served, in many theatres, with different cap badges, and under differing chains of command. We are especially grateful to all those individuals who provided photographs and documents during the drafting process.

*Andrew Simkins*

## **How it all started.....**

*by Len Edgecock*

Early in the 1990,s four of us, ex 656, Sqn, namely Bill Dick, Don Powley, Les Rogers and Len Edgecock (me), used to meet once a month at The Pheasant Pub situated between Andover and Salisbury to have a Drink and a natter. One evening Les suddenly said "I've been thinking" and then had to pause because of comments like "There's Novel" and "God Help us" and "I would never have believed it. "He then carried on by saying "Why don't we write the History of 656, Sqn? It certainly made us think for a bit and then we discussed how we should go about it. The upshot was that he would contact the Curator of the Army Air Corps Museum and see if we would be allowed to go into the Archives and have a go.

It was arranged that he would let us know what was happening at our next get together. He did, we then decided to meet at the Museum on a date to be arranged. He arranged the date, let us know, and we turned up. At least Les and myself turned up. Don was heavily into converting two old houses and understandably would be unable to help and Bill had relocated to Corfe Mullen which made his coming every week impractical. Les and I went into the Archives to see if the history was there for the researching, it was. So we decided that I would do the research and photo stating of all the relevant Military Data whilst Les would do all the collating and typing.

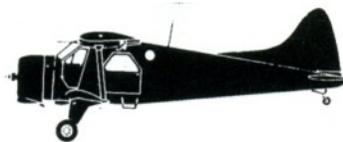
For the next 'N' number of years once a week, I would turn up at the Museum and get on with the research. It was easy for me to get there as by then I had retired. Les would turn up to collect the photo copies whenever his work allowed. His first Volume turned up in record time. It will be appreciated that I finished my part of the job well before he could, but by then I was well into the research so I decided to see if I could put together a Staff List of all the pilots.

I started from 1943 India/1944 Burma and listed all the pilots in A,B,C and 1587 Flights and SHQ. Plus those Pilots who departed which included Deceased. As I got into it I started listing their internal moves, Arrival and Departure Dates. The last list was dated 1989.

Les was heavily into his side of the job by then, producing four very big volumes and the Roll of Honour before he finished. Only he can tell you how much work that entailed. I did not want to disturb him with all the typing of the Staff List so I arranged with Derek Armitage, the

Curator of the Museum, to enlist the aid of his typist, Rosie, to do them. A good job she made of it too. By then Derek and John Bennett used to pass all sorts of queries about 656 to me. The Staff Lists and Volumes came in very handy

When I finished that, Derek got me to start on sorting all the photos in the Museum, listing them, placing them in envelopes and putting them back into the box files they came from. A job I didn't finish but did get to do 55,000 of them. But that is another story.



**On Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> November 2012 the Duke of York gave a reception at Buckingham Palace for veterans of the Battle of Kohima.**

