

THE CHINTHE



SPRING 2021

656 SQUADRON ASSOCIATION
JOURNAL

Your Committee

At the AGM the committee was elected as follows:

Your committee is therefore:

President - Pier Lewis

Chairperson - Bob Thorpe

email: bobthorpe341@gmail.com

Mob: 07935796164

Secretary - Terry Betchley

email: t.betchley@sky.com

Treasurer - George McKie

Membership secretary - Debs Harris

Assistant Treasurer and Auditor - Derek Walker

Webmaster - Mike Kane

Social Media Strategist - Jen Parker

Chinthe Editor - Dave Williams

email: dwilli@live.co.uk

Mob: 07942880886

The committee have agreed to remain in post until 2021 but as always we need more members to get involved.

Send Bob your email address so he can update you with news and information on a regular basis plus send you the Chinthe Newsletter, which is complimentary and in addition to the Chinthe Journal which will still be sent to you twice a year.

656 Squadron Association



Spring Edition 2001



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OC 656 Sqn report

Maj Phil Parkes

It is with great privilege that I get to write to the 656 Squadron Association as the latest in a long and illustrious chain of OCs of what I firmly believe is the finest Squadron in the Army Air Corps. I was fortunate enough to previously serve as the Operations Officer of 656 Squadron in 2014-2015, so it was with great personal pleasure that I was selected to return to command the Squadron with which I have felt a close affinity towards for many years.



Maj Raikes has passed the torch onto me but his closing reports read of uncertain times to come with regards to COVID 19 and how tricky the future was going to be – how right he was. However, as I am sure all readers of the Chinthe will surely know is that the movements and tempo of 656 sqn cannot be stunted by a mere pandemic. Whilst practises and procedures have of course had to be adjusted in order to keep all personnel as safe as possible, the Squadron has continued to deliver across all disciplines and a multitude of locations including another deployment to Norway, HMS Queen Elizabeth (QNLZ) and a plethora of other exercises across the UK.

Since my predecessor's final report, the Squadron has gone through another natural turn of the handle with the arrival of new personnel directly from phase 2 training establishments, a new Ground Support Commander and 7 new aircrew. It is my intention this year that the squadron can once again host members of the 656 association and meet these new arrivals in person.

Now settling into what starts to feel like routine – the squadron was once again in the build up to a deployment the high north. Located deep in the Arctic circle, Bardufoss has served the British military as a base for Ex CLOCKWORK for the last 50 years. This year would be only the third time that British Apache (AH64) helicopters had deployed on the exercise, but lessons identified and procedures put in place over the last two years ensured a slick roll out and allowed

us to hit the ground running upon arrival. Simultaneously achieving snow environmental qualifications for the aircrew and with all remaining members of the squadron completing the newly beefed up Cold weather survival course, the detachment proved to be very productive. This could have been partly due to being confined to the camp with no access to the Arctic Club outside the wire for 6 weeks! The new Cold Weather Aviation Operators Survival Course continues to be run by Royal Marine Mountain Leaders over 9 days with an invigorated emphasis on tactics. Starting in a semi tactical 10-man tent to learn the basics of thriving in temperatures down to minus 30 deg, through 4-man tents in a tactical harbour area, range packages and finally onto a survival night with 'pocket contents' and the infamous ice breaker drills to finish. A daunting prospect jumping feet first into the freezing water, but individuals can gain confidence in the skills and drills learnt that they would survive and be 'fit to fight' should the worst happen to them for real.



Once again, flying in the incredibly austere conditions of the Arctic by day and night challenged both the air and ground crews whilst keeping the workshop on their toes. Opportunities arose to live fire 30mm gun under the control of Norwegian Joint Terminal Attack Controllers (JTACs), utilising video feedback to observe the capability and firepower of the Apache. This interoperation with other countries will put the

squadron in good stead for the NATO exercise Ex COLD RESPONSE – a multinational set-up this time embarked and operating from the Prince of Wales aircraft carrier in Norway in early 2022.



