

**656 Squadron Association**



**Winter Edition**

**2020**

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## President's Report

Piers Lewis

Prior to writing this, I took the opportunity to re-read my last update in Spring this year, which was very clearly just before the Covid-19 phase struck with no awareness of what was to come. It now seems an awful long time has passed since then! The most notable 'event' during that phase was the VE Day 75, which, despite all the restrictions in place at that time, was still celebrated 'virtually' and locally/individually as well as possible (yet, no where near what it could have been).

Thus, firstly, I do hope this finds you all fairing well under these difficult and frustrated times, with strong networks to lean on as you need. I say this having just heard of the imminent tier process to be put in place, and ponder what the coming few months will hold for us.

As an Association, we are spread to the four winds across the country and indeed globe, for some members, hence interpersonal contact can be difficult. We reflected on this on a recent Committee meeting and the fact that we were not able to hold the Association Day this year, for very obvious and right reasons. I truly hope that we can correct this next year, but we will have to wait and see.

At the time of writing, I have just unfortunately heard that the Cenotaph Parade is now no longer due to take place this year, which, whilst understanding, is a shame, as that is always a very enjoyable event. I do also know that Maj Huw Raikes has handed over the reigns of the Squadron to Maj Phil Parkes, himself the Ops Officer of 656 Sqn at the time I left the service. Needless to say, the pace of the Squadron remains high with them looking towards their next Arctic instalment this winter. We look forward to working with Phil amidst his frenetic programme in any way possible.

From a personal perspective, I flew into Duxford last weekend with the family for a bit of a treat. Having taken the AH there many times for General Handling, for which Duxford were always very welcoming, it was quite a different experience this time! Nevertheless, we had a fantastic time, and paid particular attention to those aircraft and displays relevant to us. As my father was in the RAF, I took pride in showing them the Vulcan and Canberra (his two aircraft types), and also all the relevant helicopters, fixed wing and Airborne Forces areas which hold allegiance to 656 Sqn and my/our past. Despite the need to wear masks, it was still important to highlight to my children the generational elements of aviation and conflict history sat right before us, but they still were far more interested in trying out all the practical stands which inadvertently teach them so much about physics, aerodynamics, and many other elements.

Finally, with the next update due to be next spring, I wish you all a safe winter period, particularly under these conditions, and hope to be able to relay some positive news at the next update regarding the 2021 Association Day.

## Chairman's Notes

It has certainly been a strange and challenging year for everyone. I do not think in March any of us thought that we would still be a long way from getting through this pandemic in November. However, at least now there is positive news and, with a little luck, there will be a vaccine that works in the early part of next year.

This will be particularly good news for some of our more elderly members, who are shielding, and will perhaps put us on the road to a more normal existence. The situation in which we have found ourselves reminds me of something I read about American PoWs in the Vietnam War. The people who survived the best were the realists those who did not know how long they would be in captivity but knew it would end one day. The pessimists did not do well but those who were affected the most badly were the optimists. They were hugely positive at the start of their imprisonment but, as the months went by with no end in sight, their mental health became increasingly worse and they took longer to recover once they were released back to normal life. It seems the key is to be a realist and one day, hopefully soon, COVID-19 will all be a bad dream!

Anyway, onto Association news. Clearly, we had to first postpone and then cancel our reunion. This was followed by our involvement in the RBL ceremony at the Cenotaph being cancelled as well as our alternative service at the Army Flying Memorial.

We did, however, manage to have a Zoom call with the outgoing OC of 656, Huw Raikes, who gave a fascinating talk on the squadron training in the Arctic. Colin Sibun gave an Army Flying Museum lockdown lecture on the Falklands War and on 9<sup>th</sup> November, Sean Bonner and I also gave a lockdown lecture on Operation Agila and 656 Squadron's support to the Commonwealth Monitoring Force in Rhodesia. This latter lecture is still available, as we go to press, to watch on <https://www.armyflying.com/lockdown-lectures/>

Over the last few months, we welcomed 5 new members and unfortunately 6 members passed away. Their names are elsewhere in this Chinthe but may I personally welcome our new members and at the same time mourn our brethren who have passed on; may they rest in peace.

We held our AGM on 9<sup>th</sup> November online and some 20 members attended. The minutes and resolutions passed at the AGM are printed in this Chinthe. However, as a date for your diaries, we agreed, COVID-19 willing, to hold next year's reunion at the Army Flying Museum on Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> September.

One fantastic thing to come out of the AGM, is that Debs Higgs, whose father, Owen 'Bomber' Harris GPR, who flew with 656 in Malaya during the 1950s, has volunteered to be our membership secretary. Welcome Debs and thank you so much for taking on the role. I am most grateful.

On the subject of membership, we try to keep in contact on a regular basis with everyone by email as outside the Chinthe Journal, we just cannot afford to send anything out by post. Whilst I am aware that a few you do not have email addresses, I am sure there are many of you who have not given us your email. Please therefore drop an email to [secretary@656squadron.org](mailto:secretary@656squadron.org) and we will update your record.

We also voted at last year's AGM to increase the membership subscription to a modest £10 per year from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021, as our costs do not get less every year. For those of you who have set up a standing order, would you please update from £7.50 to £10 and if you pay us by cheque please note the increased amount when you come to pay us. Many thanks.

Finally, it remains for me to wish everyone a very Happy Christmas with the hope that 2021 is a better year for all us. With my realist hat on, I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at the Army Flying Museum on 4<sup>th</sup> September.

**Bob Thorpe**

Chairman

## New Members

Since the last Chinthe Journal we have welcomed the following new members:

**Kevin Lee AAC**, who served with the Squadron 1979-83 at Farnborough, Netheravon and the Falklands.

**Sean Stanley-Adams**, whose father Captain VA Stanley-Adams served with the Squadron in 1945/46

**Bill Wilkins**, who served with the Squadron in Burma during the WW2.

**Leonard Gallimore REME**, who served with the Squadron 1967-69 in Kluang

**Séan Bonner PARA and then AAC**, who served with the Squadron 1979-81 in Farnborough and Rhodesia.

Welcome gentlemen to our unique Association



Dear Members

## **SECRETARY REPORT FOR 2020 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 656 SQUADRON ASSOCIATION**

Welcome to the Annual General Meeting of the 656 Squadron Army Air Corps Association. who would have thought that we would all be in the situation we are in today. As I write this, we are entering our second lockdown and all that that entails to us all and the wider community.

Normally by now I would be reporting on the success of the reunion and the gearing up for this years Cenotaph Parade. However, this is not to be. The Reunion was cancelled and although it initially was thought that the Cenotaph Parade would go ahead in a much-reduced format this was also cancelled for all the right reasons.

As your Secretary I have very little to report other than your committee are tentatively looking forward to planning the 2021 AGM and Reunion and possible other events that the Association could be involved in. If you have any ideas of in what events you would like to see us become involved, please let one of the committee know so that we can plan this into the programme of events.

The next Chinthe Journal is due this time of year but I know that David Williams, our editor is struggling with articles to include, so please get those thinking caps on and contact David so that we can include them and that also includes any "Lockdown" experiences or anecdotes that you may wish to share.

Be assured that given the current constraints your committee will be here trying our best to get 2021 back on track.