**Included in the party was Ted Maslen-Jones MC DFC**

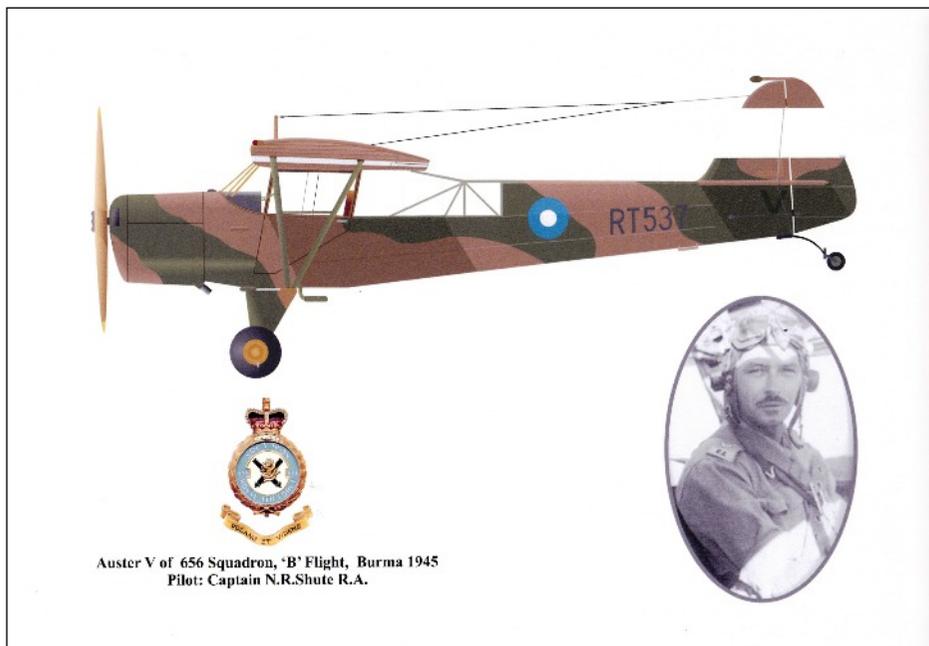


*Ted Maslen-Jones arriving at the Palace*



*Group shot of the Veterans of the Battle of Kohima.  
(Ted Maslen- Jones back row, left)*

## Would you like something similar to this?



One of our members, Peter Shute, who lives in Australia has done a computer graphic of a 656 Squadron Auster, it was actually the one his father flew in 1944-45. The above picture shows the original one he did with a photo of his father.

Peter has offered to do a similar thing for any of our members who may be interested, either with or without a photo. If you want a particular aircraft number, Peter can do that for you, he can also change the engine cowling shape if you require an earlier mark of Auster. If you would like a photo included, Peter would require one in Jpeg form.

Peter does this as a hobby, and would only charge expenses. He uses a programme called CorelDraw so if you know a printer who can print from this, then Peter would email you the file. Alternatively, he could get it printed in Australia, any size you choose and post it to you. Postage would be A\$20 (roughly £13) Or he could send it to you as a PDF file.

If you would like further details please contact Peter directly on [pnshute@worldoptions.com.au](mailto:pnshute@worldoptions.com.au)

# MEMBERS' CONTRIBUTIONS

## Déjà Vu

*by Mike Roberts*

It was a normal working day in 1961 in the radio bay of 656 Lt Ac Sqn Wksp REME at Noble Field. Having just finished consuming my morning Busty's banjo, I proceeded to repair a TR 1998 VHF radio. All of sudden the peace and quiet was shattered by the stentorian tones of the workshop ASM, Pat O' Brian, as he lifted the corrugated iron wall of the Workshop HQ building and shouted "Cpl Roberts report to the OC's office with your jacket on NOW! Oh Lord I thought, what have I done wrong this time. I duly scurried across to the Workshop HQ correctly attired and was met by the ASM who told me to go into the OC's office. On entering, I found the OC, Capt Ian Ledger seated at his desk with Lt Tim Longley standing next to him. This is serious I thought. The OC just looked up and said "Ah! Cpl Roberts, I am having some photographs taken of the Workshop and I want you to stand next to me looking intelligent as I point something out to you". The photograph below was the result.

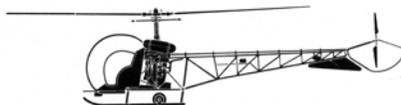
I remember thinking at the time, what is a Greenie doing looking all intelligent as the OC points at some mechanical gubbins! I was commissioned in 1966, and in 1975 I was serving at Middle Wallop in the AETW as OC Avionics Group/OC B Coy in the rank of A/Maj. One day I was walking along the road below the square/car park when I saw Capt, now Lt Col, Ian Ledger approaching. We exchanged salutes and pleasantries and he informed me that he was now the Senior Aircraft Engineer (SAE) at HQ United Kingdom Land Forces (UKLF) on the staff of Commander Aviation UKLF (Brig Dicky Parker). I told him that I was in the AETW and coming to the end of my tour of duty. He asked me if I would like to go and work for him as his SO2, Maj Tony Potter, was due for posting. I said I would be delighted and he said he would see if he could fix it. Some weeks later, I duly received a posting order to HQ UKLF. On the appointed day I reported to the offices of the Comd Avn UKLF and was met by Dick Munday, my civilian counterpart on SAE's staff, who showed me to my desk. On the desk I found a brown envelope and when I opened it there was a copy of the above photograph with "Welcome back" written on the back. A marvellous gesture from a true Officer and a Gentleman.