To prepare for the embarkation, aircrew have qualified for deck operations onboard the HMS Queen Elizabeth aircraft carrier whilst she was in UK waters off the South West coast. The near 300m deck provides a platform for aviation and air assets alike in the form of all rotary craft as well as the F35 flown by the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force. This can make for a busy flight line and part of our future embarkations will be how we integrate with this giant floating beast. She has all the modern capabilities to be a potent platform to project power around the globe. Her sister ship, HMS Prince of Wales, will host 656 squadron for the first time for three weeks in the summer to qualify more aircrew, as well as giving the Ground Support Flight and REME assets an opportunity to run out before the long stint onboard for Ex COLD RESPONSE early next year. Next year will also give further opportunity to work with the Commando Helicopter Force Wildcats to continue to explore aircraft teaming in different environments, utilising the FIND capability of the Wildcat and potent ATTACK capability of the AH64.

Whilst the themes of Arctic and maritime operations continue to dominate our timetable, it is important to note that the gaps in between are far from quiet. Constant engagement with 16 Air Assault Brigade and 3 Commando Brigade as well as support to other organisation exercises fill all available white space whilst support elements are looking forward to have the fleet ready for the next challenge. Readiness and currency are vital should 656 be called upon at a moment's notice and the squadron continues to develop skills and procedures to be effective in any environment. Later this year will see the Sqn deploy to Oman in order to brush up on their desert and sand environmental qualifications as well as utilising the fantastic resources in country that

allow the release of HELLFIRE missiles and rockets. This will complete the trilogy of snow, sand and sea – allowing 656 squadron to operate effectively anywhere in the world.



I m very grateful to be able to finally introduce myself to the association and I hope that as the world slowly starts to open up again we have the ability to host its members in person or see them at the annual meet up later in the year.

Be well

Phil Parkes

President's Report

Piers Lewis

Looking back to my article from this time last year, I can see it was clearly written unaware of the covid year yet to come. Little did any of us know the impact it would have on our lives and our loved ones as this roller coaster few months saw us bounce between lockdown after lockdown. My thoughts go out to Association members who have found this the most difficult, or have lost loved ones throughout the year.

Looking at 2021, let us hope and pray for better. As we stand, we do have the Reunion in the diary, and Remembrance Sunday too, so fingers crossed these come to fruition. Whilst the Reunion is due to be held at our spiritual home of Middle Wallop, I find myself looking to the 'Wheels and Wings' event on 3 July as an indicator for our event, and, at this stage, that seems to be going ahead as planned. Watch this space!

I also saw the departure of HMS Queen Elizabeth and her Task Group on the media streams this week (benefits of living close to Portsmouth), and watched with some jealousy, I might add. I have a friend commanding one of the ships in the task group, who we spent time with last weekend to say farewell, and it brought me back to those mixed emotions of deployment and the fantastic support networks we build and lean on to take families through months away doing what we love. Whilst once we were the recipients of that support, now, we feature as varying forms of the support in one way or another.

I am sure Her Majesty the Queen is leaning on exactly such support following the death of the Duke of Edinburgh recently. It is sad that only the passing of such an occasion brings out all the fantastic stories, history and understanding of such a great man. Of particular note for me, was a snippet of a speech he gave some years ago in Washington, really illustrating his superb statesman qualities laced with a wicked sense of humour.

Finally, it is worthy of note that the Forces Pension Society achieve their 75th anniversary this year (a way behind us, I might add!). On reading their recent Pennant journal, I can see echoes of all the above points in there, as well as so much more. It is well worth a read.

Chair's Report

May 2021

I guess we are all delighted that the end of the pandemic, at least in the UK, is in sight with the amazing vaccination programme. I am not sure whether, as Churchill said at one point in the Second World War whether this really is the beginning of the end or the end of the beginning; either way there is light at the end of tunnel.

At least now we can start to firm up some plans for Association activities in the latter half of the year. We still plan to hold our reunion and AGM on Saturday 4th September and the RBL is advanced in its planning for Remembrance Sunday.

We have had some welcome additions to the committee in the last 12 months. As you know from the last Chinthe, Debs Higgs, whose father, a GPR pilot, served in the Squadron in Malaya, has joined us as our Membership Secretary and is doing a great job of sorting out our membership and Facebook Group. We have also co-opted, Jen Parker, who many of you know when she was working at the Army Flying Museum to drive our social media strategy and recruit our younger brethren to the Association. Thank you both of stepping up into these roles.

