

THE
CHINTHE



SPRING 2016

656 SQUADRON ASSOCIATION
JOURNAL

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OC's REPORT

It is with great pride that I write my first update for the Chinthe as Officer Commanding 656 Squadron, having previously served as the Second in Command back in 2007. I am also a little surprised, as the timing of the report means that I am already a quarter of the way through my two years in Command; time really does fly when you are having fun! It is an honour and a privilege to command a squadron with such a prestigious history and I feel very lucky that we have such a strong Squadron Association. We have a busy but exciting time ahead of us, and I am keen that we do so by continuing the traditions of those who went before us.

My arrival in August coincided with a Squadron deployment. On a wet and windy airfield in the North of England, we set up an operating base with aircraft, aircrew, ground crew and REME and quickly began to provide Attack Aviation planning advice to support the larger plan. On execution, our crews found themselves operating solely by night, spread across a large part of England and Wales to support complex operations, with several types of aircraft, on a range of mission types. The rain for the week was relentless and everyone did a fantastic job in keeping the aircraft flying with only the odd exception. The importance of carrying a well equipped 'go bag' was not lost on the Squadron Weapons Officer, who, when finding himself stuck in a field for the night with an unserviceable aircraft, was very grateful to the Second in Command who kindly shared his sleeping bag and biscuits with him!!

The Squadron returned in September after a well-deserved summer leave and quickly had to get to grips with operating in two very different environments again. A team of ground-crew were inserted on to HMS OCEAN to receive an aircraft containing the SQHI and me so that I could qualify in both day and night Apache deck landings. With two maritime deployments under their belts earlier in the year, they were able to integrate with the Ship's company easily and operated like seasoned deck hands on a very busy deck! It was fantastic to see how all the training and adherence to procedures meant that two Chinooks, two Merlins and our Apache could 'bash' the deck at night and operate in near poetic harmony. We left the ship, eager to come back in 2016 for Exercise BALTOPS in the Baltics. With a quick repack of equipment the Squadron deployed down to Salisbury Plain for some live 30mm canon firing on Exercise TARTAN DAGGER. This was a fires integration exercise with the Royal Artillery and demonstrated that the Apache could provide fire support on call even while operating in the low level environment.

October saw deployments on two more live firing exercises. The first was the Land Combat Power Visit (LCPV) which took place on Salisbury plain. 656 Squadron Apaches and crews fired live 30mm canon as part of a fire-power demonstration to both senior Officers and representatives from industry. It is a very important event in the calendar and serves to illustrate how potent our aircraft are and how they can operate as part of a combined arms group. The Squadron performed to their usual high standard and represented the Apache Force and AAC well. The second deployment was to Otterburn for Exercise GUARDIAN STRIKE, a Regimental battle camp. This was focussed on training the crews to operate by night in a high threat electronic warfare (EW) environment. This provided some excellent and really challenging training and at the end qualified the majority of the Regiment's aircrew to do the same for real. This was a very important milestone as we maintain our very high readiness posture; the skills honed on Spadeadam ranges are exactly the ones that we anticipate needing in our likely future operating areas. It wasn't all work though as the unforgiving Northumberland weather



SQH1 making a brew on exercise



LCpl Gondwe winning the mince pie eating competition!

provided a non-flying day, allowing Squadron members to conduct a cultural study day in Newcastle to catch up on the new James Bond film!

The Regimental Christmas day took on a slightly new format for 2015; after the traditional Gunfire served to the girls and boys by the Officers and SSM, we all then took part in a Regimental Sports competition with each of the sub-units competing against each other at football, water polo, basketball and tug of war. Despite a strong showing from 656 Squadron, we just couldn't match the numerical superiority of the Workshop who took a clean sweep of the trophies. We did however win the mince pie eating competition after the Soldiers' Christmas lunch. LCpl Gondwe romped to victory by devouring 10 pies in 2 minutes 13 seconds! All of this just proved to be a warm up for the main event; a Regimental hangar party, organised by 656 Squadron soldiers, it kept us all entertained with a live band, gladiator style games and a couple of beers to stay hydrated! The year ended with another period of some much needed leave and although the Squadron were able to take a break the vast majority of us remained at very high readiness throughout the period.

We all returned to work in January refreshed and raring to go. We now look forward to an overseas exercise and another maritime deployment to the Baltics aboard HMS OCEAN. The pace and variety of life remains high within 656 Squadron but the soldiers and officers continue to meet it with good natured professionalism.

Alex Harris

Apache helicopters take to the skies in Leeds



Right:

Taken from a newspaper article of a 656 Sqn aircraft with one of our pilots and the CO who landed at Leeds hospital HLS for aircraft commander training.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

I am probably a little late but here's wishing you all a successful 2016. I hope that none of you have been caught in the terrible floods. We live within a 100 yards of the River Axe and it is quite a sight when it breaches its banks. Luckily the excess water spills out onto the flood plains, although our village is cut off to the south until it runs its course.

Whenever I look back to write these reports, I am always amazed at the amount of committee activity, which might not appear obvious to you all.

We are keen to update our website which has served us well for over 15 years, but is now getting a little creaky. So we applied for some grants and have requested quotations. The process always takes longer than planned, but we should be able to announce a shiny new website in time for our reunion. We will let you know.

We also now have our Facebook Group page up and running. This is a very helpful additional means of communicating. If you are "on Facebook" please feel free to post any news or comment.

Just after Christmas we decided to make two £50 donations. The first was to Guy Warner (who wrote our magnificent "From Auster to Apache"). He has written the history of 29 Flight AAC which is now in Canada as part of the British Army Training Unit Suffield (BATUS). Many of our members (yours truly!) will have undertaken training there and Spencer Holtom was the Officer Commanding in the 1970s. Guy aims to have the history published as a booklet, with the profits going to the Museum of Army Flying. Secondly we made a donation to The London Taxi Benevolent Association for War Disabled. These London taxi drivers undertake trips for disabled veterans and some of us have benefited from the charity when attending Remembrance Sunday. I hope you will agree these are worthy causes.

This year's Reunion will be centred around George Butler's Fly In near Haywards Heath, on Sunday 19th June. This is a very relaxed event run, in part, by the local RAF Association Branch, who provide a barbecue on a donation basis. The Fly In will be supported by the International Auster Club and there could be up to 50 aircraft present. We have arranged accommodation in the Best Western Birch Hotel (RH17 7SP) for the Saturday night, and will hold a dinner that evening. Cost of B&B is £95 (ask for the 656 rate) and the Dinner will be £25.

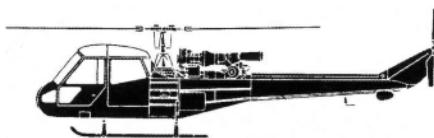
We will also hold the AGM, at the Best Western Birch Hotel, on the Sunday morning before driving the 8 miles to the landing strip. This is very much a "come as you are" event where we can meet up with family and friends. Details, including other local hotels are on Page 13.

We are always seeking ways to move with the times. Some members are happy to receive their Chinthe by email (or look it up on our website) while others prefer to have a hard copy. If you are happy to receive Chinthes by email from 2017, please tick the box on the enclosed proforma.

Finally, for many years I have encouraged closer links with the Army Air Corps. I am also conscious that the Corps will celebrate the 60th Anniversary of its formation in 2017. Recently they have restructured their veteran support and established the Army Air Corps Veterans' Association (AACVA). There is a suggestion that we should be "affiliated" to the AACVA, which would bring benefits in terms of grants and access to up to date information. We would also be able to share our experience and information. The subject will be discussed in the Spring after which we should receive a formal invitation. Our June AGM would be an ideal opportunity for us to discuss the pros and cons. Again we will keep you updated on developments.