One of my responsibilities was for the UKLF Theatre Aircraft Standards Team based at Middle Wallop. The team was run by an ASM, one Bob Langley. Bob had been my Apprentice room Corporal (A/T Cpl)

in HQ coy at the Army Apprentices School at Arborfield when I joined in February 1954. He was a stern but fair A/T NCO, always immaculately turned out and he guided/cajoled and moulded us during our first six months. On my first visit to the team I was met by Bob who, in true ex boy fashion, crunched his feet to attention and threw up an immaculate salute. His first words were "You could do with a bit more work on them shoes SIR"! Even after 23 years some people never change!



*L/R Lt Tim Longley Cpl Mike Roberts Capt Ian Ledger*



**20 Independant Recce. Flt.**  
**1962 to 1963 Hong Kong**  
*by Peter Williams*

Having been posted to Hong Kong from Malaya at short notice my wife and I arrived with a couple of suitcases and very little money. All our goods, car and pay were still in Malaya. They caught up with us after about a month having arrived by landing craft. In the meantime we were booked into a very nice hotel until I discovered the price was more than my pay! We retreated to a terrible hotel but I still had to borrow money as my pay had not arrived. When it finally got to a Hong Kong bank we set about looking for a flat as there were no married quarters available. We found one on top of a 700ft ridge overlooking the Shatin valley.

The set up of 20 Flt was very different. There were four aircraft for six pilots, more aircraft were supposed to be held in store ready for immediate use. The airstrip was a concrete strip 350 yards long and about 15 ft higher than the high tide level. To one side behind a security fence was a typhoon proof hangar which held three aircraft with the fourth picketed Malay fashion. There were also some Nissen huts used as crewroom ,offices, store and workshop. Very importantly there was a small strongly built control tower with a flat roof and concrete safety rails.

About a mile away on the other side of Shatin village was the main flight camp right alongside the Hoy. This held the offices store rooms and living quarters for the bulk of the flight in a solid stone building. The guard room was a Nissen hut and other huts were used for various purposes. A quarter of a mile beyond the main camp was an old school building which was the Officer's Mess. Along side this building were about a dozen sampans full of Chinese families. All in all a very nice setup but very strung out .The main international airfield was Kai Tak which was the other side of the ridge from our strip. This housed 20 Fighter squadron RAF with their Hawker Hunters. At this stage it had a single runway running out into the harbour. The original runways close into the cliff had been abandoned but the approach from the land side was still over huge tower blocks holding thousands of families. The potential for a massive accident was always present. The working day started at 0800 hrs and finished at midday as it was obviously too hot for Europeans to continue! This meant a lot of time was spent in the swimming pool or working for promotion exams. There was little flying required so you flew when you felt like it. The one time when all hands

were required was the joining routine when the officers of a Navy ship arrived and were flown round the colony.

On occasions there was trouble with the Chinese across the border. At one point they persuaded their peasants to cross into the New Territories. I was detailed by the CinC Far East to take photographs of the border incursion. Immediately afterwards I was ordered by the Governor of Hong Kong NOT to take any photos as it might upset the Chinese! After taking council I obeyed my superior officer. We loaded our photographer with a huge WW1 style camera and flew the border area.

At the river mouth end on our side of the security fence I was astonished to see the ground was blue and not green or brown. This was due to thousands of people dressed in blue denims covering the ground. They were then herded back to the other side of the border by the army over the only bridge. This was designed to put pressure on Hong Kong. At any time we were airbourne we could be attacked by the Hunters of 20 Sqn. who did their best to bring back pictures of Austers taken by their gun cameras. Normally a light aircraft is a very difficult target if the pilot is warned.

On one occasion I was jumped on take off from Sekong airstrip, the home of the Gurkhas , while carrying the flights acquittance rolls and pay clerk. The pay clerk was strapped in but the acquittance rolls were not and most went out through the windows as I took violent avoiding action. The Hunter did not get his photos and I was not popular!