Reunion/AGM – 4th September 2021

As you are aware, we have planned that our reunion, which sadly we had to cancel last year, will take place on Saturday 4th September 2021. Following an email survey, it was decided to hold the event at the Army Flying Museum. However, it is possible that the Museum will not be able to host the dinner. We are currently looking at alternatives and I intend to visit the Museum as soon as it is open to review the situation with them.

The alternatives are:

Hold the daytime activities as planned in the Museum and then have the dinner in the Officers' or WO & Sgts' Mess. However, we believe that this will prohibitively expensive, costing as much as £65 per head for the day, due mainly to staff overtime costs.

Hold the daytime activities as planned in the Museum and then have dinner together at a local pub. This, we believe, would be around £40-45 per head

Turn this into a daytime informal event with a Hog Roast and BBQ. Again, we are estimating a cost of around £40-45 per head.

Since we had no events in the last 12 months, the committee have agreed to subsidise the reunion and bring the cost down for members by around £5 to £10.

Please complete the form later in the Journal to indicate your interest in attending. It is really important that you include an email address so we can contact you further once we have firmed up details.

We hope next year, subject to the exigencies of the service, to hold the reunion at the Squadron. We are also looking at whether we could organise a separate event as a fly-in (or drive-in) at Sywell Aerodrome in Northamptonshire.

Remembrance Sunday 14th November 2021

Terry has detailed the plans for this event. He has requested 25 places which will be allocated on a strictly first-come first-served basis. I do hope this event will take place and if you have not attended before, I would urge you to do so once in your life.

Finally

As we come out of this strange and difficult time, I believe we can look forward positively to the future. The Association is in good shape and we are developing the strategy to recruit new members to our unique organisation.

Please do spread the word about the Association and help us get more members in 2021 and 2022.

Stay safe everyone and I look forward to seeing you all at the reunion.

Bob Thorpe

Chair 656 Squadron Association



SECRETARY'S REPORT **SPRING/SUMMER 2021**

I am sure all of you are glad like me to be coming out of lockdown and returning the new normality. Getting a hug from my Grandkids will be up there on the list of highlights to come.

Regrettably and understandably there has been very little movement regarding the Association but then this must be the same for all organisations given the current situation.

After our last committee meeting, we are slowly moving forward with regard to re-planning the AGM/Reunion. Things remain very much up in the air at the moment and perhaps as we come out of lockdown more planning can be done. Rest assured that as soon as the plans firm up, we will get the details out to you as soon as possible.

With regard to the Cenotaph Parade this year we have received direction from the Royal British Legion regarding the 2021 parade. They are planning for business as usual this year and so I have requested our normal 25 places for the Association. Further on you will see the booking form and for anyone wishing to attend please get your booking in early as all the deadlines have moved forward.

We have three new members of the committee to welcome and we hope in time they will all bring their own expertise to the Association.

Deborah Higgs takes on the reins of Membership Secretary. Formally with the Glider Pilot Association as their Membership Secretary.

We have also co-opted Jen Parker, who used to work at the Army Flying Museum and who we made an Honorary Member last year. Onto the committee to develop our Social Media strategy with an aim to recruit some younger brethren into the fold.

Captain Dan Hunt takes over the reins from Captain Matt Collings as the Active Squadron Representative.

Stay safe everyone and I look forward to meeting as many members as possible at the AGM/Reunion in September



Expression of Interest in attending the Reunion/AGM

on Saturday 4th September 2021

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Telephone No: _____

Please reserve me a place at the reunion taking place at the Army Flying Museum on Saturday 4th September 2021.

I would like to bring _____ guests

I understand that plans for the reunion will be firmed up as soon as possible and there is no obligation on my attendance until I know the confirmed cost of the event.

I would prefer Option A / B / C (please circle your preferred option)

Option A - Day at Museum followed by dinner in the Officers' or WOs & Sgts' Mess

Option B – Day at Museum followed by an informal dinner in a local pub

Option C – Day at Museum with a BBQ/Hog Roast

I acknowledge that, if I have chosen Option A, the cost of this may be as much as £60/65 per head and that the committee will take a decision on which option they feel is the best for this reunion.

Please complete this form and post or email to Terry Betchley. If you do not want to tear the page out of your copy of the Chinthe we are happy to have this on a blank piece of paper or just send an email to Terry with the details shown in the form.