Whatever the year brings, I wish you good fortune, and hope to see you.

Andrew Simkins



TREASURER'S REPORT

656 Squadron Association

Statement of income and expenditure for the year ended 31st Dec 2015

Income	Expenditure
General Account	
Subs	2,798.50
New member subs	17.50
Reunion income	929.00 1
History book income	21.76 3
Archives income	0.00
Event income	0.00
Donations in	1,305.00 5
Postage paid income	47.94
Adverts income	0.00
Misc income	0.00
Interest	0.99
Payments from debtors	0.00
Totals	5,120.69
Surplus (or overspent)	1,109.09

Sales account

Sales	Cost of sales
Shop sales	496.43 3
Shop profits	72.96
	423.47
Total income	5,617.12
Overall surplus	1,182.05

Notes (or overspend)

These are provisional, unaudited accounts.

- 1 The Reunion did not have a shop in 2015, so the total cost of the Reunion was £ 373.01
- 2 Remembrance Sunday etc.
- 3 Includes the purchase of 12 copies of "From Auster to Apache", and the sale of 8, plus some ad-hoc donations to the project.
- 4 Reunion prizes, gifts, lapel badges for new members, etc.
- 5 This includes a £ 1,300 lottery grant for the redevelopment of the web site.

656 Squadron Association
Balance sheet for the year ended 31 December 2015

Current Assets	2015	2014
Cash	6,253.69	4,900.17
Stock	797.68	969.15
Debtors	11.20	0.00
Assets	<u>0.00</u>	<u>6.80</u>
	7,062.57	5,876.12
Current Liabilities		
Shop stock	0.00	0.00
Unpresented cheques and transfers	<u>0.58</u>	<u>0.00</u>
	<u>0.58</u>	<u>0.00</u>
Net current assets	7,061.99	5,876.12
(Represented by)		
Funds B/F	5,869.32	4,506.72
General surplus	1,109.09	1,274.75
Shop profits	72.96	87.85
Plus Debtors - current year	11.20	0.00
Minus Creditors - current year	(-0.58)	0.00
Assets	<u>0.00</u>	<u>6.80</u>
	7,061.99	5,876.12
Reserve account		
Opening balance 1 January	2,002.30	2,001.30
Transfers in	0.00	0.00
Transfers out	0.00	0.00
Interest received	<u>0.99</u>	<u>1.00</u>
Closing balance 31 December	2,003.29	2,002.30

Mark Meaton, Treasurer
Derek Walker, Deputy Treasurer
January 2016

REMEMBRANCE DAY PARADE 2015

The 8th November dawned bright and sunny in London as the Squadron's party totalling 20 including three sons, a friend of Gwyn Davies, my own partner Pat Moore wearing her grandfather's DSO and MC and Captain Olly Snell and five of his regular colleagues assembled on Horse Guards for the ceremony and the march past.

As our President Andrew Simkins was laying a wreath at St Bartholomew's Church in Crewkerne, our Treasurer, Derek Walker, was the Squadron's Commander for the day. Alan Flint carried the wreath while Ross Skingley was again the left marker for the march past.

This year we had been allocated a slot close to the head of the marching columns, partially because Ted Maslen-Jones MC DFC had featured in one of the interviews with veterans during the BBC's coverage of the ceremony.

Once we were in position in Whitehall, there was quite a long wait and during that time George Laker had a bit of a turn, but was soon back on his feet having been attended to by medics and revived by any number of offers of water provided by the WRAC contingent ahead of us.

A moment of light relief occurred when the huge TV monitor just ahead of us failed and as the saying goes "A titter ran around Whitehall" with the Monty Pythonesque appearance of a man with a very long ladder climbing up to fix the offending display just in time for the Service to start.

The march past went well and we featured in a couple of ten second slots during the BBC coverage. I have to confess that I find it quite humbling to be applauded while marching past the crowds - often ten deep.

The Duke of Cambridge took the salute as we passed the dais behind Horse Guards at the end of the march past and following some reunions with old comrades from other detachments, and a chaotic photo shoot, most of the contingent repaired to L'Ulivo's Restaurant near Charing Cross for an excellent lunch.

It was good for the old retirees to mix with today's young Squadron members and from what I saw, 656 is very much alive and well and in very good hands.

A lovely bonus presented itself when we went to pay our bills after the meal – It appeared that our absent "Glorious Leader" (President Andrew Simkins) had negotiated a 50% discount for us all by booking us in advance. Well done Mr President!

In my view, it is a great privilege for 656 Sqn to be allowed to march as an independent unit rather than with the much larger AAC contingent. I commend it as an experience that no one should miss the chance of doing it at least once in their lives and I look forward to marching with the Squadron again on the 13th November 2016.

(PS. I have a DVD of the BBC broadcast and will be happy to run off copies for members if I am asked so to do).

Geoffrey Simpson



Some of the contingent at Horse Guards Parade and below enjoying lunch.





Above:

It is always a pleasure to have current squadron members "on parade" with us.



Right:

Andrew Simkins lays a wreath at St Bartholomew's Church, Crewkerne on Remembrance Sunday 2015

COLONEL ARMY AIR CORPS COMMENDATION

MARK MEATON

It gives us enormous pleasure to announce that Mark Meaton was awarded a Colonel Army Air Corps Commendation in the 2015 Army Air Corps Honours and Awards.

The Commendation was not just for his sterling service to our Association, where he has been a most diligent treasurer and archivist. His work with the Museum of Army Flying has also been acknowledged whereby he introduced the IT archival software, called MODES, into the Museum's Curator Department.

This is a significant achievement and has enabled the Museum to gain further accreditation. He also researched the honours and awards of The Air Observation Post in time for the unveiling of a memorial at the Museum. Again this was a major feat as the records were dispersed, contradictory and often incomplete.

On behalf of all our members we congratulate Mark on a well deserved recognition of his efforts on behalf of Army Aviation.



ANNUAL REUNION DINNER - THE BIRCH HOTEL - SATURDAY 18th JUNE

We have arranged accommodation in the Best Western Birch Hotel (RH17 7SP) for the Saturday night, and will hold our reunion dinner that evening. Cost of B&B is £95 (ask for the 656 rate) and the Dinner will be £25. Alternative, cheaper accommodation may be found at: The Eight Bells, The Street, Bolney, RH17 5QW, 020 3564 4869 or The Premier Inn, Burgess Hill Hotel or East Grinstead Hotel.

We will also hold the AGM, at the Best Western Birch Hotel, on the Sunday morning before driving the short distance to the landing strip. Full details are on the enclosed Return Proforma.

REUNION FLY IN 19TH JUNE

This year's Reunion will be centred around George Butler's Fly In near Haywards Heath. This is very much a "come as you are" event where we can meet up with family and friends.

Date and timings: Sunday 19th June from 11:00 to 15:00.

Location: The Airstrip is just off the A272 at Piltdown, and we will mark the entrance. The postcode is TN22 3XN, which is the Old Spot Farm shop; the turn-off for the airstrip is 100 M West of this on the A272

Flights: We are looking into whether we can offer flights. However, there is no guarantee owing to weather and availability. If we can arrange, we request a donation for the fuel.

Bad Weather: Naturally we wish for fair winds and clear skies. However we will aim to inform attendees if the forecast is for bad weather.

Barbecue: An excellent barbecue is provided by the local RAF Association. Donations are requested. There will also be a Raffle.