In September we were warned that Typhoon Wanda was likely to strike the colony. On asking around we were told that a typhoon was no worse than a bad English gale and some people had taken their cars out to watch the sea. As the flight had only hangar space for three of the four aircraft one was flown to RAF Kai Tak to be placed in their hangar and tied down. I was detailed to retrieve the pilot by air in another Auster. Kai Tak was already closed to commercial traffic due to cross winds. The sky looked stricken but the winds were still reasonable. My Auster was put into the flight typhoon proof hangar.

Everything moveable was secured and we were all sent home and told to stay there until the storm was over. The local radio started to issue storm warnings and instructions for everyone to get undercover and stay there. My wife put the milk bottles out and I checked that all our kit was put away and we went to bed. The next morning in the half light something was flapping over my head. On waking up properly I realised it was the curtains lying straight out from the curtain rail and yes the window was firmly shut! The wind steadily increased, as did the noise level. As rain was being blown through the closed windows we cleared

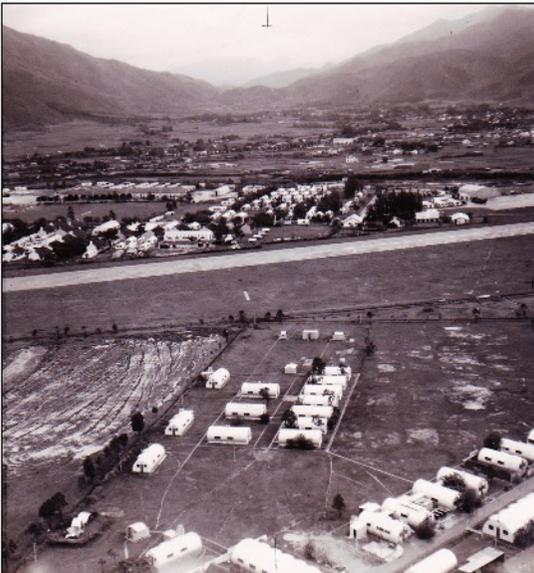
the windward rooms of anything moveable and put them in the safest area which was the corridor. At about 1000 hrs the glass of the windows on two walls was sucked out. By this time the pressure of the gusts was painful on the ears. The visibility was now down to less than 50 yards in the torrential rain, despite this I saw what appeared to be a wooden house being blown up the 45 degree slope and slowly disintegrating as it came. Suddenly after some hours the rain stopped and we could see across the valley most of which was flooded by the sea. Three people came into view at the bottom of the valley making for higher ground. On three occasions we saw them blown off their feet and carried along airbourne by the wind. On the third occasion I am sorry to say they did not get up.

Almost without warning the wind stopped and the sun came out so my wife and I went outside to inspect the damage. The milk bottles had disappeared! The car under a lean to had no paint on the windward side and the glass was sandblasted and had to be changed. Other than that, unlike many people, we were intact. Shortly afterwards we met the Flight Commander and heard that the block of flats lower down the hill were undamaged and no one was hurt. We all kept close to shelter as we were expecting the wind to restart from the opposite direction. It did so suddenly and we took cover; however for some reason it was only of gale force. Later on that day we were able to visit the compound to

find that none of the flight had been seriously hurt but there had been a number of very near misses.

The nearest part of the flight was the airstrip which was a shambles. The only intact building was the control tower. At the height of the storm the sea had risen up to cover the airstrip to a height of around six feet and was driven by a wind of over 150 mph. (The wind measuring equipment had broken at over 160 mph).

The sea came into the Typhoon proof hangar through the back wall and



*Hong Kong Sekong Airstrip*

washed the three Austers through the metal doors and on to the security fence. The Nissen huts had been washed around and some days later I found my flying clothing and log books under the remains of a different hut from the one I had left them in. The top of the control tower became the refuge for the guard and the normally fierce German Shepherd guard dogs as well as some six or so Chinese. The flight personnel were unhurt but there were a number of dead on the airstrip.