Terry's details:

7 Barn Meadow, Combs, Stowmarket IP14 2QG

t.betchley@sky.com



656 Squadron Association

George McKie, Treasurer

Treasurer's Report **Spring 2021**

First, I would like to thank all those who changed their Standing Order and paid the new £10.00 subscription rate in January 2021. If you have forgotten to do so, could you please complete the Standing Order that is included in this issue. Could I also ask those who have paid at the old rate of £7.50 to kindly pay £2.50 online to: 656 Squadron Association, Sort Code: 60-12-34, Account Number: 51137135, or send a cheque made out to 656 Squadron Association and post it to me at:

Mr G McKie, 10 The Blossoms, Markfield, Leicestershire, LE67 9SB.

The 2020 accounts have been audited and they were found to be in good order. The Income and Expenditure Account and Balance Sheet is reproduced in this issue of 'The Chinthe'. Due to Covid 19, and the resultant cancellation of the 2020 Reunion, the Association's expenditure was reduced. This resulted in an excess of income over expenditure of £1681.67.

The Association's cash assets had increased to £5824.32 by the end of the Financial Year 2020, compared with £4091.23 at the end of the Financial Year 2019.

Therefore, the Association has a sound financial base to work from in 2021 and there are sufficient funds for current needs, and there are funds held in reserve to meet future contingencies.

George McKie
Treasurer

656 Squadron Association Balance Sheet **For the year ended 31 December 2020**

	2020	2019
Current Assets		
Cash	5824.32	4091.23
Stock	793.42	844.84
Debtors	0.00	0.00
Assets	35.98	35.98
	6653.72	4972.05
Current Liabilities		
Shop Stock	0.00	0.00
Unpresented cheques	0.00	0.00
Net Current Assets	6653.72	4972.05
(Represented by)		
Funds Brought Forward	4936.07	6159.96
General Surplus/Deficit	1651.09	-1251.59
Shop Profits	30.58	27.70
Plus Debtors - current year	0.00	0.00
Minus Creditors - current year	0.00	0.00
Assets	35.98	35.98
	6653.72	4972.05
Reserve Account		
Opening Balance 1 January	4004.12	2006.27
Transfers In	2000.00	3000.00
Transfers out	-500.00	1009.44
Interest Received	4.94	7.29
Closing Balance 31 December	5509.06	4004.12

G McKie
Treasurer

D Walker
Deputy Treasurer

656 Squadron Association - Income and Expenditure Account For The Year Ended 31 December 2020

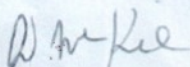
Income	£	Expenditure	£
General Account			
Subscriptions	2512.50	Journal Costs	561.02
Reunion Income	1045.00	Printing & Stationery	27.82
Donations Received	50.00	Reunion Refunds	710.00
Postage and Packing Income	15.60	Donation to Army Flying Museum	250.00
Interest on Reserve Account	4.94	Donation to Royal British Legion	100.00
		Postage Costs	93.41
		Lockdown Lectures Expenses	100.00
		Web and Computer Costs	95.47
		Miscellaneous Costs	27.50
		PayPal Charges	11.73
Totals	3628.04	Totals	1976.95
Excess of Income Over Expenditure	1651.09		

Sales Account

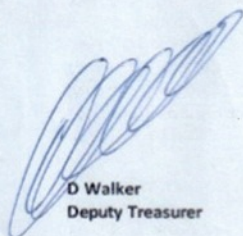
Sales	£	Cost of Sales	£
Shop Sales	82.00	Opening Stock	844.84
Shop Profits	30.58	New Stock Added	0.00
		Less Closing Stock	793.42
		Cost of Sales	51.42
Total Income	3710.04	Total Expenditure	2028.37
Overall Excess Income	1681.67		

Notes to Account

- (1) Travelling costs for members who lectured
(2) 1 x wreath @ £20.00 + refund of £7.50 subs to potential member who joined in error



**G McKie
Treasurer**



**D Walker
Deputy Treasurer**



CENOTAPH PARADE 2021

656 SQUADRON ASSOCIATION CONTINGENT

The Royal British Legion are planning for business as usual for this year's Cenotaph Parade and planning for the event has started. Of course, this can all change in an instant given the current situation regarding covid.