Stay safe and may I be one of the first to wish you all you wish yourselves this Christmas.

Terry M Betchley MBE  
Secretary



**WASH YOUR HANDS**

**COVER YOUR FACE**

**MAKE SPACE**



**TREASURER REPORT FOR 2020**  
**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**  
**656 SQUADRON ASSOCIATION**

A Treasurer's Report and a set of audited accounts for the year ended 31 December 2019 was published in the Spring 2020 edition of the Chinthe.

However, a copy of the audited accounts is attached for your information. There was an excess of Expenditure over Income of £1251.59, due in part to a donation of £500.00 to the Army Flying Museum, and higher than anticipated costs for the 2019 Reunion. Nevertheless, funds still remained adequate.

At the 2019 AGM it was agreed that subscriptions should be raised from £7.50 to £10.00 per annum. It is proposed to implement the increase from 1 January 2021.

The balance of funds held as at 3 Nov 20 are as follows:

Cash in Hand:	£. 0.00
Current Account:	£ 256.34
Reserve Account:	£6,008.91
<b>Total:</b>	<b>£6,265.25</b>

Therefore, the accounts continue to be in good order, with no debtors or creditors outstanding, and there are sufficient reserves to meet current needs and future contingencies.

George McKie  
Treasurer



## **MINUTES OF THE 656 SQUADRON ARMY AIR CORPS ASSOCIATION 2020 HELD BY ZOOM APPLICATION – 10TH NOVEMBER 2020 AT 1930 HOURS**

The following committee members were in attendance:

Piers Lewis President

Bob Thorpe Chairman/Membership Secretary

George McKie Treasurer

Derek Walker Assistant Treasurer

David Williams Chinthe Editor

Mike Crichton-Kane Webmaster

Terry Betchley Secretary

12 Members of the Association were present on Zoom for the meeting.

Apologies from: Douglas Fox and Wally Stewart

### **One minutes silence was held to remember those members of the Association who had passed since the last AGM**

- a. The minutes of the last meeting held at Wattisham Station on 21st July 2019 were read and passed as correct.
- b. The President addressed the meeting in light of the current lockdown and the years previous events and suggested more online engagements during the current situation.
- c. The Secretary addressed everyone and hoped that 2021 would be a better year for events. His report is attached.
- d. The Treasurers report is attached and was also attached to the Agenda sent out. There had been an overspend during 2019, however this had been made up during 2020 due to the COVID situation and the lack of events. The suggested donations to the Army Flying Museum and the Royal British Legion are covered in Resolution 3 of these minutes.

The following resolutions were voted and agreed by those present:

### **1. Acceptance of Accounts**

The audited accounts from 2019 were ratified and accepted.

### **2. Election of Committee**

It was agreed by those present that the following members would be elected/re-elected to the Committee:

President: Piers Lewis

Chair: Bob Thorpe

Secretary: Terry Betchley

Membership Secretary: Bob Thorpe .... (Note: Since the AGM Debs Higgs has been coopted into this position).

Treasurer: George McKie

Deputy Treasurer: Derek Walker

Webmaster: Mike Crichton-Kane

Editor Chinthe: David Williams

Squadron Liaison Officer: Vacant

As well as the Squadron Liaison Officers post being vacant, Bob Thorpe would like to see someone take over the role of Membership Secretary. Since the meeting we have a potential volunteer to take over the role.

Proposed by: Alan Flint Seconded by: Bob Danton

### **3. Donations to the Army Flying Museum/Royal British Legion**

It was agreed that the Association would this year donated monies to the following:

The Army Flying Museum £250.00 and to the Royal British Legion £100.00.

Proposed: Terry Betchley Seconded: Peter North

### **4. Reunion 2021**

It was agreed that if circumstances allow the AGM and Reunion would, if possible, take place at the Army Flying Museum on 4th September 2021.

### **Any Other Business**

The following points were raised by those attending as Any Other Business:

a. The wreath originally obtained for the Cenotaph Parade would now be placed at the Army Flying Museum Memorial when circumstances would allow.

b. Thanks, were extended to all of the committee for their work over the past year.

c. Terry Musgrove was asked to consider joining the committee when family commitments would allow.

d. The next issue of the Chinthe Journal is now due and Bob had some articles to send to David to publish in the next issue. There was, again a call for new articles to be submitted for the spring issue.

e. Geoffrey Simpson had a spare double room which he offered for free to anyone in the Association. Details would be published in the next Chinthe Journal.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 2000 Hrs

T Betchley MBE  
Secretary 656 Squadron Army Air Corps Association

## Operation Barrow

Mike Kane

Operation Barrow provided Support for farmers and small village communities during the harsh blizzards of March 1979.

656 supported the operation between the 26 and 30th March with two Scout helicopters fitted with snow shoes, piloted by myself and SSgt Chris Raine and included an observers L/Cpl Phil Crick and Corporal Bill Sullivan. The aircraft were XP 603 and XP 616.

We left Farnborough for Catterick, which was to be our base for the next 5 days via Topcliffe to refuel as our barrel supply had yet been positioned on site. It had snowed heavily in the morning and the parade square we were to land on was still covered. Both Chris and I decided to practice our snow landing technique which worked very well even though we produced clouds of snow and quite exiting as it was the first time either of us had skied in a helicopter.

Unfortunately, it was not very exiting for the Squadron Sgt Major who was sat in his office just in from of where we both came to a halt after landing. After close down, a trooper ran out to us and informed us that the SSM would like a word and to please follow him.

We were ushered into the aforementioned's office and were immediately berated about snow and especially noise as he could hear himself think. I believe we explained that we had expected the square to be clear of snow and would have therefore been able to land as normal at the far end away from his office. And why we had to land the way we did. He suddenly changed tack and asked us where we would prefer to land and he would get his recruits out immediately to clear the snow. Not a problem from then on.

Most of the tasks involved were in support of the Royal Marines who had been deployed earlier in snow-cats and were well versed in arctic warfare and so this was a piece of cake to them. Chris and I would pick up bales of hay from their vehicles and drop this off to areas where they could not access. The bales were fodder for the sheep that could not get back to shelter at their home farm. Quite often this would mean hovering at a safe height so as not to produce a white out and our observer in the rear kicking the bale out of the side. The bales would quite often split on landing but that did not seem to bother the sheep.

One of our other tasks was to recce areas where communication from local farmers had been lost due to telephone lines being brought down by the driving snow. On those occasions

we would often take a liaison officer with us. It was definitely a treat for them and saved a lot of time.

On the 28th March I got a call about snowcat that was stuck on a ridge with a problem and could we deliver a new part? Phil Crick would be the observer accompanying me and after receiving the snowcat part and the location we departed Catterick. It is not as easy map reading in a landscape covered with snow but we did eventually find the vehicle and its contingency of marines because they played smoke for us, very handy as it was orange.

Just down from the ridge we spied some grass poking out of the snow and the slope wasn't too steep so I decided to land facing up slope and slowly settle down so that both skids were in full contact with the ground and within sloping ground limits. I would then slowly move the rotor disc to a level plane all the time making sure we didn't start to slip back down the slope. I would keep the power at flight idle just in case anything untoward happened and I would be able to just lift off just enough to arrest the slip. I briefed Phil that he would have to climb out the front door onto the snowshoe skid, they are quite wide so easy to walk along, and collect the part from the rear before returning to the abeam his door before and stepping off the skid and out of the rotor disc area and walking up to the marines on the ridge.