It was then on through the remains of Shatin village where only the well built houses remained standing, the rest had been flattened by wind and water, as usual it was the poor who, without the protection of a strong house, suffered most. The fleet of sampans and the attendant families had disappeared. At the main camp the Nissen huts including the guard room had been flattened. One member of the guard floated out on his mattress fast asleep before being rescued by his mates! A large car was sitting on the roof of a three ton lorry and none of the vehicles were where they had been parked. The cellars where most of the flights equipment had been stored were flooded but a great deal of the equipment had been rescued by the people on site at the height of the storm.

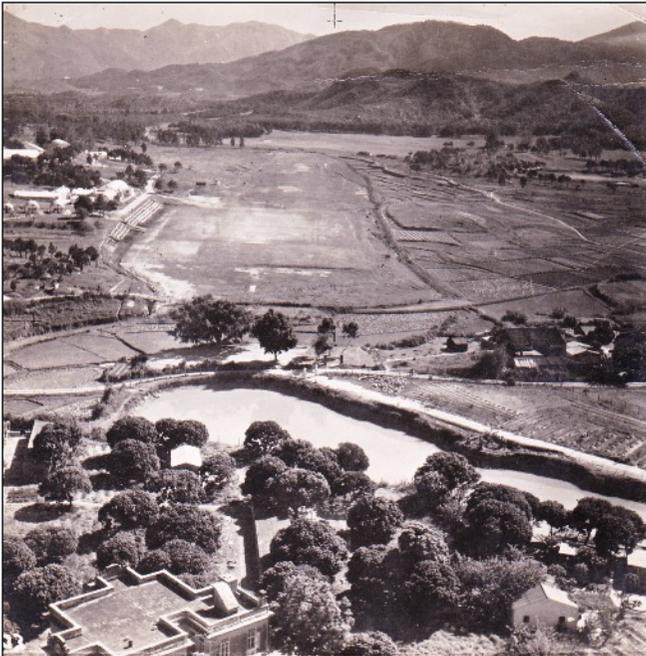
At the officers mess our small but wide Chinese lady cook had been caught by the sea on the ground floor and had performed an impossible feat by climbing up an upright deep freeze to get into the next floor level and save herself from drowning. At all the three sites the people there at the time and without outside help had done a wonderful job saving themselves and a lot of equipment.

It took us months to get reorganised and re-equipped. The aircraft flown to Kai Tak was the only one to survive. Eventually we got other aircraft from store to discover they were unmodified (no tropical modifications) and with only one fuel tank. It was decided that as a lot of work would have to be done to the buildings the flight would join 20 Sqn at FAF Kai Tak where we were made very welcome.

About this time the Gurkha brigade decided to have a tattoo and built a wooden castle on the airfield at Sekong. Our flight commander had the brilliant idea of flying three aircraft in tight formation at night down a valley without lights, and then turning right to line up with the runway, followed by switching all the Austers lights on at low level in front of the crowd just as the castle was illuminated. The leading Auster had a white painted board fitted just behind the front seats illuminated by a vehicle convoy light. All navigation lights and landing lights were switched off. The two wing men had to be tucked in with wing tips well over lapping the leader and between his wing and tail, the closer they were in the easier it was to keep formation. Obviously the leader had to fly accurate-

ly! At the entrance to the valley a large fire was lit with another at the end of the valley. For the right hand turn a line of blue glims led onto the runway threshold. At first I thought this was an accident about to happen but it can be done safely. Prior to the night a series of rehearsals went better than expected. On the night the lead pilot failed to pick up the glims on the turn and the formation was about 100 yards behind the castle. The formation was three seconds late but the castle light switch on was thirty seconds late so the formation was almost abeam the spectators! The lead pilot realised where he was, forgot that he had wing men and turned hard right!!! The formation was within inches of a major collision as it broke up in disorder with all lights blazing. The spectators on the ground thought it was planned and the most spectacular they had seen!! However there were some very shaken pilots.

From then on life was quiet until we left in March 63 to face snow in England. A few months later I was horrified to read that an Auster had hit a hill near Sekong killing the Flight Commander and the two pilots with him.