To that end I have included in this addition of the Chinthe the normal booking form if you wish to attend, please complete and return to me so that I can get everyone registered. I have asked for our normal 25 places and there is no priority, it will be strictly first come first served basis.

I can accept email bookings provided the email contains all the required information and an indication of if you would like to attend lunch at a local restaurant after the service.

Please note that this year carers are included in the numbers allocated so anyone who has a carer and wishes to attend please bear that in mind

Also, it goes without saying this event could be cut back of even cancelled at very short notice.

We will remember them.



Remove this page, Complete the form and return ASAP

Application to attend the

Annual Parade at the Cenotaph

(There could be a restriction on numbers)

Please return by 14th August 2021

Or

Email Details Required to t.betchley@sky.com

To

Terry Betchley
7 Barn Meadow
Combs
STOWMARKET
Suffolk
IP14 2QG

Please note the following points:

Covid 19

Be advised that the Royal British Legion is working toward business as usual however, Government Guidelines may change. The Legion may need to reduce numbers attending or even cancel the event.

Carers

Unlike previous years, carers must be included in the figures. Therefore, the option of one veteran assisting another for the duration of the parade should be considered.

REMEMBRANCE PARADE CONTINGENT RETURN
SUNDAY 14th NOVEMBER 2021

Full Name _____

Address _____

Post Code _____ Phone Number _____

I wish to join the 656 Squadron Contingent at the Cenotaph Ceremony on
Remembrance Sunday

(Form up on Horse Guards Parade by 1000 Hrs
Sunday 14th November 2021)

The following information will be required:

Military Service Number _____

Title/Rank _____

First Name _____

Last Name _____

Date of Birth _____

Place of Birth _____

Please ensure full details are correct

Do you wish to join the party for lunch in a local restaurant **YES/NO**



THE NOT FORGOTTEN

Presents...



THE FORGOT YOU NOT ROCK

SUMMER GARDEN PARTY DRIVE-IN TOUR!

Rock classics, power ballads, the music of legends AND MORE!

12th July

Hagley Hall
Stourbridge

22nd July

Gatcombe Park
Gloucestershire

9th September

Penshurst Place
Nr Tonbridge

13th July

Newby Hall
Ripon

7th September

Caerhays Castle
St Austell

13th September

Ballindalloch Castle
Banffshire

14th July

Knowsley Hall
Prescot

8th September

The Grange
Alresford

14th September

Cardross Estate
By Sterling

21st July

Ewenry Priory
Bridgend



Getting the 'feel good' feeling back together!

Complimentary events for veterans and their guests
For more details, see overleaf...





THE NOT FORGOTTEN

We were very disappointed our annual Summer Garden Party was cancelled again this year. However, following the resounding success of the Jingle Bell Rock Drive Ins in the lead up to Christmas we are thrilled to announce The Not Forgotten will once again be touring the UK with the "Forgot You Not Rock" Summer Garden Party Drive Ins.

11 Summer Garden Party events will be taking place (Northern Ireland details not yet published) whatever the weather – come rain or shine! We are extremely grateful to the owners of the spectacular venues for giving us this wonderful opportunity to entertain you. Further information is as follows:

These complimentary Party events are hosted by The Not Forgotten for veterans and their guests. We do ask, however, that our guests make their own travel arrangements to and from the venue. Two parties will take place daily and the timings are:

1130 hrs - 1400 hrs

1630 hrs - 1900 hrs

Each Party is limited to 60 vehicles. We anticipate there being great demand so we would ask that veterans complete and return their application form as soon as possible. All requests to attend a party will be considered and invites distributed fairly although we cannot guarantee every application will be successful. Preference will be given to those members who have not attended many Not Forgotten events previously. We will though do our best to accommodate as many of your members as possible.

Bluetooth speakers will be provided to each vehicle for everyone to enjoy the Party whatever the weather and social distancing guidelines! Members should have picnic chairs and picnic blankets at the ready! Our guests will be welcomed with a glass of Pimms or non-alcoholic squash alternative. A BBQ will be served followed by tea, coffee and a delicious slice of cake.

The fabulous show will be hosted by the lovely Annie Riley and equally lovely Max Fox! The popular Singo Bingo will be making a return and there will also be the fun game of Kings & Queens and a raffle should you wish to take part

Dress Code : Smart Casual OR Garden Party attire OR Rock 'n Roll – a prize will be given to the most innovative outfit!