Aircraft: Plenty we hope; and here's praying for good weather. The event is supported by the International Auster Club.

We recommend you bring a collapsible chair with you.

MEMBERS' CONTRIBUTIONS

THE FIRST SQUADRON CASUALTY

Autobiography of Rex Boys

Foreword: My father volunteered at the beginning of the war. Many years later he wrote his memoirs, not for publication, but for the benefit of his five children, who - as so often happens - until that time knew very little of his early life, and nothing at all about 'his private war'. In those memoirs, he described his training in the Observer Corps, continuing after contracting - although relatively mildly - poliomyelitis, and managing to fool the medics by hiding the resultant slight leg problem. In due course, he was posted to Burma, and it seemed to me that it is this description of his - sadly rather brief - time and adventures there might be of interest to members of 656. The following is an extract beginning at his arrival in India.

Mrs. Jennie Karle

'My orders were to get to Calcutta quick, but to get there whole: no fancy business! The Army had rules, of course, for every occasion, and in particular for that sort of road movement: speed, vehicle densities and so on. I tried to remember what we had been taught at Filey, however irrelevant it might be in India, but nothing came back to me. I was left with common sense as my only guide. The distance was about 2,000 kilometres over dirt roads, with no tarmac, as I recall, except near the cities. At least I was in the lead on this occasion, so others got my dust. The main thing obviously was not to lose the way: it would be no joke trying to turn a convoy of twenty or thirty vehicles on those roads! Fortunately they were mostly pretty new, which helped, and many of them were of American manufacture, which helped even more. I had a Dodge command car, tougher than anything I had driven before, superbly sprung and equipped for rough work in bad conditions, four-wheel drive and all. So I and my driver were happy. With hard going, we could have done the distance in two days, but the convoy was perforce slower. We took about a week and arrived without casualties.

I had time to drink in the novelty of the sights and sounds of the Indian countryside. We passed through everything from semi-desert to near-jungle. We saw hundreds of holy but starving cows; hundreds of coolie women with children at the breast, humping baskets of earth to make up the road; all the commonplace sights of India. At that time of the year, January, there was no rain, of course, and we saw much hardship,

indeed starvation, for the 1943 famine was at its height. The worst scenes I had already experienced in Calcutta and on the railways: bodies lying about wrapped in rags; pot-bellied children scampering up and down the line whenever the train slowed, screaming 'No Mammy, no Pappy' and smacking their bellies, but laughing their heads off at the same time. It was impossible to distinguish between those in need and jolly kids exploiting the soft hearts of British soldiers fresh from home. We also saw some beautiful sights on the road, both scenery and the occasional palace. I remember one in particular which, perhaps because of some trick of the light, reminded me of Petra, but I was concentrating too much on my responsibilities to think about the 'Rose red city half as old as time'.

However enjoyable it may seem in retrospect, it was deadly serious then, and I felt my responsibility. I had only to take a wrong turning to have chaos on my hands. Nor of course was it only I who found myself in a novel situation. Almost every man in the convoy was in India for the first time in his life, and the long drive in such circumstances was a wholly new and rather tough experience. So it was vital to maintain morale and let everyone know that I was fully in command of the situation and of any emergency that might arise. When we stopped for one of our periodic halts in a coconut grove I walked back along the length of the column joking with the men. It was perishing hot, and although we had plenty of water, the idea of some coconut milk was attractive.

'Shoot us one down, sir!' some wag shouted pointing aloft.

'Sure,' I said, drawing my pistol and aiming up into the tree. Bang! And to my amazement, down came a coconut. Prolonged cheers and we set off again in high spirits.

When we were about half-way, we received a radio signal from Headquarters that equipment in some of our vehicles was urgently needed in Calcutta as the Squadron was about to go into action at Arakan. I therefore took the necessary trucks out of the convoy and led them in my command car, driving more or less day and night. On our last halt on the outskirts of Calcutta, we stopped for breakfast and a shave so that we should not arrive bedraggled and exhausted. The OC, Major Denis Coyle, took over the essential vehicles and sent them ahead to Cox's Bazaar where his headquarters and 'A' and 'C' Flights were already established on the airfield. I waited for the rest of my column and, when it arrived a few days later, we went straight on board ship at the Hooghly River, finally reaching Cox's Bazaar at the beginning of February 1944.

Having been out of touch with Squadron Headquarters for so long, I did not know at all what was going on except that my Flight had been detailed to build the first forward airstrip, just over the hills in the Kalapanzin

valley and therefore not far from Taung Bazaar. We were in support of the 7th Indian Division whose Headquarters were in the hills above our airstrip, although no operational sorties had yet been flown. I had no further knowledge of the tactical situation, and there was no one at Squadron Headquarters to brief me. In the absence of Denis, therefore, it seemed to me that the first thing I should do was to see what was happening on 'my' airstrip, and then report to Divisional Headquarters.

It was a long time since I had flown an aircraft and I felt quite light-headed as I set off on what was to become a very long journey. I intended only to inspect the work that was being supervised by Captain 'Mac' McLinden, a reliable officer several years older than I, who had served his time in the ranks as a regular soldier. He proved his ability later in the capture of Akyab and other operations, he had a heart of gold and was utterly fearless. It was another lovely day and I flew in bush shirt and shorts, expecting to be back in an hour or so to pick up the other threads in our Squadron life. It was no more than fifteen minute flip, and the hills, which ran more or less north and south, were no obstacle, as I already knew from walking across them.

As soon as I cleared the hills I could see the airstrip, but to my surprise none of the activity I expected, particularly no dust from the bulldozer's blades. There was no one to flag me down, which was something I expected on a newly constructed strip, and when I landed I could see no sign of life. Then Mac came running up to me from a clump of trees at the corner of the airstrip where I could see the bulldozer parked and the men from Mac's Section crouching in the grass.

'What the hell's going on?' I began to rage, thinking they had 'stopped for tea'.

He pointed away into the hills and shouted above the noise of the engine: 'The Japs are just over there,' almost behind us, in fact, just where they should not have been. So I taxied to the clump of trees, stopped the engine and got out.

We held a council of war. Someone had warned Mac to stop work because he was now between the front lines, but had given him no orders or any other information. Mac was the ideal man for the circumstances. He had ordered his men, and I suppose the driver of the bulldozer, to take up a defensive position under the trees and load their rifles. He was quite unflappable and would doubtless have sold his life as dearly as he could. Yet he was, I imagine, glad to have his Flight Commander turn up in the nick of time to assume responsibility for a difficult situation.

I had no idea what to do next, as my military training had not covered such circumstances. There is, however, one thing about the

Army: you should always be able to find someone to give you orders before you have to act on your own initiative. So I hurried off to Div. H.Q., hidden on the hillside among the trees, to seek out the C.R.A. or some subordinate under whose command I assumed myself to be. He was nowhere to be found, being no doubt in conference with other senior officers about the day's sudden development, and planning for its consequences. Air O.P. could not have loomed large at that critical moment even if I had been able to find him. But at least he would have given me an order, probably to push off back where I had come from and leave the battle to him. All I could find was a baffled-looking junior officer who told me no-one had any idea what was happening or where the Japs were, and he could not advise me what to do.