*Hong Kong Bee Stables Airstrip*

## ILL MET BY LUMINOUS LIGHT

1 Light Aircraft Wing Workshop, Detmold, Nth Rhine Westphalia, 1962  
*by Robin Dawes*

My Mini in Germany was fitted with an old Jaeger clock. There was unfortunately no method of illuminating it for use at night. One day I was in the 'Electrics Bay' waiting for the servicing of an electrical component for our aircraft to be completed when I noticed a cupboard which contained several large glass jars of green luminous paint, all throbbing gently and no doubt emitting all sorts of nasty radioactivity. I asked the Greenie SNCO's if I might have a smidgen of this to paint on my clock hands. The reply was not encouraging - it consisted of two words, the second being 'off'.

On key orderly duty some time later I found myself in possession of the hangar keys and with the paint in mind, devised a plan. In the early hours I crept in to the huge spookily silent building, the moon shining eerily through the few windows. Strange sounds emanated from all around in the darkness, I thought of giving up. There were tales of mass executions of Nazis in hangars elsewhere. However, I soon found the bay and the cupboard with the jars, mercifully unlocked and still throbbing like 'Alien' eggs. The quantity in the jars was far too much for what I wanted, but what to decant the stuff into? I remembered the jam jars brought in by the 'married pads' we used for mixing paint in our Skeeter servicing bay. Carrying one of the throbbing jars I set off across the hangar floor making my way gingerly round one aircraft after another. Then I tripped on a Beaver towing bar some thoughtless person had left still attached to its aircraft tail wheel. The jar flew out of my hands and shattered, a large luminous pool spreading out over a 6 foot diameter. I was mortified but I then had to commence a massive clean up, it seemed everything I touched became luminous, there were luminous footprints, a shovel I used became luminous, bits of rag etc.. The scene was worthy of a Tom and Jerry cartoon. I used everything I could think of to mask the stuff, even soil from outside which I put on it and swept up.

I was there until about 6am and needless to say utterly exhausted. On parade next day I was horrified to see I had still missed some splashes, but nobody seemed to notice. If the electricians missed the jar I never heard about it. Just about every car these days has some sort of a clock as standard. People today don't know how lucky they are. I even had to wind mine up too.

## **The Bahnhof (Railway Station) Telephone**

*by Robin Dawes*

Detmold - one cold January Sunday night in 1963 about 1am. Snow lay thick on the ground and only foolhardy souls were not yet abed. One of these was Jock (Mac) MacArthur. MacArthur was a genial and generally harmless soul who was tolerated by most despite being over-friendly to those of nervous disposition. Like many, he drank rather a lot every night and frequented most of the local bars and gasthaus (pubs). His adventures were legend and getting out of scrapes was second nature to him.

Back to 1am. We (3 Cpl technicians) are all fast asleep in our top floor room in the old Luftwaffe Barracks. Suddenly the light snaps on and we sit up in bed to be faced by two Polizei in bottle green trenchcoats complete with pistols. They were accompanied by a redcap Corporal and a local civilian. One of the Polizei spoke. 'Vere ist die telephone ?' he said. We all said there was no telephone in this block, there's one in the next block though. 'Nein, nein. 'Vot haf you done wiz zie telephone?' We all said we haven't done anything with any telephone, we've all been in bed since 11 o'clock. All this was rather disturbing, we had visions of being carted away by the Gestapo and having our fingernails pulled out. After all, there were still swastikas on various things like lockers for instance and it was only 18 years since Adolf said 'For me, ze war is over' - bang!

All was revealed when the redcap said accusingly 'One of you lot has ripped out the taxi-drivers' phone from the rank outside the station and was last seen running in this direction'. They stomped off and we all went back to sleep muttering about victimisation etc..

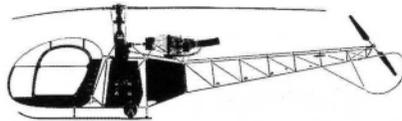
The next morning all was revealed. MacArthur had waited in the snow outside the station for a taxi - none came. Meanwhile the phone rang incessantly until relieved of its task by being yanked off its wire by Mac. Just then a taxi appeared and Mac climbed in still drunkenly holding the phone. On returning to the station the driver noticed the missing phone and called the Polizei. 'So where was the phone?' We asked Mac. Apparently it was in his bed and by good fortune the taxi-driver didn't recognize him.