If you have any queries or would like any further information about the events please call Anne McGinley on 020 7730 2400 or email anne@thenotforgotten.org

Please circulate the attached form to your members and if any wish to join us and we hope they do! – please ask them to complete the form indicating their preferred venue and time and return it to Anne McGinley, The Not Forgotten, 2 Grosvenor Gardens, London SW1W 0DH as soon as possible or alternatively email karlie@thenotforgotten.org

We look forward to hearing from your members soon. With best wishes.

Rosie, Anne and Karlie
The Not Forgotten Events Team

Getting The "Feel Good" Feeling back Together

For more information on The Not Forgotten please visit our website: thenotforgotten.org



THE NOT
FORGOTTEN

"The Forgot You Not Rock"

Summer Garden Party Drive Ins

Referring Association: 656 Squadron Association

<u>Please indicate venue :</u>	
<u>Please indicate time :</u>	
<u>Names of veterans in vehicle (social distancing permitting and if you wish we are happy for 2 veterans to travel together in one vehicle – the more the merrier :</u>	1. 2.
<u>Please provide names of veterans' guests :</u>	1. 2.
<u>Address of main contact :</u>	
<u>Telephone number :</u>	
<u>Email address :</u>	
<u>Registration number of vehicle :</u>	
<u>A BBQ of beefburger in a bun with sausage, salad and coleslaw will be served. Please let us know here of any alternative dietary requirement:</u>	
<u>Veterans' Service (Regiment, Royal Navy, Royal Marines, RAF, Merchant Navy)</u>	1. 2.

Please see overleaaaf

<u>Service number/s</u>	1. 2.
<u>Dates of service</u>	1. 2.
<u>Where you served</u>	1. 2.

Please tick the box to confirm you are an eligible beneficiary of the TNF(eligibility is any serving man or woman who is wounded, injured or sick and any veteran, of any age, with a disability or medical condition; whatever the cause).		<input type="checkbox"/>
In accordance with the new General Data Protection Regulation we need your consent to communicate with you. Please tick the box to confirm you are happy for the Not Forgotten to send you details about this event and our other activities. This consent can be withdrawn at any time by informing info@thenotforgotten.org Our privacy policy says how we look after information about you. You can read it at https://www.thenotforgotten.org or ask for a copy by phoning 020 7730 2400 or writing to us at The Not Forgotten, 2 Grosvenor Gardens, Victoria, London SW1W 0DH.		<input type="checkbox"/>
Please note that photographs and / or videos may be taken at this event and used by The Not Forgotten in the following ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Printed publicity for The Not Forgotten • Facebook, Twitter and Instagram • The Not Forgotten Website • Presentations Please notify us if you object to the above		
Name	Signature	Date

Our Friendly Shipborne Spies

Mike Kane

This story is about an incident during a 5 day shift offshore in the BP Forties Oil Field. For those who are not familiar with the North Sea oil fields, the Forties, as it was known was one of the biggest. Comprising of four permanent rigs A-D a number of maintenance vessels, and a large catamaran called the Emergency Support Vessel 'Iolair'.

This unique vessel did not start as an ESV, but rather as the concept of a maintenance and support vessel (MSV). It was proposed for the Forties oil field, jointly owned by British National Oil Corporation and operated by BP Petroleum Development Company Ltd in the North Sea. A particular feature of the design by the Naval Architects was that there was no cross-bracing between the pontoons. Instead, the platform was given extra strength by a box-girder construction and diagonal bracing was arranged from the centre of the platform to the pontoons. This arrangement remained virtually unchanged to the build completion and offered exceptional speed when the vessel was de-ballasted on the surface. The intention was to achieve a rapid response to emergencies, wherever they might be experienced in the North Sea.

As an MSV, the vessel was always conceived to provide accommodation for about 220 persons, saturation diving facilities, a large workshop, craneage, and helicopter landing area with hangar and re-fueling. All were still featured in the eventual design but had been enhanced with other features and sophistication much of which was to support the emergency role. ESV incorporated novelty and ideas that were years ahead of their time. Indeed, part of the brief was that she should still be modern ten years after entering service. For example

- The saturation diving system was equipped with an advanced launch and recovery system.
- Heave/swell compensation in the diving tube to enable operations in rougher weather.
- A Citadel area to which people could retire and survive if the vessel was engulfed in gas.
- A drenching system to cool the exterior surfaces if the vessel was too close to a platform.
- The largest capacity and the longest range of firefighting monitors ever at sea.
- Fixed water cannon on the after columns to cool the underside of production platforms.