Everything was going very smoothly, the snow had a good crust so there was very little powder to cause a white out. With no wind it was easy to land and maintain position. The aircraft maintained position without any problem and after levelling the rotor disc Phil got out, closed the door, moved to the rear, got the part, closed the rear door moved forward again and promptly stepped off the skid. I was looking up the slope at the marines so didn't actually notice what had happened next. I saw the marines fall about laughing and when I looked over to where Phil should have been was nobody visible.

As the marines were laughing I had to assume that Phil was not in any real danger, but then they were Marines. I looked through the port chin window and saw Phil with one hand on the forward skid upright and up to his chest in snow. He must have fallen down the only snow hole on the hill.

I dropped the power to ground idle and was about to motioned to the marines to come down to try and get him out but luckily Phil had managed to get one leg up onto the skid and was slowly dragging himself out of the snow. When he got out he looked like the abominable snowman and even I was giggling but like a true trooper, after picking the part up off the skid where he had

dropped it, he crawled up the bank, pushing it in front of him, testing each hand and foothold, and delivered the package to the waiting recipients.

When he got back into the aircraft he just looked at me and asked me to “ put the F - - -  
- g heater up full” and can we go home?

I think Phil has never been so cold in his life and even a big thank you message from ops when we got back to Catterick didn't improve his demeanour either.

Op Barrow just lasted five days but it was my first taste of how the squadron operated, one or two aircraft out on operations in the UK or in other parts of the world and rarely as a complete squadron. That is until the Falklands conflict. Even while on Op Agila the squadron was split in half by aircraft type at either end of the country.



## **Remembrance Sunday 2020**

Keith Johnson

St. Peter's Church in Frimley at rest is L/Cpl Simon Cockton late 656 who lost his life on the 6 of June 1982 in the Falklands when his helicopter was shot down by friendly fire. Keith Johnson planting a Cross on behalf of 656 Squadron Association



## Bill Wilkins 656 Burma Veteran



We recently learnt of Burma veteran, Bill Wilkins, who was approaching his 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday. Andrew Simkins kindly put us in contact with him and also sent him Ted Maslen-Jones' book 'Fire by Order', the story of 656 Squadron in SE Asia from 1943-47

Bill had his 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday on 3<sup>rd</sup> October and we sent him a card and membership of the Association. I am told by his nephew, James, that he was delighted to receive it as well as the gift from Andrew



James tells me:



"I made the trip up to Leeds on October 5<sup>th</sup>, to see my uncle Bill on his 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday!

He, and his wife Mary, were happy to see me.

The first thing he showed me that day was his card from 656 Squadron Association

I looked along the mantelpiece for the card from the Queen, but none there – Oh, he said, that's in the other room.

Then over cups of tea, he re-lived some memories of his time in Burma (1942? Under 14<sup>th</sup> Army command) – “The best years of my life” he said with pride.

Before leaving, I suggested it may be time to give up his car and use taxi’s instead of driving at his age – he’ll give it some thought ”



We are delighted to welcome Bill into our unique Association and he joins our three other surviving Burma veterans.

## An Embarrassing Situation

Mike Kane

On the 24th of February 1980 after a days operations transiting between Fort Victoria, AP's Hotel and Golf, Steve Williams, my crewman and myself returned to Fort Victoria to overnight as we had an early sortie to hotel in the morning. We had been informed that accommodation at the RSF Fire Force base had been arranged so I duly found the camp QM and asked where we might bed down for the night as well as the availability of food etc.

The QM didn't seem particularly happy about the arrangement, I put it down to the fact that QM's are generally unhappy about anything that is out of their sphere of influence and does not require a signature.

He showed us into a hut next to the runway which had a couple of bunks but also said that he was unable to provide food as the cookhouse was now closed. Admittedly it was getting late and there didn't seem to be the equivalent of a NAAFI available and so the QM left us to our own devices with a curt goodbye. 1 big difference from the attitude of the Rhodesian Air Force at Thornhill.

Having inspected the hut and beds which were in poor condition and very damp we decided to look for other accommodation in Fort Victoria and managed to use the Guardroom phone to ring around but none was available. The other alternative was the hotel at Zimbabwe Ruins and they had rooms available. There was no ground transport available of course so our only option was to fly down which took about 10 minutes. After landing we sauntered into the hotel reception which doubled as the bar and sat on the bar, in what could be described as an Annie Oakley attire, was a very attractive lady and with the shortest cutdown denim shorts ever. To compliment the outfit and her persona she rested a shotgun across her thighs and I was expecting to be greeted with "Howdy" but instead it was "Ya, what can I do for you boys".

Steve and I were shown to our rooms and returned to the bar for an evening meal and a drink. Our hostess gave us a history lesson on the ruins and we chattered for a while and arranged a wake up call for 6:30 before retiring to our rooms which were a great improvement on the one at Fort Vic.

Next morning I woke up with the morning light peeping through the curtains and looking at my watch I realised that our wake up call had not materialised and I made a mad scramble to knock Steve up and get ready. No time for breakfast and as we had payed up front we just rushed out the door and ran to the aircraft. A quick preflight and we were off back to Fort Vic, 30 minutes late.

Our passengers were waiting for us but only just and while Steve refuelled I apologised explained that we had had a problem on the preflight which thank god was accepted though not very graciously by one of our passengers, a Major whom I did not recognise. Commissar Michell, the ZANLA liaison officer however seemed quite happy to accept the explanation.

We emplaned and departed Fort Vic for Assembly Point GOLF without further ado. There was some low cloud enroute but was told that our destination was clear and there were quite a few gaps where we could see the ground and therefore elected to fly above the cloud.

Approximately halfway to our destination, the central warning panel 'GEARBOX OIL PRESSURE' light illuminated. I checked the gearbox oil temperature and that seemed ok but that didn't mean there wasn't something much more disturbing about to happen. I therefore decided the safest option was to land to check out the problem. At the same time I contacted base and told them what had happened and that I was going to carry out a field landing and could they get an engineer out to me ASAP.

If memory serves me well, you have about 12minutes at maximum range speed, with no oil before the gearbox seizes but that wasn't a problem being only about 3 minutes from landing, well it would be if I can find a large enough gap to drop down through and I warned our passengers what was happening and after finding a suitable hole in the cloud an uneventful landing was achieved.

After disembarking Steve looked in the boot for the brewing kit, as you would, while I looked at the gearbox oil which was still showing full and I therefore concluded that either the pressure pump was faulty or the pressure sensory was at fault but I could not tell which and would wait for our engineer to arrive.

Steve had less luck, the emergency ration kit was there with cans of water and tea making kit but no tin opener, disaster. Our aircrew knives have blunt ends so no good and none of us had a knife. We did consider putting a round through a can but this was discounted within 2 seconds. It was going to be a boring thirsty wait for help.

Commissar Michell said he recognised where we were and said he would be back in a short while. To our surprise, he just toddled off and the three of us left were a bit nonplused. The Major suggested we dig a couple of shell scrapes just in case, Steve and me looked at each other, looked back at the Major whereupon he decided it probably wouldn't provide much of a defensive position considering all we had was an SMG and two browning pistols. We therefore just sat in the shade on the Scout skids and waited and wondered if a round in one of the water cans would work.