Some weeks later the Wing EME (Electrical and Mechanical Engineer - the late much lamented Major Guy Newton-Wade) initiated a blitz on Flight Safety. One of the results was the regular publication of a 'Good Shows' flyer. When serious faults had been discovered in areas

of the aircraft where one normally wouldn't look. One of the first accolades was won by Mac - for what exactly I have forgotten.

About a week later a technician was on a Technical Charge for split pinning a Skeeter engine mount bolts with 1/16th" split pins. The heads could easily be pulled through the 1/8 holes. Yes, you've guessed who it was.

Another of his gaffes came when he breezed into our room and said, holding a photograph from a bedside locker, 'Hello Brian' is this your Mum?' It was Brian's girlfriend to whom he wrote unfailingly every night. The rest of us tried to hide.



## The Perilous Key

*by Robin Dawes*

In the early 1970's I was an aircraft technician with an Army Workshop in Germany. One of the duties of the group I was in, was to recover helicopters which for whatever reason had come down away from their parent unit.

Thus I was at home one summer evening when the call came in to recover a Sioux which was on the ground not too far from Hildesheim about 60 miles away. A fellow crew member and I set off in a crane-equipped lorry having made sure all the necessary gear was aboard. A couple of hours later saw us at the aircraft which was in a particularly muddy field. A lot of this mud seemed to have an affinity for our overalls and also various parts of the truck. A quick examination of the 'casualty' soon found the fault the pilot had grounded the aircraft for. A few second's work with a spanner and it was fixed.

Therefore we did not wish to recover a now serviceable aircraft with all the attendant possibilities of disaster on the road and all the in/out paperwork at the workshop. Having no means of communication we drove to a nearby army unit to use their phone.

It so happened that this was an Artillery Unit. We parked our battleworn and muddy conveyance in a lovely marked layby outside the Guardroom not realising that this was reserved for Royalty. Once in the Guardroom we could not help but notice that everything that could be brass, was. And a lot of things that normally aren't brass, were too. It was almost necessary to wear sunglasses. We estimated that the consumption of 'Brasso' in this shrine to the God of Bull must have been phenomenal.

Then we noticed the 'Piece de Resistance'. This was a brass (of course) edged glass box on the wall bearing the notice **'THE USE OF THIS KEY IS PERILOUS'**. It had been somewhat difficult to contain ourselves since entering this place but this cracked us up completely. It was a job to remain standing for laughter.

We were brought down to earth by a voice outside which belatedly 'Whose is that vehicle, get it out of my sight'. It was the unit's RSM.

So we headed home, our spirits considerably raised by our experience.

## TO BE OR NOT TO BE? THAT IS THE QUESTION.

*by Andrew Simkins*

There I was, in the mid 80's, within two weeks of taking command of 656 Squadron AAC. The final hurdle was to pass my Lynx conversion course at Middle Wallop.

The last time I had been a student at Wallop was 10 years previously as an *ab initio* on the Army Pilots' Course. Yet even though I had accumulated over 1,500 hours, mainly on the Gazelle and the Scout, it was still daunting to return to the Students' Crew Room. However, I was blessed with an excellent instructor who forgave my weaknesses and complimented me on my strengths.

I was halfway through the course, and things were on track. I had moved the family into a newly purchased house near Netheravon, the children were registered at a new school and Jane had organised a new teaching job locally.

The mid-course sortie was to progress my handling skills out in the Low Flying Area. All seemed to be going according to plan, albeit with the occasional demonstration and a little prompting from my instructor, when he suddenly declared that he was 'taking control' and returning early to Wallop. This was unusual, if not unprecedented; instructors seldom took the controls and never cut a sortie short. Mild panic increased as the deafening silence intensified. Why had my instructor taken this dramatic action? The glaring answer was that I had clearly fallen short of the required standard and he saw no reason to continue the agony. But surely not? I ran through my previous training sorties, and there were a few times when things had not gone that well, but were they 'red', the below standard grading?