So I returned to the airstrip, thinking hard. The only thing clear in my mind was that I must do *something*. Mac's Section might be surrounded by the Japanese at any moment as there apparently were no ground troops between us. The Division was facing south and was not expecting its flank to be turned. It was the same old story, but this time with a difference. 15 Corps, of which 7th Indian was a part, was ready to fight a defensive battle on the spot and had no intention of withdrawing. This was at last made possible by the huge improvement in our air capability, which enabled beleaguered troops to be supplied by air. Thus developed the 'Battle of the Admin Box', the first occasion on which the Japs were fought to a standstill, and in due course driven into their disastrous rout down the length and breadth of Burma.

That, however, lay in the future and did not help me to decide what to do. Since as far as I could tell nobody knew where the Japanese were, it seemed a good idea to find out. I did not, of course, know that all this time Tony Irwin's 'V' Force had been feeding information through about Japanese movements and intentions - he told me that part of it later - and that there must already have been a great deal of information, much of it no doubt based on rumour, in Corps and/or Divisional H.Q. It seemed to me that under the conditions of almost total ignorance, as I had been informed, I was probably the best man for the job of finding out where the Japs were because of my previous experience of the Kalapanzin Valley to the east of us.

When I told Mac of my decision to make a reconnaissance he asked me to let him go. I did not even think about it. I did not consider that he was suitable and anyway the Kalapanzin was 'my' valley. Apart from that, it was clearly my responsibility and I could see no other way of assessing the risk to which we were exposed. It never occurred to me to be afraid. The alternative would have been for Mac and me to fly back over

the mountains taking a man with us in each aircraft. That was unthinkable. And we could not just sit there. 'Time spent on reconnaissance is seldom wasted' was a popular Army catchphrase.

Perhaps it was a wrong decision. It certainly caused a great deal of trouble for all concerned, though I suppose what happened to me was part of the body of experience that led the Squadron to its subsequent successful operations throughout the campaign. It would certainly have been bad for our reputation and our morale to have turned away from danger.

Anyway, I took off for the river, which was quite close, and flew up and down the banks seeing nothing. For the first time, I realised how little one could observe through dense forest even at low altitude. The whole area could have been teeming with Japs for all I could tell. Then I flew south to Taung Bazaar. There was no longer a Union Jack on Tony's *basha*. At once the Japs came swarming out of the village huts and began to shoot at me. I tried to count. Impossible. There were groups of men everywhere and flashes of small arms fire. Splendid targets, but I had no guns to call on. I saw no signs of vehicles or artillery. I was about to turn back when I realised I had lost control of my aircraft, which went crashing into the ground from about 500 feet. It happened very suddenly: no time to think.

I should have been dead except that my guardian angel was watching over me and has continued to do so ever since. Even now as I write these words, aged nearer eighty than seventy, and continue to enjoy good health, I thank him for it. But on that afternoon the odds against my earning an old age pension would have been pretty long.

My guardian angel's main achievement was to put me down in a small clearing in the forest and prevent the aircraft from catching fire as it might well have done. I do not know how long I was unconscious, and the first thing I dimly realised was that I must get out quick. I opened the door and tumbled out bottom first, dragging my broken legs after me, and lay beneath the wing, losing consciousness again.

When I came to, I was aware of shadowy figures creeping around under the trees. These, as Tony Irwin was later to inform me, were Texas Dan and his mates, all set to earn the reward that 'V' Force offered for rescuing pilots who had force-landed. Seventy-five rupees was the official rate, but in the confusion of the Japanese attack, accounting procedures went by the board and Texas Dan was thought to have got away with nearly a thousand. I would not have quibbled. My silver cigarette case was the only thing of value I had with me. I pressed it into his hands, mumbling incoherently.

The Japanese must have been close by, and it was touch-and-go whether Texas Dan would get me away before they came. He left me, and for a while I was alone. The teak forest all around, which had looked so fresh and green from the air, was an ugly dusty world of bare tree trunks and big dry leaves. I dozed off into unconsciousness again. When the gang returned, they brought a long bamboo pole on to which I was hoisted, sitting sideways with my arms round a couple of necks, the others taking the weight on each side. They were small men and as they scurried off across the fields, my dangling legs banged against the paddy *bunds* as we passed, while I clung for dear life to my rescuers' necks. It was rather desperate, and my right leg in particular, which as I visualised it afterwards could have been severed with a sharp knife, was covered with dirt, protruding bone ends and all.

I thought we were going in the wrong direction, towards the Japs on the river and away from the airstrip, and I had some anxious moments. But Texas Dan had organised his team with courage and resourcefulness and if I had ever been able to find him again I would most willingly have paid my debt. I tried several times after the war, and sent money to the local District Commissioner, but Burma was soon overwhelmed by communism and there was no way of making contact.

Texas Dan's planning was exemplary. He had sent some men ahead to secure a sampan and another party down river to a Field Ambulance which happened to be there, to warn them of my approach. The doctor in charge, Major Crawford as I afterwards learned, had been ordered to withdraw in the face of the Japanese advance, but he decided to ignore his orders until I arrived. To him also I owe my life.

I was bundled into the sampan, again scarcely conscious. They covered me with leaves and grass and paddled cautiously downstream, crossing from side to side to avoid Jap patrols. Some of the party were doubtless reconnoitring ahead. I do not know how long that journey took, not too long perhaps though it seemed an age, partly because I had no idea where we were going. I was aware that it was getting dark when we reached the Field Ambulance, so it must have been four or five hours after my crash. Major Crawford was standing on the bank and came down to meet me, plunging a hypodermic needle into my arm without a word.

Afterword: Captain Boys spent the next ten months in hospital, first in India for seven months, Egypt for one month, and then in London

THEN AND NOW

by George McKie

When I was 15, I dropped out of South Shields Grammar & Technical School for Boys and started work at Whitburn Colliery, Co Durham. My paternal grandfather used to be a Shot-firer, doing underground blasting at the coalface, and I had this romantic idea that coal-mining would be a great career for me. Big mistake!

Working a 3-shift system, I used to descend 1400 feet in the cage, collect a pit-pony from the stables at the pit-bottom, and walk with the pony over a mile under the North Sea to get to my work area near the coal face. There I was a timber-leader, ferrying wooden pit-props to the men on the face (used to shore up the roof whilst coal was extracted) I loved my pit pony but hated the pit. However, I managed to stick it out for nearly 3 years. After the Deputy (middle manager) was buried up to his neck in a rock fall and I nearly broke my pelvis after being pinned between two haulage tubs, I decided it was time to move on. A mate at the pit had joined REME and was going to train as a vehicle electrician so I applied to do likewise and I was accepted in November 1958. Basic training at 1 Trg Bn REME, Blandford, was followed by trade training at 10 Trg Bn REME, Gosport, where I was a potential electrician. I have great memories of carousing with my mates in the pubs in Portsmouth, along with Matelots and Royal Marines, but in trade training I discovered that I had little mechanical aptitude and I was withdrawn from the course at the half-way point. As I then wanted the shortest course possible, so I could get to my first unit, I opted for HGV driving at 6 Trg Bn REME, Bordon. Subsequently, I arrived as an 18 year old 'Whitey from Blighty' at 656 Sqn Army Air Corps, at Noblefield, Kuala Lumpur, in November 1959.