It must have been over an hour later, Commissar Michell returned with a group of school children and a teacher in tow. I think all our jaws dropped at the site, quite unexpected.

We were introduced and exchanged the usual pleasantries then asked if the kids would like to look at the aircraft. They were all excited, girls and boys, and it provided some relief from the boredom of hanging around for our recovery.

Michelle called time after a short while and asked the Major, Steve and myself if we wouldn't mind standing side by side as if for a photograph. He then said that the children would each kiss our feet.

I was shocked as was all three of us and told Michelle that this was not on and a hand shake would suffice nicely. He was adamant that this had to happen as it was the shona way of showing respect.

We were very uncomfortable but agreed under duress to let it happen. I kept thinking how this must look to anyone who did not understand what had preceded this act.

"Black children kissing the feet of white men", I couldn't believe that a ZANLA Commissar would advocate this act considering what this bush war was or had been about and after the children left I didn't talk to Michelle much except to be polite and when necessary.

I didn't just feel very uncomfortable I felt very upset and to this day feel very humiliated.

We had to guide the relief scout in by sound as we could not give a precise location of our position when I made the landing call earlier, only that we were on route to Golf and a flight time from Fort Vic. The cloud had also cleared by now and I fired off a mini flare so they were able to locate us easily.

The REME air tech found a broken MGB pressure sender unit so not as bad as could have been and made a temporary repair so we believe. It was flown back to Thornhill airfield for a more permanent solution.

We took the aircraft the relief crew had arrived in and completed our journey to AP Golf and from there we returned our passengers back to Fort Vic and our selves onto Thornhill at the end of a very long day.

I never flew that Major or Commissar Michelle again. I did hear Michelle had disappeared soon after our incident but why and where or if true I do not know.

## Victoria Falls Sneaky Beeky

Mike Kane

On the 15th January 1980 I was tasked to meet up one of our British liaison officers at Bulawayo airport. From there I would receive further tasking. The scout I was to fly that day was XT 642. The flight from Thornhill to Bulawayo was uneventful and on arrival at Bulawayo I refuelled before meeting the aforementioned officer, A captain if my memory serves me well.

He was to accompany me to Wankie Airfield ( now Victoria Falls Airport)where we would pick up two gentlemen who had no names. We were then to fly along the Victoria falls ridge line in each direction so the gentlemen in question could take notes, they would be sitting in the rear one by each door.

Life jackets would not be required because if we went down into the falls we wouldn't survive, a sobering thought. I was not to ask questions of our passengers except for standard replies required for safety reasons and to reply to their questions as and when.

I flew along the Bulawayo to Victoria Falls railway line, straight as a dye and extremely boring apart from the odd herd of elephant and giraffe . Upon Landing at Wankie I refuelled then met my passengers. Both were in civilian dress, one spoke with an English accent and one with a Rhodesian accent. I carried out a safety brief, strapped them onboard and took off for the 8 minute trip to Victoria Falls.

I had never been here before and I was so in awe of its immense size and as it was in full flow I was just absolutely amazed. Although there was quite a lot of mist thrown up by the falls it would not be a problem as my passengers wished me to fly just above that along the edge of the falls but of course maintaining our position along the Rhodesian side of the Zambian-Rhodesian border.

I had been informed that permission had been granted to do this and therefore assumed this also meant from the Zambian authorities.

My passengers said nothing as I flew along the edge in both directions except to ask that we land at Victoria Falls military airstrip.

After landing I disembarked my passengers and thanked. I was asked to wait and invited to lunch at the RAR canteen which was basically a couple of benches under cover outside. My three passengers sat on a separate table away from myself and the RAR contingent.

While eating lunch and chatting a Rhodesian captain. came up and sat opposite me, he then began to berate me about flying along the border and that I could have been shot down and could have caused all sorts of problems. The RAR guys who had been talking to me kept quiet but all of a sudden my passenger with the Rhodesian accent came over, tapped the young officer on the shoulder, flashed a card and cocked a finger as to say come with me, which he did immediately. They stopped out of earshot and after just a few words the officer turned away and left sharply without another look at me. My passenger just gave me a thumbs up and walked back to his table.

The guys at my table made a few exclamations with smiles and asked who my passengers were. I just replied that I was not at liberty to say, in fact, I didn't know.

After lunch I embarked my passengers took off and returned to Wankie where I refuelled and left my passengers including the liaison officer. I was then free to return direct to Thornhill. Before I left for base I did ask the liaison officer who the gentlemen were I had been flying, all he said with a smile on his face was Special Branch and left it at that.

On return to base I had clocked up 6hrs 10 minutes of flying for that day.



## **OP AGILA – FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FENCE!**

BY TERRY BETCHLEY

Having spent the last two years as part of 1 Regt AAC in both Verden and Hildesheim Germany, the opportunity arose to be posted back to UK. 656 Squadron at Farnborough beckoned and I was summoned to serve as the Lcpl Squadron Clerk by the then Combined Manning and Records Office.

Duly arriving in my new home in November 1979 just in time for Christmas and the new concept of “Block Leave” I had never heard of this before and the whole Squadron going on leave was a new concept to me. Was the whole Squadron going to disappear for two weeks? It seemed so, after only a matter of weeks in post I was allowed to go home. This cannot be all bad I thought. The Squadron had already been warned that it would be deploying as part of the Monitoring Force, but I never really conceived that I would be required to go. Returning in early January 1980, I was warned of my deploying to Rhodesia and becoming part of the Commonwealth Monitoring Force. Stores were hurriedly gained, SOP re-written and then re-written again as they always are. Postings cancelled or delayed and as ever “Where is this place” “Do we have maps” “What the whole Squadron” questions all thrown into the mix that needed answering.

Sgt Paddy Hall was the main Squadron Clerk and was quite senior in years (I’m sure he wouldn’t mind me saying that) so it was me that was going! Well I volunteered to join the Squadron so I had to take it on the chin so’s to speak.

Being only 20 Years old, full of testosterone and when possible beer! Life was for living so I was game for anything or so I thought at the time. Scout Flight had already departed their aircraft loaded into C5 Galaxy aircraft of the US Air Force. I was to go to Salisbury the Capital (Now Harare) there I would conduct Squadron Clerking type work! from the Hangar that Gazelle Flight were to occupy at Salisbury Airport. The flight there was by RAF VC10 stopping at Cyprus. Wow my chance to visit Cyprus this was getting better. Alas it was not to be a quick 2-hour refuelling stop and we were off again.

Having had the obligatory inoculations of which one was the Hepatitis. It was funny to watch the whole Squadron lined up in the tiny RAF Medical Centre at Farnborough then each person collapsing as the injection was given directly into the thigh muscle causing temporary paralysis. It was hilarious to watch, that was until it was my turn. A dental inspection was also obligatory prior to departure and it was shortly after this that a chronic toothache kicked in, niggling at first it, was to cause me absolute hell on arrival. Visits to the Rhodesian Army Medical Centre and some painkillers did not help and I was pointed in the direction of the Rhodesian Army Dentist. On entering the small surgery I was confronted with a collapsible Army chair to sit on and the instruments of torture were laid out on a wooden table at best they must have dated back to the 50s. That was it, I made some lame excuse and exited without any work being carried out.