As we entered the Wallop circuit I rationalised that if my instructor believed I was beyond redemption, he would close down the aircraft. Given that the Lynx was twin-engined, with a complex auxiliary gearbox, starting up and shutting down was complicated and took the whole course to master. He landed on dispersal, closed down himself, in silence, and immediately left the aircraft. I was, at that moment, certain that he was en route to see the Chief Flying Instructor and my career was in tatters. It was 4.30pm on a Friday.

What do I tell the family? Nothing. I would sweat it out till the Monday and face my future. But I then remembered that Monday would be a 'Tech Day' when we would be confined to the classroom, learning the intricacies of the fuel, flight control and hydraulic systems.

Come the Monday I barely paid attention, thinking that at any time I would be called out to be interviewed by some senior Corps officer. On Tuesday morning I trudged to the Students' Crew Room wondering what the day would bring. All the instructors were assembled for the daily Met Brief, bar one. Mine. After the formalities, instructors and students paired up, briefed their sorties and departed, leaving me alone in the Crew Room.

Eventually my instructor appeared, coffee in hand, in no hurry to head skywards. Hesitantly I asked, 'Er, any comments on Friday's sortie?'

Friday's sortie?' he replied.

'When you took control?' I said.

'Did I? I can't remember. Oh yes, of course, thank God I did. If I hadn't I'd never have got back home in time to take my wife shopping. She would have been livid. Now today's sortie, I think we will conduct some emergencies. Any questions?'



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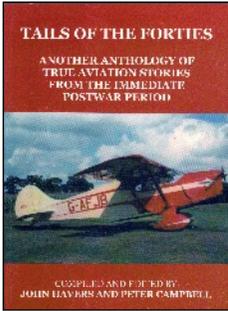


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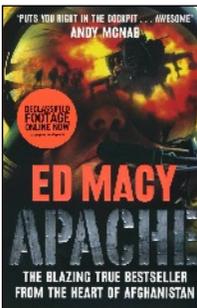
# BOOKS



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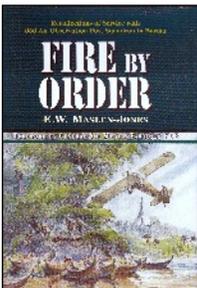
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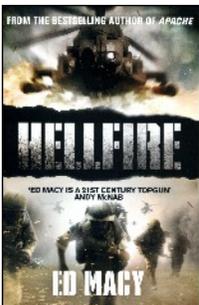
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Ed recounts the intense months that followed Mutay: the steep learning curve, the new missions, the evolving enemy and the changing Rules of Engagement. He also sheds light on his early career as a young paratrooper, his operational baptism as a pilot and how both shaped his ability to fly, fight and survive during that fateful first Afghanistan tour against a cunning and ruthless enemy.

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You will be well aware that HM The Queen holds Garden Parties at Buckingham Palace and at the Palace of Holyroodhouse each Summer. Veterans and their spouses are qualified to attend one of these memorable events.

If you are interested in applying, please let me know and I will send you an application form.

Sylvia Heyes *Contact details on page 39*

## NEW MEMBERS

Robin (Dickie) Dawes	REME	Joined July 2012
Jim (Jock) Taylor	RAF/AAC	Joined July 2012
Len Wells	REME	Joined Aug 2012
Derenda Unwin	Associate	Joined Sep 2012
Derek Peacock	REME	Joined Nov 2012
Colin (Taff) Norris	REME	Joined Dec 2012
Kane (Wardy) Ward	AAC	Joined Jan 2013
Aiden (Frank) Bulmer	AAC	Joined Jan 2013
Kyle (Cas) Cassell	AAC	Joined Jan 2013
Darren (Daz) Wyllie	AAC	Joined Jan 2013

## DEATHS

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

Trevor Foxcroft	RA	Died July 2011
George Gillson	REME	Died July 2012
Harold Groom	AOPOA	Died Aug 2012
Robert Staveley	RA	Died Sep 2012
K. C. Bath	RA	Died Dec 2012
Mrs. Claire Clark	Associate	Died Dec 2012
Charles (Mick) Webb	RA	Died Dec 2012

# COMMITTEE MEMBER'S DETAILS

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