Major Dennis Weatherhead REME was the Wing EME and I was his Land Rover driver for a while before becoming a Bedford RL 3 Tonner driver. My 3 years with 656 Sqn AAC were the happiest times of my life. I absolutely loved Malaya, the climate, the food, the people etc and I found truck driving, especially long-distance driving, appealed to my sense of adventure. I enjoyed being away from camp life as much as possible too. I used to do 'the milk run' from Noblefield, Kuala Lumpur, to Singapore on a regular basis, back-loading stuff to RAF Seletar, RAF Tengah, or RAF Changi, in Singapore, and collecting stores from the RAOC depots in Singapore, and 221 Base Vehicle Depot in Johore Bharu. We had to go with a co-driver, each driving 2 hours on and 2 off, and L/Bdr Jim (Paddy) Connor was my mentor. Paddy taught me the

ropes and introduced me to Mee Hoon Soup, Nasi Goreng, etc at wayside eating stalls. We spent 2 nights at 11 Flight, RNAS Sembawang, and availed ourselves of the facilities of the Britannia Club and Newton's Circus in Singapore, and returned to KL on the 3rd day, after a 500 mile round trip. We also did aviation gas (Avgas) runs, delivering 4 gallon 'flimsies' tins to the AAC detachment at Temerloh, over the Bentong Gap, and being billeted at the Police Field Force Camp. Bucket swills from the ice-cold well were a good start to the morning! We also delivered stores to exercises on the north-east coast of Malaya at Kampong Kijal, and drove the 'Outward Bound Club' on trips to Khota Bharu and Trengganu. There were also lots of routine local runs. Claiming subsistence allowance for 5 and 10-hour journeys also came in handy in those days.



Cfn. George McKie in his Bedford RL 3 Tonner at Noblefield

Half way through my tour I met a local girl, Mabel Yong, and we were married on 11 August 1962. (We have now been married 53 years, and have 2 sons and a grandson, so we think the marriage is going to work out!) In the third year of my tour I was allocated a place on a Recovery Mechanics basic course at 40 Base Workshop REME in Singapore. There I learned to drive and operate Scammel 6x6 recovery vehicles and low-loader trailers, as well as the techniques for winching, suspended towing, dealing with mines and booby traps, radio procedures etc. I thoroughly enjoyed the course and felt that I had found my vocation.

On leaving 656 Sqn AAC, in Nov 1962, I was posted as a Recovery Mechanic to the LAD REME attached to my father's old regiment, 1stBn Royal Northumberland Fusiliers, at Lemgo, near Detmold, BAOR. The Fusiliers had recently converted to an armoured infantry role and were learning to drive Saracen armoured cars. This gave rise to some interesting recovery tasks for me, especially on the day President J F Kennedy was assassinated. I spent 6 hours that day, in the Sennelager Training Area, trying to get a Saracen up the ramps, and onto the Rubery Owen drawbar trailer, after the Saracen's 2 front wheels had been ripped off in an accident. It was great to serve with fellow Geordies and they looked after their LAD personnel very well.

After two very busy years with them I was posted to 13 Armoured Workshop REME in Aden from June 1964 until June 1966. These were exciting times doing recovery duties on convoy runs to the Radfan, as well as recovery in the Aden area. There are some similarities with convoy runs in Iraq and Afghanistan recently. Convoys of 40 vehicles went up-country on one day and came back the next, with crews sleeping overnight in tents. The recovery vehicle was at the back with the armoured car escort. Terrorist activities were rising and IEDs were becoming an occupational hazard to drivers.

Sadly, my links with army transport were coming to an end. By now I had matured and I was an ambitious Cpl and I was becoming frustrated with the lack of promotion prospects to Sergeant – despite my love of the job. So I responded to a call to make up the shortfall of Clerks in the Corps, and on return to UK in 1966 I passed a Clerks REME course. Although the job was dull at times, compared with recovery, I found I was well suited to administration and accounting and was promoted relatively quickly once qualified. Postings followed to various REME workshops and Headquarters in UK, BAOR and Cyprus (during the Turkish invasion 1974), and I retired as a WO1 Superintendent Clerk in 1981. During my last 2 years in the Army I paid for an HGV driving course and obtained an HGV Class 1 Licence. Also, during my last army job in Leicester (at REME Manning and Records Office) I had bought a house there and that is where we settled.

I had dreams of becoming an owner/operator HGV contractor with my new Articulated Vehicles licence but the recession was biting in 1981 and I decided not to go ahead with the idea, because I worried that I might lose my house, which would have to be the security for the loan to buy a tractor unit. My checker board 2nd career on civvy street included running my own carpet and upholstery business, being a

contracts manager, and a Waste Management Officer in Local Government.

When I was a Recovery Mechanic I was very sensitive when being referred to as a “thick Recy Mech” by the vehicle mechanics. However, I left the army with a Higher National Certificate in Business Studies, obtained the hard way by a distance-learning course, and I finally put that stigma to bed when I graduated from Leicester University in 1997 with a 2:1 BA (Hons) in Humanities. I was 56 and my father, who was 86, came to my convocation to see his boy ‘come good’. At the ripe old age of 63, I obtained a Further Education Teaching Certificate and spent my last 2 years up to retirement teaching business studies and book-keeping to life-sentence prisoners at Gartree maximum security prison. My ‘students’ were lovely and really appreciated what I was doing for them - they just happened to be murderers, rapists etc in another life!

After retiring in 2006 we rented our house out and relocated to Kuala Lumpur, and used the UK monthly rental income to fund the rental of a condo in KL. We had a 5 year visa under the “Malaysia My Second Home Programme.” (full details available via Google) We were able to rent a condominium with 3 bedrooms and 2 bathrooms, in a secure gated compound with its own swimming pool, tennis court, gymnasium etc. This enabled my wife to spend quality time with her aged mother and her siblings, and our family could visit us from UK and enjoy the facilities too. From KL we were able to visit Thailand, Cambodia, Bali and Australia.

It was wonderful to be back in the place where I had spent the best years of my youth and to travel to all the old favourite places like Bentong, Trengganu, Cameron Highlands, Frasers Hill, Port Dickson, Penang and Pangkor Island. When we weren’t travelling, or entertaining visitors, I kept busy through membership of the Scottish Society, as well as being the treasurer of the Rotary Club of Pantai Valley, and I was also the Malaysia Representative of the National Malaya and Borneo Veterans Association. (NMBVA). In addition, I sang tenor in a mixed choir – Cantus Musicus – which had a busy programme throughout the year. (see their website or Wikipedia) When our 5 year visa came to an end we decided to return to the UK. Mabel’s mother had passed away while we were there and now the pull was back towards the kids and our grandson.

After returning to UK in 2011 we moved into a retirement community with its own social centre etc and we settled in quite quickly. Within a short time I joined the Grand Central Chorus as a tenor – a 60 member male voice Barbershop choir – and we won the UK Gold Medal in 2012

and competed in the International Championships in Toronto in 2013, where we were 23rd and better than 10 American choruses! (listen to us on Spotify) I subsequently became the Treasurer and still fulfil that role. In May this year we won the Bronze Medal.

However, at times I was restless and still felt I could be doing more with my time. So I found myself a part – time job driving Mercedes Sprinter vans with Cheetah Couriers – and I am still doing it at the age of 74! One of our main customers is Base Group, Whetstone, who produce composites and patterns for the Formula 1 and sports car manufacturers. For you F1 enthusiasts, I regularly deliver to Merussia F1 at the Silverstone Technology Centre, Mercedes at Brackley, Williams F1 at Wantage, Red Bull at Milton Keynes, McLaren at Woking, Lotus in Enstone, and various suppliers and sub-contractors in the Goodwood area. I also go all over the country on other collections and deliveries, including Central London – which is my least favourite run. So I guess driving is in my blood and I am glad I can still enjoy it and have a few more adventures.

Like they say, “age is just a number!”



“Keep on Trucking” Me and my Sprinter

PHILIP BARAK RECOVERS TO SECOND PLACE AFTER NIGHTMARE START

Our very own Philip Barak, who at the age of 81 is, I believe, the oldest driver still racing in the UK! Great Stuff Philip! Note the 656 sticker on the car's side Ed.