Back at the Squadron the aircraft were busy flying sorties to the various Assembly Points taking limited supplies and conducting other various duties especially the more important delivery of the mail and papers. I must point out here that being young I didn't really understand the politics of being there but the importance of our mission was brought home to me when on one occasion I was given the opportunity to visit one of the Assembly Points with the Squadron Commander (Major Stephen Nathan) on arrival at the assembly point I was confronted by several lean but nevertheless mean looking people dressed in very ragged clothing with AK47s and bandoleers of ammunition wrapped around their necks. This also included the women and children. A glance down to my 9mm pistol convinced me to that things that little more seriously.

On another occasion, apart from being ballast as a passenger, I was given the job to keep an eye open for wires that may have caused us to hit them and subsequently crash. Unfortunately, this was to be the case with a Puma helicopter of the RAF and regrettably the three crew lost their lives. The heat was unbearable and the sun pointed directly at us I found myself drifting off and consequently becoming the proverbial nodding dog. I came too seconds later to wires in the distance. We were not in harm's way but I do not think the Boss was overly impressed when I shouted "WIRES" at the top of my voice in total fear. The look I received said it all. **"I've got them Betchley"**

Oh dear copy book well and truly blotted. He was not impressed and I felt totally stupid.

Back at the Airport the toothache was progressively getting worse and it was affecting my sleep and everyone else's who had to put up with my constant moaning. My saviour came in the form of the QM who arranged for me to visit a civilian dentist in down town Salisbury. I think I paid for the work to be done but was able to claim back. The dentist a small Scottish ginger haired man soon realised the problem and the large abscess I had given birth to was immediately taken care of. Total relief! I always have the greatest sympathy with anyone who suffers nowadays.

I should point out at this juncture that unlike the boys in the huts at Gwelo (Now known as Gweru) we in Gazelle Flight and Squadron were accommodated in various hotels around the city. Given extra pay (Local Oversea Allowance) to pay for this. Afternoons when not working were spent on the hotel veranda drinking tea or relaxing in the hotel pool. The beer was either Tiger Beer or Lion Beer both being very palatable from what I can remember.

Working conditions were basic, an old wartime style T2 hanger housing both us and the RAF Puma Squadron. All work was carried out in two shifts earlys and lates that way we all got chance of free time. I remember working on one late shift in the hangar, it was particularly hot and so the hangar doors were left open. Suddenly swarms of flying ants invaded. It became unbearable, work stopped as equipment had to be covered. Then as suddenly as it started it stopped but where the ants dropped, they shed their wings and the next thing the floor of the hangar was crawling with these things, I for one was astonished at the size of them. I embarrassed myself also, when on a trip into town I commented on the size of the mice that were running all over the pavements. I was astonished when it was pointed out to me that they were in fact cockroaches.

All too soon the fun! was over and the packing up for the return to Farnborough started. I cannot really remember the return but the novelty of flying backward in an RAF VC10 will always stick with me



## Tales from the Laterite Strip

Patrick Knight

Looking back through the mists of time. Nineteen and green appear as a theme.....I was both of them.

The summer of 1959 witnessed a fresh face, dare I say handsome sailor, of nineteen summers arriving at Seremban railway station in Malaya. The other matelot being slightly less beautiful

Earlier in the year I volunteered to serve with the Army Air Corps, I was based at Culdrose approaching sea time, anything seemed a better option than two years bobbing up and down on the briny in a ship of the Grey Funnel Line, with flying machines. After a few mini adventures in places with strange sounding names, Arborfield, Katunayake, Nee Soon and Noblefield to be recalled later?

A greenish Land Rover thingy transported us to another life centred around Pario Camp home of 14 Flt of 656 Sqdn the deed was done.....

The stage is set .....tales from the laterite strip they might not necessarily be in the correct order but they're true.

First day at work in the hanger/workshop the Staff Sergeant in charge introduced to his staff, 1xCpl, 1xL/Cpl and collection of craftsmen from the REME who didn't have privates. They all later turned into L/Cpl craftsmen. That put me and the other matelot firmly in our place in the chain of command.

We were questioned at our depth of experience as aircraft. My aircraft experience revolved around the Fairey "Gannet", the manufacturer's name really sold it to the team!!!!!!!!!!!!

When asked by the afore mentioned Staff/Sgt (Boss) has any of you ever done amendments to APs. I had the great pleasure to inform I was that sailor.

The Crabs had left so many in boxes of amendments under the Bosses desk he hadn't been able to sit down since the AAC had been formed. A few weeks later they were all dun.....

The AOP9 version the Auster was of tube and canvas construction which was of course not within our normal remit, with careful mentoring, mental and physical abuse we were licked into shape and passed off as an AAC soldier (poor lighting conditions helped).

During spells in the days when all a/c were away flying, idle hands were employed maintenance of flight equipment. I recall one item was the little petrol driven battery charging set. We had a few which when on schemes were bolted on the front bumper bar of the land rovers. The purpose to charge the radio batteries. The engine itself was a neat little bit of kit we decoked it and ground in valves and stuff and surprise, surprise they ran.

As our communication skill were outstanding it was decided to teach us to use the radios, I believe its called being an "operator". It was a bundle of laughs I couldn't relate them all here.

The signaller's course was run at the flight by our Bombardier i/c signals.

The battery charging part is where he dug a hole for himself.

The excavation started with the length of aerial wire to frequency, tuning and netting call, finished with batteries being in parallel or series being a part of some mystic phenomenon.

I managed to fall in the hole. He was describing the charging set and with great authority he informs the class the motor was a two stroke.

'Excuse me corporal it's a four stroke'. Whata mistaka ta make.

He stood in front of my desk, being a rotund gentleman held together with a stable belt, he shut out a lot of sunlight. Explained what a corporal in the R.A. was called, (I heard other names later) that the piston went up = one, down = two, that my makes two strokes! I couldn't defy that logic; I was in the hole metaphorically.

The fuel leak in the air.....

Don't catch an Iguana by the tail.....

Pass the Avgas I'll sort these palm fronds out.....

Another day maybe????

Patrick Knight

## **Humour In Uniform**

(George McKie)

When I first arrived at Noblefield, KL, in December 1959, everyone was sporting a deep bronzed tan, whereas I was a typical "Whitey from Blighty." The working dress in camp was: beret, shorts, belt, boots and puttees. So my luminous white skin stood out a mile.

In the first week, after the morning muster parade, Squadron Sergeant Major Whale decided we would all benefit by having our drill skills refreshed. When we started marching as a squad I found I was soon out of step and I had to perform the skip-step routine to try and get back in step with everyone else.

After two or three skip-steps I was failing miserably. Then I heard SSM Whale yelling "That man in the sheep-skin vest get back in bloody step!" The squad fell about laughing and he had to call us to a halt and start again.

Even drill can be fun with the right manager !

# **My Introduction to 656 Squadron**

Having successfully completed APC166 and gained my wings, in August 1964, I was sent on embarkation leave prior to my first posting, as a Westland Scout pilot, to 656 Sqn AAC, in the newly formed Malaysia.