The IOLAIR on a calm day

The Iolair sat beside the Forties Alpha and a support vessel.

The Forties Delta in 1983 that unfortunately felt the full impact of the Iolair's capability with water and mud when it had a drilling station gas fire. The Iolair powered down the field from where it had been sitting in the lee of the Alpha at about 12kts. It can, when it turns the water monitors on full blast astern, gain another 5Kts.

When it arrived at the Delta, apart from a fire crew, all other personnel were evacuated to the Iolair including the 16 injured. Warning the fire crews, it then let go with all the water monitors onto the drilling platform and tower with devastating effect.

Unfortunately the water hit the drilling tower so hard it bent it. It damaged it to such a degree that it was dangerously close to collapsing and they had to call the Iolair off and the remaining fire crews had to tackle the fire manually which continued to rage for another 9 hours.

It was my down shift so I got the story when I next came onboard.



AS365N

However, The Iolair was also the base for the infield shuttle helicopter, an AS365N. The helicopter had a number of tasks, but it was generally there to shuttle staff around the field when it was crew change. Each morning, lunchtime and evening the helicopter would shuttle crews from rig to the Iolair and then onto the rig to which the Puma/Tiger would drop off a relief crew and pick up the weekly shift change to back to Aberdeen. The shuttle would then start again distributing crew between the rigs. The helicopter was hangered on the Iolair and all maintenance except for major maintenance was carried out there too.

The shuttle aircraft also had another task, that of Search and Rescue. The Forties field was in a busy shipping and fisheries lane and it was therefore important to have quick response to any incident. It would take over an hour for any rescue helicopter (Sea-King) to reach anywhere within a 5 mile radius of the field.

The crew comprised of three captains and two first officer copilots as well as a winch operator and winch man. Apart from SAR Ops the only requirement for two pilot operations was at night. Hence only two first officers.

The aircraft was of course fitted with a winch at all times but unlike modern SAR helicopters, we had no searchlight apart from landing lights and no thermal camera. It was therefore difficult to maintain position at night over a sinking boat with next to no visual reference except listening to the con from the winch op and what the landing lights could provide.

So there is a little bit of background to operations in the forties field. Now we can get onto the story proper.

One Sunday afternoon I had about finished my 6am-2pm shift when my relief arrived, Steve Bidmead, Bidders as he was affectionately known. He was quite excited, well anything to do with boats and sailing usually does excite ex booty's, he had been up to the bridge before coming down to the flight crew office, (a container bolted to the deck) and was told that the Delta had spotted a Soviet trawler fleet approaching and looked like it would be heading right up the middle of the field South to North. What got Steve interested though was that in the middle of the fleet, so as to be as inconspicuous as possible, was a communications boat, noticeable because it was brisling with aerals.

These boats not only maintained control of the fishing fleet but communicated with other assets around the North Sea and Europe.

As a typical marine, Bidders thought it would be a good idea to have a practice emergency SAR callout but coupled with this he wanted to scour the lolair for any magazines which might be of interest to our soviet colleagues, namely Playboy, Fiesta, Men Only, etc. etc. Steve popped up to the bridge, while we went hunting for magazines, and told the officer of the watch his idea and had no problem with getting permission. Winching down a bundle of magazines could be construed as practice for winching down life-saving equipment or medical supplies to a boat in distress.

We had amassed a reasonable sized bundle after 15 minutes which was duly tied up and made secure enough that it could be lowered by winch. Steve then called out the SAR crew i.e a loadmaster/winch operator and winch man and being as both he and I were available as flying crew there was no need to call out anyone else. There were definitely big smiles all round from everyone including the deck crew and rig staff from around the field were waiting to see which rig the fleet would be closest to when we carried out the drop so they could take photographs.