Finmere racer Philip Barak finished second in the 2015 British Automobile Racing Club Clubmans Championship for A Class Cars.

Philip Barak endured a tough season of racing as he attempted to collect his 10th championship.

The first round at Silverstone was a disaster when a spinning car removed the rear of Philip's car, causing him to miss several rounds. Two first places at Brands Hatch helped him get back in the picture before a first and second at Snetterton, plus two second places at Croft, gave him an outside chance of taking the championship. At the last round at Oulton Park, two cars in front of Philip collided and the parts from one damaged his car so he ultimately finished second.

Philip's car is prepared at his workshop at Silverstone and tuned by TTS performance at Silverstone on their rolling road.

OPERATION AGILA – RHODESIA 1979/80

My recollections of two and half months in Rhodesia commanding Scout Flight of 656 Squadron, Army Air Corps. by Bob Thorpe

1979 was to prove a busy year for Scout Flight of 656. We started the year with a deployment to Belize on the normal roulement tour. This was followed with reinforcing 660 Squadron in Hong Kong with 2 Scouts, 3 crews and the normal excellent REME and ground support. The illegal immigration problem had escalated when the Chinese 42nd Army was removed from the Hong Kong border to take part in the invasion of Vietnam; the garrison was swamped with all 5 infantry battalions on the border and 660 flying at maximum capacity, with the garrison catching over 1,000 immigrants per day.

We arrived back in UK, having been replaced by two more crews and ground support from the Flight, in late October for some well-deserved leave only to be put on standby to be part of a Commonwealth Monitoring Force (CMF). This was being set up to monitor the ceasefire in Rhodesia, assuming, of course, that the Lancaster House talks, between all the warring parties, was successful.

Initially the plan was to deploy Squadron Headquarters, under Major Stephen Nathan, with three Scouts to be deployed to the Rhodesian Air Force base in Gwelo (now Gweru), under my command, and three Gazelles based at Salisbury Airport. Captain Sam Drennan, as Squadron 2ic would remain in Farnborough running the remaining half of the squadron, although with two crews in Hong Kong it was somewhat smaller than the half deploying.

Much preparation took place; the ground crews started to prepare the aircraft and equipment, making sure we had sufficient spares for what was going to be a hot and dusty environment. At the same time the air crew started studying the maps of Rhodesia with little real knowledge of what to expect. What was amazing is that the maps were no more than three weeks old, the mapping people having over printed pre-1965 maps with up to date information provided, I assume, from satellite images and perhaps over-flights.

We then waited and waited. Everything was, of course, highly confidential. No-one was to speak of the deployment outside of the squadron lines. However, when we adjourned one evening to the local pub outside the Royal Aircraft Establishment, we were greeted by the landlord saying "I hear you boys are off the Rhodesia". So much for our ability to keep a secret. How did we win the Cold War?

Finally, the Lancaster talks were successful. Zimbabwe-Rhodesia was to become a British colony again and revert to the name Rhodesia, whilst the Patriot Front (PF) (Mugabe's ZANU and Nkomo's ZAPU) came into Cease Fire RVs and thence into Assembly Places, which were to be monitored by the Commonwealth Monitoring Force, consisting of around 1,000 Brits, 100 Aussies, 50 Kiwis, 25 Kenyans and 25 Fijians. 'Free and fair' elections would then be held and Zimbabwe would be born as a new independent nation in the Commonwealth.

656 was given the order to deploy and 6 weeks of waiting was over.

The first VC10 lifted off from Brize Norton with the new Governor, Lord Soames, and his staff plus the GOC Major General John Acland, his deputy commander, Brigadier John Learmont and his staff. Our advance party, with Squadron HQ and the two flight commanders left the following day on the second VC10. An uneventful flight except that as we arrived over Salisbury Airport the Captain asked us to "securely fasten our seat belts" as

there was a SAM threat and he intended to do a very rapid descent within the airfield boundary. For those who love roller coasters it was an exciting descent, side slipping in a VC10 from 33,000 feet.

The remainder of the Squadron arriving over the next two days with our Scouts being carried by a US Air Force Galaxy and the Gazelles in a Hercules, plus, of course our land rovers and equipment.

After a few days of preparation in Salisbury, on 23 December, I then led my three Scouts from Salisbury to Gwelo with a Hercules bringing



Unloading from a US Air Force Galaxy



Christmas Day Gwelo 1979 - I need a haircut!

the ground crews and equipment. It was at that stage we took the decision to fly at 1,500 feet out of small arms fire but theoretically a prime target for handheld SAMs. However, we discussed this with our intelligence boys and they told us that use of SAMs was controlled at a very high level within the Guerrilla forces. Since they had agreed at Lancaster House to the cease fire we therefore reasoned they would not knowingly shoot down a monitoring force aircraft. This was in direct contrast to the RAF crews who decided SAMs were a threat and flew at 150 feet agl. Tragically on Boxing Day a Puma flew into wires killing all three crew members. Thereafter the RAF also flew above 1,500 feet.

We were met by the Rhodesian Station Commander and his staff, assigned a hangar we were to share with 230 Squadron Royal Air Force and their 3 Pumas and given a liaison officer. They could not have been more welcoming and a feature of our whole stay was the friendliness and cooperation given to us by the Rhodesian Air Force. Given that their world was about to change dramatically it showed us what a professional bunch of servicemen and women they were.

We spent the first few days at Gwelo acclimatizing, painting white crosses on the aircraft (all CMF vehicles and aircraft had white crosses (great aiming marks!)), and doing a shortened TQ (theatre qualification) with WO2 Mick Sharp, our QHI. This involved rather exciting hot and high engine offs. Luckily for us the Scouts were very robust and apart

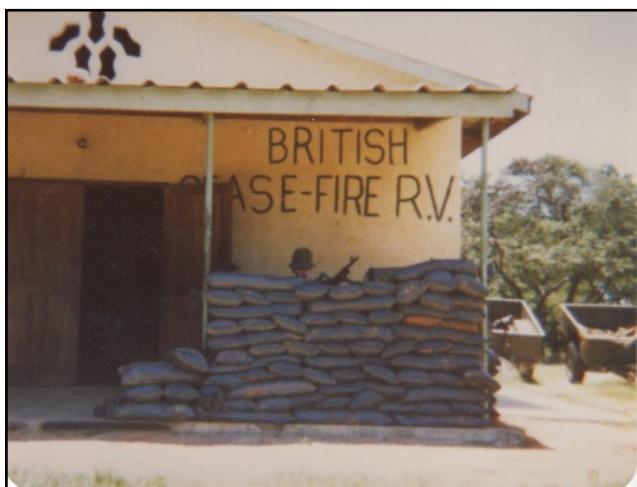
from some very hard landings no damage was done. Mick was not so lucky when doing engine offs with one of the Gazelle pilots and managed to break the tail off after being specifically told by the boss not to damage the aircraft! Mick took quite a lot of ribbing about that one!

Once the Force was in country the order was given by General John to deploy into the field and set up the RVs and Assembly places. The decision was to go overtly and raise both the Union Flag and the White Flag of truce. We supported this deployment and were constantly in the air with crews racking up the hours.

It was a tense time; would everyone honour the cease fire? Yes, the decision had been taken to be overt but nevertheless a small number of British and Commonwealth soldiers had to monitor thousands of very suspicious guerrilla soldiers. Sand bags and ammunition filled the back of the Scouts on many occasions during this period. However, the bravery of the guys on the ground was amazing, including the Irish Guards' Officer, who, with his team in defensive positions, walked out unarmed (well he did have his blackthorn stick) to greet the first guerrillas to come into the RVs. A tense situation was defused.