Air trooping had recently been introduced, but it took nearly two days to reach Singapore.

The initial move was to Nee Soon, in order to acclimatise to the hot, wet, conditions. After a few days I was to move up country by train to Kluang, where 656 Sqn was based, along with a REME Workshop.

The Scout had recently been introduced as a replacement for the Auster, and deployed all over Malaya, Sabah, Brunei and Sarawak, to support the army in opposing Indonesian Confrontation.

The Borneo border with Indonesia's Kalimantan stretched some 450 miles, and Units were located at intervals with company bases some 30 to 50 miles apart. Artillery pieces were allocated to some of these Company positions, but not all.

Our role was to be co-located with infantry units to troop lift them into HLS clearings, enabling them to patrol the border, re-supply patrols with food, water, ammunition and clothing. Rotate patrols, by insertion and extraction, plus providing air recce for new Units.

I first had to complete a theatre qualification at Kluang, plus an RAF Jungle Survival Course at Changi, on Singapore, and the primary jungle of Malaya's central uncultivated area of natural jungle.

Before leaving Middle Wallop I had completed pay arrangements for my wife, Jean, to receive an allotment, and the bank to cover the mortgage on our bungalow at Newton Toney, where our children were settled in the local school

Family issues sorted, I got down to the task in hand. Unfortunately Scout serviceability was poor and my theatre clearance seemed to take ages. It was after Christmas before I was able to join 11 Flight in Long Pa Sia. This was co-located with a Company of the 10<sup>th</sup> Ghurkha Rifles, on an old WW11 airstrip some 100 miles from Brunei in 3000 to 5000ft mountains.

I was transported by the RAF to Labuan Island, and then by Beaver to the airstrip, which proved capable of accommodating it, as well as Single and Twin Pioneer fixed wing aircraft.

Scouts were parked on log platforms alongside the strip, with Ghurkha sentries, manning water cooled machine guns, sited on hillside sangers, covering the area.



I was soon briefed, allotted a defended bed space in the Senior ranks mess, and shown the WW1 style trench system to my Stand-to position in Bunker number 3. This was manned at first and last light' thinning out gradually to breakfast or bed.

Everything was re-supplied to us via air-drop, with one end of the strip designated as the LP.

Maps were almost useless. They were white sheets of paper, on which

an artist had used black ink to draw from a mosaic of high level photographs. River lines and Longhouses were roughly sited. Large areas had no information at all, (being covered by cloud). As we got to know the area we sketched the mountain tops, so that we could recognise them again. Fuel was dropped in 44 gallon drums to small outposts about the area, and we had to carry tools to open, test and filter fuel as we refuelled using a hand pump fitted to the Scout framework.

In order to become acquainted with most of our operating area, I was taken to a nearby Company base and transferred to an RAF Whirlwind. Ack-Ack guns on the border had prevented airdrop re-supply to a Unit at Bakalahlan. Their kit was dropped on the nearest airstrip of Long Samardo, and the RAF with two Whirlwinds, often assisted by our Scouts, would ferry loads in at low level. (Legal Low Flying).

Three instances stand out from this. First, the Gurkha's still wanted live animals to celebrate Dashera and those crated were no problem, but returning for another load, the loading team turned back a canvas sheet to reveal a live pig, with all four legs tied at the trotters. The terrified animal lurched to its feet and started to run on tip-toe in a circle, as it gradually lost its balance, they got it on board and lashed it under a net. The delivery was much appreciated.

The second incident was for me and Scout on a secret run. The usual canvas was rolled back at Long Samardo and a 105 pack howitzer wheels and trails were loaded. On arrival at Bakalahlan these were removed and a similar load strapped in for return. Then followed the Barrel, and Carrier for the next run. Finally a very red faced gunner put the breech block on the front passenger seat to keep me in C of G. They had been firing in support of a night patrol at "Charge Super" all night and broken the gun saddle. I didn't realise that all parts of a gun must stay together as one piece. You live and learn.

The final incidents on this run concerned "Hearts and Minds". To save locals a three day trek, when empty we were to give lifts, often with their hunting dogs, but I was not prepared for a little old lady who had covered her head in a towel. She was clearly terrified of flying but all went well, until I started my final approach to the 2000 metre airstrip. Suddenly she grabbed my

wrist and I couldn't lower or raise the collective lever. Try as I could, she wouldn't let go, and I overshot. Fortunately her companions realised we couldn't stay airborne for ever and freed her grip, allowing me to land safely after the second circuit.

It was now getting late in the afternoon, and I had a ridge to clear in order to reach Long Pa Sia. Waiting to return with me were five Ghurkhas and a local family. The airframe was stripped of seats, except mine, and doors, as was quite normal practise. Green lashing straps were fitted across the door openings, with the troops normally sitting along the rear bulkhead, with the outboard men holding onto the straps and all linking arms. I double checked my AUW, and realising I could not return that day, they all piled in and we made a safe return with 13 pax and 1 dog. (a Scout Record)

Our length of tour should have been 3 months in, and then relieved by 10 Flight, 3 months out. This rarely went to plan, and I found myself doing 4 months in and only 2 months out.

As I had received an excellent in-depth training on the Scout in Ground school, the OC made me the Flight Test Pilot. Thus, all aircraft were set up to one standard. This was not normally an onerous job, along with tasking, but occasionally an aircraft had to be flown out for deeper servicing at the MSRD, based in Brunei. The aircraft was often robbed of serviceability, as fragile instruments could not be safely airdropped. The dash looked like Gruyere cheese. If there was a temperature gauge, there would be no pressure gauge etc..

There were some perks with this trip though. At Long Pa Sia we were on a strict ration of 2 cans, per man, per day. It didn't matter if you chose beer, cola, lemonade or orange. Also it was a diet of compo rations, with fresh once a fortnight. Once the aircraft was handed over to the REME in Brunei, I could enjoy fresh food and unlimited beer for 3 to 4 days.

The ground crew were great chaps, and after a satisfactory airtest, they would scrounge fresh bread, potatoes and fruit for me to take back. Comms were hopeless, once we were out of the range of Brunei, and only regained when 5 minutes out of Long Pa Sia because of the mountainous terrain. On touch-down a horde of chaps would appear and liberate the goodies. I would only have to carry my helmet, but the chaps having disappeared were assisting the Unit cook. That evening's highlight was Chip Butties, and I was in everyone's good books.

Before leaving Long Pa Sia the Unit was woken to "Stand To" one night, following the sentries hearing noise in the defensive perimeter wire. I made my way in the dark to Bunker number 3 and again heard noise to our front. Using our jungle telephone link to the C.P. we were given permission to prime and throw 2 grenades, after the Unit were all aware. As they exploded we heard a squeal, followed by silence. Having reported we carried out a listening patrol for another hour, but it remained silent. We slowly thinned out again to sentries and went back to bed, fully clothed as usual. Next morning a fighting patrol examined the wire. We had killed a wild pig. Still we ate well that evening.

I was summoned to the CP one evening. The airdrop frequency had been changed, and as I was seconded from the Royal Signals, I was to change the radios 'Biscuits' to the new frequency. I protested, as I was a Line man, trained only in telephony, and I knew that the radio set should only be opened in sterile workshop conditions. Under orders, using REME tools, I opened

the set, broke the old biscuits, whilst familiarising, but had to feel my way through the job, and put the set back together. To my surprise it worked and our next re-supply was successful.