British Cease Fire RV set up in a church



An RV at Zhombe

This period was not without its other challenges; the country was vast and we did not have fuel in enough places. The Rhodesian Air Force kindly offered their fuel resources to us but they had no fuel pumps at their various dumps as the Alouettes they flew had an integral refuelling pump. We tried to come up with all sorts of innovative ideas or downright stupid ones too; this included me suggesting we fill our tank half full and then take a 55-gallon drum in the back or underslung. It was at this stage that SSgt Sean Bonner pointed out that why didn't we just fill the fuel tank full. I think this was the first entry in the 'line book'. Finally, we managed to deploy Zenith pumps to all the locations so we could support the CMF wherever they were based.



Lined up at Fort Victoria - British and Rhodesian helicopters

It was at this stage we realised that three Gazelles and three Scouts could not possibly cover the whole country without seriously compromising flight safety. The order was given for the rest of the Squadron to deploy. The problem was, of course, that we had two crews and two aircraft in Hong Kong. However, 657 Squadron kindly reinforced us.

Once the whole flight was with us, with Sam Drennan joining us as well, we started flying sortie after sortie in earnest, settling into a routine of sorts. Every day we guaranteed four Scouts on the line for tasking, with most days providing five and often even all six. This was only accomplished with a sterling effort by our Blackies and Greenies. They would literally work all night to make sure we had our aircraft available to support the guys on the ground. Our ground crews also provided outstanding support. Together as a team they were, quite simply, magnificent and took a lot of pressure off the aircrew.

Our tasks were many and varied from flying the GOC, the Deputy Commander, senior Rhodesian officers, senior PF officers, CASEVAC (including some anthrax sufferers – is it contagious?), environmental health teams (yes we even had them back in 1980!), ammunition, beer and, of course, the mail. SSgt Ross Skingley, our SQMS, started the ‘Flying Supermarket’ concept where we would take orders for anything from Interflora orders for wedding anniversaries to some item a soldier wanted in the Assembly Place.



A Patriot Front Leader prior to flying with us

Of course, even though the cease fire was in place life was not without its little incidents. Sean Bonner came under fire from a light anti-aircraft gun (luckily they were not great shots even with our white



Patriot Front Guerillas on Parade

crosses). Sam Drennan landed in a mine field next to an Aussie-run assembly place and when he asked for help from some 'Diggers' to unload the Scout he was politely refused. They had watched Sam land with a morbid curiosity. Sam moved the aircraft very quickly.

In one memorable incident (for me at least), I had to land a British officer to negotiate resolving a stand off between around 30 PF guerrillas who were refusing to surrender to opposing Rhodesian forces. We landed between them and I think they were all so shocked that the situation was quietly resolved. I felt at that point that my 9mm Pistol was of little use. I suppose I could have thrown it at them to distract them whilst we made our escape.

Air crew fatigue was a bit of an issue but we managed to give everyone one day off a week, which helped people recoup some energy. As always we also played hard and I think Mick Sharp, Sean Bonner and Sgt Dick Kalinski kept the bar open in the Rhodesian Sergeants' Mess on a number of occasions, much to the distress of the duty officer. I am sure it was Sean, who stated to a young Rhodesian officer "when you

have as many hours as me, sonny, you can close the bar" (typical Para no respect for these young officers).

Throughout the tour Sam, Lt Simon Stead and I lived in concrete floored huts just outside the officers' mess. A very Spartan existence compared to the SNCOs. Quite right, I hear people saying and we resisted a suggestion

by the RAF Squadron Leader that we decamp to the Midland Hotel downtown and join their aircrew living in luxury. However, we were well looked after by George, a wonderful African, who had been the barman in the mess since it had been an RAF Station in the 1950s.

We also kept the bar supplied with duty free whisky and gin (we gave it away in case anyone thinks we were misusing our duty free allowance). However, I seem to remember (although I think my memory might fade in a court of law) Sgt 'Paddy' White using it to barter things for us, including 18 pairs of desert boots for the aircrew. Those days were surely different to today when each member was entitled to one bottle of spirits a week (we had to pay for it, of course) and 200 cigarettes (Free of charge courtesy of HM Customs confiscated loot).

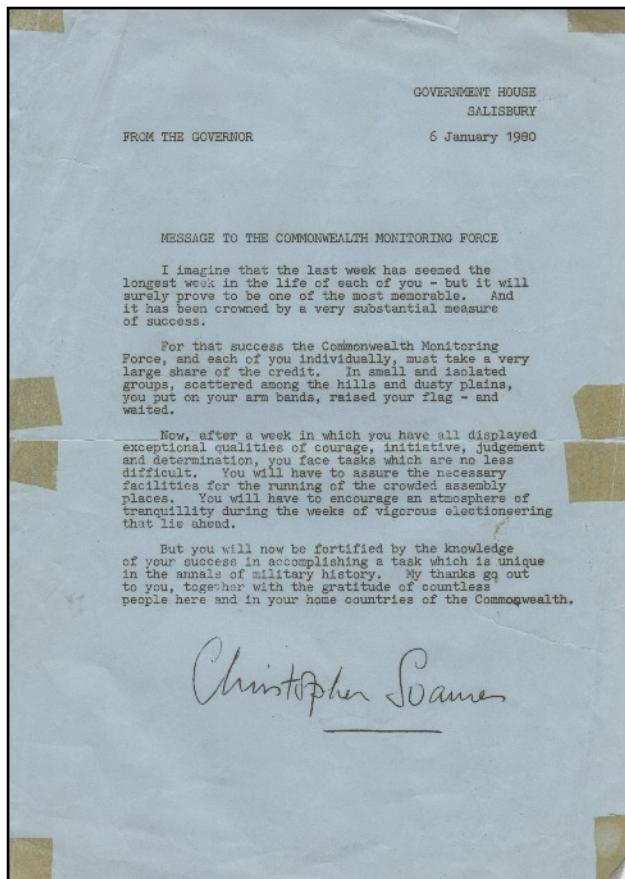
Finally, after two and a half months, the election loomed. British Police Officers arrived to be stationed at each polling booth and the masses quietly queued to vote for the first time in their life. It was quite humbling to see them queuing for hours when we only get at best a 60% turnout in elections.

The result, however, was a shock, at least to the White population. They honestly thought that Bishop Muzorewa would be elected prime minister. Mugabe had triumphed and the rest is history. He started off so well with talk of reconciliation. He is, however, no Nelson Mandela.



Dick Kalinski - wishing he could play with it!

Our time on Operation AGILA was coming to an end. We had flown nearly 1000 hours over the two and half month period. The Scout performed incredibly well; in conditions of dust and heat (we had times where the Outside Air Temperature registered over 50° C) the venerable Scout performed day after day (in fact a plan to replace us with the Lynx was shelved because the Scout payload was higher in such conditions). We did, however, go through every Scout main rotor blade and engine in stock in the Army Air Corps due to the adverse conditions but we supported the guys on the ground to the best of our ability. We learnt a lot about ourselves, we became better pilots and soldiers and I hope we lived up to the best traditions of the finest squadron in the British Armed Forces. It is humbling today to see how far the Squadron has come since those days. It is also a great honour to have been a very small part of the Auster to Apache story.