Our Flight was re-allocated to 28 Commonwealth brigade and we said farewell to Long Pa Sia and Kluang.

Maj. (Retd) A. Markham AFC

**Footnote:**



**Hearts and Minds**

On one occasion I was tasked to transport the District Officer plus the Police Chief, to a tribal village in a remote area. To my surprise it turned out that I was the very first white person they had ever seen.

## Squadron Newsletter 1960 Army Air Corps Journal 1961

O.C.      Lt-Col. J.H. Creswell., O.B.E. R.A.

1960 has been an eventful year marking the end of the Emergency in Malaya. This event which took place on 31st July, 1960, brought to a close a period of 12 years of operations against Communist Terrorists.

The following is a summary of operational effort by the Squadron since the emergency began :

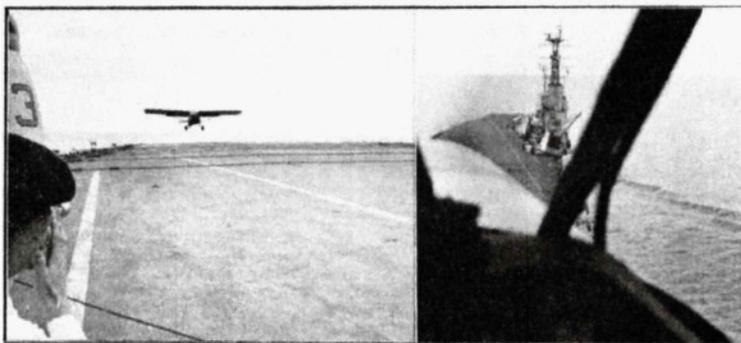
Operational Hours flown		171,241
Operational Sorties		181,236
Visual Recces		121,960
Arty Targets Obs.	<b>Over</b>	3,500
Target Marking	<b>Over</b>	4,000
C.T. Camps Found		2,140
Supplies dropped		6,675 tons
Leaflets dropped		232 millions

The early part of the year was marked by the success achieved in the North by 2 and 7 Recce Flights and in Central Malaya by 14 and 16 Flights in support of ground troops. This resulted in the whole of Pahang State and the area of Ipoh being declared "White." With the end of the Military Operations in Malaya, Special Police Field Forces were trained to continue the pressure on the C.T.'s on the South Thailand border. These operations have the support of 2 and 7 Flights who have produced some very valuable information. Since this area is largely unmapped, target marking and air supply have been vitally important.

The year having started with great promise was soon to see the tragic loss of Sgt. McCammont and his young passenger, Pte. Finnerty, on January 20th. McCammont had taken off from Seremban and made his last call seven minutes later. The aircraft was lost without trace. An intensive air search was carried out by Squadron aircraft, Helicopters, Valettas, Shackletons, Dakotas and P.R. Meteors, lasting ten days but without result. In April a logging contractor found the aircraft about six miles from Seremban in dense jungle. Pte. Finnerty had died instantly but McCammont though clearly badly injured had gallantly managed to cover 400 yards of the 800 yards to the main road. The aircraft was eventually brought out of the jungle by Aborigines of the Senoi Prak and Gurkhas for a full investigation. The position of the aircraft was such that no amount of air recce would have located it.

During March and April a re-training camp was established on the East Coast of Malaya and Flights were taken from operational duties for a period of training in the more conventional aspects of war. This training proved to be of great value and was the first of its kind to have taken place throughout 12 years of intense flying in support of Emergency operations. Largely due to the excellent liaison that exists between 11 Flight in Singapore and the Navy it was possible to carry out some deck landings on H.M.S. Albion (20,000 tons) in the South Asian Sea off the coast of Johore. Intensive training in true Naval style in the form of a cocktail party the previous night was a prelude to an enjoyable day's flying. After making the first landing the Commanding Officer watched from the compass platform while the Q.F.I., Freddy Legg, took Lt./Commander Flying to see how landing the Auster compared with his jet aircraft.

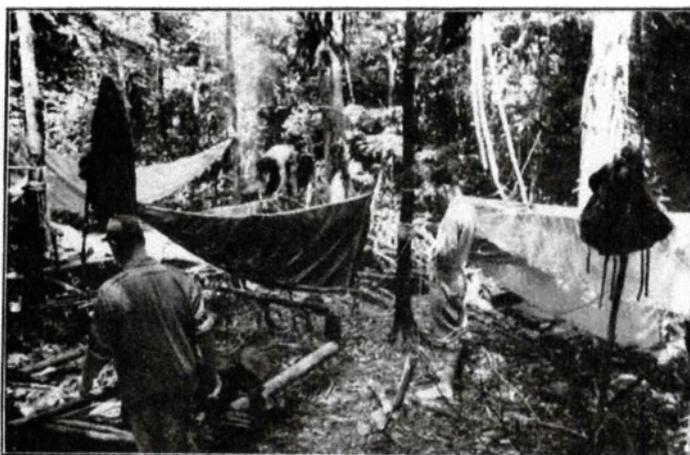
Each landing was witnessed by astonished groups on each side of the flight deck as a host or cameras filmed each effort.



*Deck landings on H.M.S. Albion.*

With the end of the Emergency on 31st July, 1960, the tempo changed from operations to thoughts on retraining and the allied problems created by a new problem for the Squadron-air portability. During trials carried out one factor has been foremost in our minds, that of the extreme weight and bad design of so much of our equipment. It can only be hoped that designers of the new equipment are equally aware of this problem.

Outward bound activity has its enthusiasts in the Squadron and an energetic and thriving club has been formed. Its first major project was to climb the highest mountain in Malaya, Gunong Tahan. This 7,200 ft. mountain lies in North Pahang in the middle of dense jungle and mountainous terrain. The trip lasted 14 days and was led by the Adjutant, Capt. Bob Horne. Although very exhausting, it was a complete change to office and camp routine. An enjoyable experience which, it is hoped, will be followed by a similar type of expedition in 1961.



In September John Bedford Davies set out with his pilots for a long trip to Bangkok. It is not clear what training value this flight had, but from an almost closed shop attitude on the details, Bangkok must have produced some excellent training. It is believed, however, that further information is available in plain envelopes on request

On 4th September Capt. Chris Roberts was flying V.R. in South Thailand when due to engine trouble he had to make a forced landing. The only available strip was a short stretch of laterite road on the edge of paddyfields. The landing was successful with no damage to the aircraft. The recovery operation carried out by R.A.F. Sycamores of 110 Squadron R.A.F. was of great value and gave us new experience in air recovery.

In the field of sport the Squadron has to face the difficult problem of collecting its teams from dispersed flights; this has caused the various sporting activities to be rather limited and flights have tended to specialise in their own particular field. 16 Flight, S.H.Q. and L.A.S.W. have produced very promising rugby and hockey teams. Both are quite strong, and having got off to a good start, it is hoped that they may both achieve a high degree of success.

7 Flight once again produced successful tug-of-war teams, winning light and heavy-weight events in the Brigade athletics meeting and the heavy-weight event in the Malaya Command meeting, losing the light-weight to a very strong Gurkha team.

Capt. George Richey captained the Commonwealth rugby team which had a successful tour of Hong Kong earlier in the year.

**Honours and Awards**

**D.F.C. : Capt. J. M. G. Stenson, R.A.**

**D.F.M. : Sgt. Patrick.**

**A.F.C. : Capt. J. Chandler.**

**M.I.D. : Capt. J. R. West.**

**Sgt. J. E. Fenlon.**

**Capt. J. S. Riggall.**

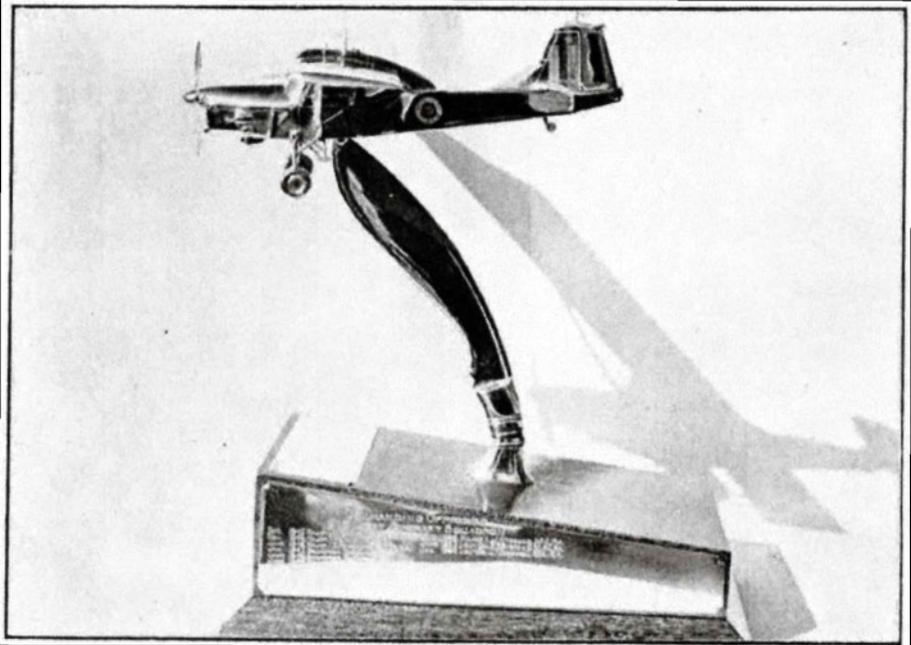
**Sgt. G. T. Ryan.**

**Sgt. N. Law**

**Sgt. K. Boulter.**

**B.E.M. Staff/Sgt. R. Wright.**

It has long been the desire of the Squadron to possess a silver centre-piece of some distinction and value. To this end a fund has been subscribed to by Squadron officers for the past years. The fund growing slowly received a most magnificent gift from Austers and associated manufacturers of the Auster IX. This gift made possible the purchase of the centre-piece shown below.



Inscription reads " To commemorate the completion on 28th February, 1959, of 150,000 operational hours by 656 Light Aircraft Squadron in support of the Emergency in Malaya."

The plaques on the side of the plinth bear the names of the Squadron Commanders Since the Squadron was formed.

## In Memoriam

Since the Spring edition of the Chinthe Journal, we were saddened to learn of the passing of the following friends and colleagues:

**Adrian Faulkner**, who died of 27th January this year. Adrian, who was a member of the RAOC, served with the Squadron at Noble Field, KL from 1958 - 1960. and joined the Association in 2011.

**Donald Donnelly**, who passed after a short illness on 5th March this year. Donald served his national service with the RAF and 656 Squadron in 2 Flight at Ipoh in 1957-58.

Gloria, his widow, tells us that he looked back with great fondness of his time serving with the Squadron and the fledgling Army Air Corps. He also used to tell everyone, with great delight, of surviving an accident in Auster WZ717 on 9th November 1957. He also attended many of the reunions and loved being member of our Association.

**Keith Parker known as "Charlie"**. Charlie was in the RAF and served at Benta and Ipoh with 2 Flight from 1955 to 1956.

Charlie and Peter Biggadike both joined the Association at the same time and came to several reunions together. Peter tells us that Charlies' most enjoyable one was at Middle Wallop where they both had a flight in an Auster. Peter and Charlie were good friends for over 45 years so inevitably it is a very sad loss to him personally.

**James Adair**, who served in 656 in Malaya 1960-63, on 30th September. His son, Bill recalls his father:

"My father, Major Arbuthnot James Adair, was born in 1931, not quite making it to ninety but a game effort. The scion of a long line of Royal Marines he did National Service in the Buffs and then went to Sandhurst and the Royal Artillery. He saw service in Egypt in 1956, Cyprus and Malaya (1960 - 1963) before returning to Europe to be in the BAOR, posted every few years to new locations in Germany, Old Sarum and Wales. He was married to Jill and they had two children William and Catherine. Germany allowed him to carry on flying, but in civilian guise only, as a glider pilot. He retired from the army in the mid-seventies. His last posting had been in Lincolnshire so he settled down there to run a village post office in Barnetby with my mother for many years. When she died he went to Barton on the Humber and then, when he needed to, came down to stay with my sister in Wales. He died after a short illness."

**John Hoare**, who served in the squadron as a RA pilot 1953-54 in Korea and Malaya. John slipped away peacefully on 1st October, with his sons, Marcus and Christopher, with him.

John won a DFC whilst serving with 1903 Flight in Korea and subsequently he served with 1914 Flight in Malaya. John retired as a Lt Col.

His son, Marcus, writes:

"Suffice to say he was a life-long soldier (even after retiring!) who was totally dedicated to his family. Since our mother died when my brother Chris and I were young, he became both mother and father to us and he lived for the time we spent together. He truly loved his career in the army which took him all around the world from flying Austers in the Korean War for the Air OP (where he was awarded the DFC) to Canada and numerous postings across the Middle East, Far East and Germany. He was an amazing father and a dearly loved grandfather. There will be a memorial at some point in the future

**George 'Jim' Laker**, who served with the Squadron from 1958-62 as a REME Air Mechanic

**REST IN PEACE. YOUR DUTY IS DONE**

STANDING ORDER MANDATE

To: The Manager ..... Bank  
Full address of Bank .....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Please pay **National Westminster Bank plc**  
Branch **Langport**  
Sort Code **60-12-34**  
Account number **51137135**  
Account name **656 Squadron Association**  
The sum of **£10.00 (TEN POUNDS STERLING)**  
Frequency **Annually, on the 2nd of January**  
First payment **2021**  
Reference **Your name and membership number**

Please note that this Standing Order Mandate supersedes any previous standing order mandates in favour of 656 Squadron Association, which should be cancelled.

As my annual subscription to the said Association, until further orders from me, and debit my account:

Sort code .....  
Account number .....  
Account name .....  
  
Signature .....  
Date .....

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Please fill in your Bank's address, and your bank account details, on the dotted lines. Make sure you sign and date the form, and then return it to the Treasurer, so that we may make a note of it in our files. We will then forward it to your bank for you.

Thank you.

George McKie,  
Treasurer, 656 Squadron Association,  
10, The Blossoms,  
Markfield Retirement Village  
Markfield, LE67 9SB