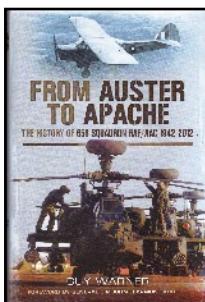


Left-
A message from the Governor to all ranks after Phase 1 of the Operation was over

Above -
The armband worn by everyone in the Commonwealth Monitoring Force

REVIEWS FOR 'FROM AUSTER TO APACHE'

The following reviews are for Guy Warner's book 'From Auster to Apache'



The Army Air Corp's 656 Squadron is celebrating its 70th anniversary with a book telling its dramatic story and written by Ulster author Guy Warner who specialises in military affairs. It's a tribute to Guy that he was commissioned to write this important tome.

Belfast Telegraph

I was so pleased to meet Guy Warner and I thought his address about how the book came to be written, and his admiration for the achievements of the Squadron through its 70 year history was inspiring. It is obvious that he enjoyed writing the book and he clearly recognised the importance and significance of the task the more he researched the subject. I do congratulate you and your committee for getting this project off the ground and onwards to a safe landing. It is a really high quality hardback which, on this basis alone, would grace any bookshelf. The pictures and illustrations are outstanding and it is clear that Guy Warner has gone to immense pains in his research. To his credit, he has managed to record incidents with a maximum of comment by those still alive to add flavour to the whole enterprise. The book is a tour de force and I was very honoured to meet Guy and shake his hand. I think that it is brilliantly written. All the personal accounts make for a very good read and the pictures/illustrations and quality of the paper are outstanding. Well done to you, Guy and all concerned.

Gen Sir John Learmont

The book is excellent, lots of contributions which add colour - Guy was on the ball in getting the gen from so many. All my local friends are queuing up to borrow it.

ex-Sqn pilot Maj Spencer Holton AFC

An excellent selection of photographs and squadron memorabilia also enhances the quality of this well-written volume.

The Bulletin

It was on 31 December 2012, that 656 squadron celebrated its 70th anniversary. Over the intervening years the squadron has served with great distinction in India, Burma, Java, Malaya, Borneo, Hong Kong, the UK, the Falkland Islands, Bosnia, Kosovo and, most recently, in Afghanistan. This is 656's story, told in full.

Britain at War

From Auster to Apache is a well-written account of a remarkable squadron. The book is a worthy addition to the annuals of the RAF.

RAF Historical Society

The Association is indebted to Guy for his dedication and professionalism in producing a book which does true justice to the squadron's unique history.

Army Air Corps Veteran Association Newsletter - Lt Colonel Andrew Simkins

For those that resist buying such books, 'borrow' the book and just quickly read General Sir John Learmont's foreword and then turn to Appendix 1, the list of honours and Awards, you will be quickly sold!

Readers will quickly appreciate how much work has been involved in researching, collating and then ultimately writing such a detailed history.

Army Air Corps Veteran Association Newsletter - Lt Gen Sir Gary Coward

He interweaves historical fact with oral history. It brings his subjects to life, particularly when read from the professional soldier's viewpoint. It also adds colour to what could easily be a black and white report of days gone by. 'From Auster to Apache' captures 70 years in an Aviation squadron's vibrant life and tells us just how much has changed in the intervening years - and just how much has remained the same. This book is densely packed and may be read as an interesting story or mined for nuggets of useful information. It is a must for all who have served in 656 Squadron and highly recommended for those who have an interest in our history.

Army Air Corps Veteran's Association Newsletter - LZ

Interviews and quotes from those who took part livens up and gives colour to the narrative, making this an interesting read for anyone interested in Army aviation.

Helicopter International

A comprehensive account. Illustrated to a very high standard.

Forces Pension Society

No reader who is enthusiastic about aircraft will fail to be fascinated by the numerous anecdotal accounts of the wide range of unique experiences gained in flying Tiger Moth, Auster and DH Beaver fixed-wing types, Scout, Sioux, Gazelle, Lynx and Apache helicopters in a very wide variety of military roles and operational environments. Moreover, the book is testament to Guy's ability to quickly research and assimilate a huge amount of information and present it in a detailed but easily accessible way, thanks in part to an index which, in itself, must have taken immense patience to produce. Without doubt, the book is one of his greatest achievements to date and I know from personal contact it has given him great satisfaction to write. Highly commended.

Ernie Crombie – Airmail

NOTICES

The following letter was sent to our President who would like to share it with you.

Dear Andrew,

I'm hoping you can pass on this message to any interested members.

Watching the Service at the Cenotaph and subsequent programmes it was such a delight to see and hear Ted Maslen-Jones. Over the years we have all met Ted at the Reunions at Middle Wallop. Ted and Frank McMath figured greatly in the lives in Burma of John Stevens, Ron Cottam, Gordon Twohey, Peter Dodson and Basil Appleton who all met on call-up at Scarborough for training in the Royal Artillery and subsequently formed a part of the great 656 AOP. It was such a part of all our lives that wives and families attended the Reunions which were greatly enjoyed by all. They remained friends all their lives.

They have all sadly left us over the years but three of the remaining widows remain good friends and keep in touch.

Do please let Ted know what a pleasure it was for us to see and hear him looking and sounding so well.

Yours sincerely, Audrey Appleton



NEW MEMBERS

Welcome to our new members.

Philip Piper
Chris Rowe

AAC
AAC

Joined: November 2015
Joined: November 2015

FROM THE ARCHIVES



In June 1999 a lunch was held to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of 656 Squadron Association. Nobby Clarke, the Association founder, was presented a pewter Auster and Lynx, by Maj (Ret.) Frank McMath the second wartime Squadron Commander.

Also present were John Bennett and Andrew Simkins'

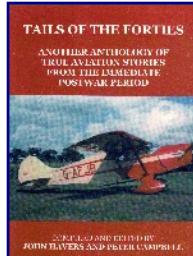
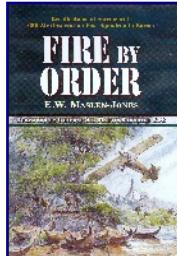
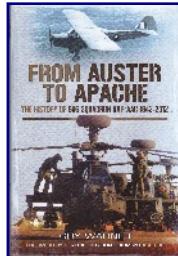
Apologies for the poor quality of photo. Ed.

DEATHS

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

Capt. Peter Short	RA	Died Aug 2015
Maj. (Retd) Peter (Pip) Beard	REME	Died Oct 2015
Michael Nelson	RA	Died Dec 2015
Maj. H.G. Crutchley DFC	AAC	Died Jan 2016

ASSOCIATION SHOP



PRICE LIST

Books: ‘Hellfire’ by Ed Macy Hardback £10.99 Paperback £4.99
‘Auster to Apache’ by Guy Warner **Sold out**
(see Amazon or Kindle for copies)
‘Fire by Order’ by Ted Maslen-Jones Hardback £19.95
‘Tails of the Forties’ by Haver & Campbell Paperback £8.00

Mugs: Bone China: **AAC, Association, Chinthe & RAF** £6/ea / £20/four

Badges: Blazer, Gold wire: **AAC or Association** £10.00
Woven: **Association** £5.00

Cuff links: **RA or REME** £17.50

Clock: Travel alarm £4.99

Plus Postage and Packing on all items;

Contact: Mark Meaton. Details on page 40

COMMITTEE MEMBERS' DETAILS

President:

Andrew Simkins OBE

The Sanctuary, 5 Court Farm Close, Winsham, Somerset, TA20 4JY

Tel: 07866 054196 E-mail: ajnsimkins@hotmail.co.uk

Honorary Secretary: Situation vacant

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