Checking the wind, swell and visibility there would not be a problem with conditions for the drop. As Steve was going to be the command pilot, he carried out the flight crew briefing including how we were going to get the soviet comms boat crew to understand what we were intending to do. The officer of the watch was in communication with the fleet but that might not be the boat to whom we wanted to operate to. He did say we were conducting SAR practice and could we utilize the fleet to practice a supply drop. I cannot remember what the reply was but we believe that it was cleared so we prepared to go.

We climbed aboard, started up, carried out all the aircraft and winch safety checks and made the package safe inside the cabin. After takeoff we headed for the rear port side of the flotilla and then gradually moved forward until we could spot the control boat in the middle of the trawlers. It wasn't hard to spot, it was festooned with aerial's which also made us think about how we could get the package down without it getting snagged. However, as we got closer we could see there was enough of a gap to winch down the package between the aerials as long one of our soviet friends un-clipped it and made sure our hook was free to reel back in.

There were plenty of crew on the deck, all in normal work clothes just like all the crews on the normal working trawlers. It seemed that the message had got through that we were going to attempt drop a package down to the deck and one of the deckhands began to con us in with hand signals. Not that we weren't appreciative but we preferred to use the con from our loadmaster/ winch operator in the back. Making sure we were over the deck at a reasonable height to avoid all the aerials we maintain heading and speed with the boat as the package was lowered down to them. We could see lots of thumbs up and when the package was grabbed then unhooked we began to reel the cable in.

The look on the crews faces when they saw what we had delivered was brilliant, they all made a mad dash for the guy who had the bundle, they were jumping around and gesturing there thanks to us when all of a sudden the bridge door flew open and a uniformed officer dashed out, grabbed the bundle, didn't acknowledge us and rushed back inside, closing the door.

The crew just looked around in shock making a lot of hand gestures and asking us if we had any more but we of course had to indicate that was a negative. When the winch was secured we waved goodbye and climbed away talking about how it was a shock to see that officer dive out of the bridge and confiscate the magazines.

When we returned to the IOLAIR and closed down, we went up to the bridge and told the Capt. about it all he said they had received a call from the flotilla commander thanking him for the package in a typical Russian style monotone without any emotion.

Well, it broke up the day and apart when we have an actual SAR operation or ship landings in rough seas, it made a change.



IOLAIR in full flow

28 (Commonwealth Brigade)

Maj.(Rtd) A. Markham AFC

The family having arrived at Kluang, I was now detached, with 7 Flight, to Kuching in Sarawak. Although we kept the aircraft on Kuching Airfield, we were accommodated at Semengo Camp, some 2-3km away. We were a lodger unit to various tank, artillery and infantry units.

Often our flying missions caused us to miss meals, but the cooks would often leave us something on a 'low light' in the evening.

We still had a pair of Austers from the Hong Kong Flight blistered on, and I shared a bunk with Tony Wing for a while. They flew dawn and dusk reccees to spot Indonesian incursions, by boat, into 1st Division near Lundu.

In early 1965 we carried out reccees for a number of units on rotation, and took the Brigade Commander and his Staff to visit those units in 1, 2 and 3 Divisions of Sarawak.

The Indonesians made several incursions into Sarawak, but we were forbidden to follow them over the Kalimantan border to retaliate. They also had Ack Ack guns along the border to prevent this. However, if they opened up on our reccees, the RA were allowed to retaliate on their AA sites. Always "Fire Mission 1 gun", and AOP controlled.

The RAF rested all their aircrew at weekends, except for 1 crew on S and R standby. We however flew all days of the week, resting when tasking allowed.

On Sunday the 4th of July 1965, I was to recce for a special Op to go "Claret". ie cross the border into Kalimantan. I duly flew to Padawan, the Coy HQ of the 2nd Royal Green Jackets, and was briefed by the OC, Major 'Punchy' Carter, to take him and his "O" Group over their route.

The weather was ideal, puffs of Cu, and clear visibility. I started on our side of the border, where the RE's had levelled the top of a mountain, which would enable the Company to be airlifted to it as the HLS start point. Three artillery guns were also to be concentrated here to improve the range of support fire. I made a number of lateral passes short of the target so that briefing photos could be taken, from a number of angles, and was returning the party back to Padawan, via the mountain pad, when the Scout engine stopped.

I entered autorotation and set up for range, transmitted a Mayday call, and advised the "O" Group to make sure they were secure. All below and around us was a dull green area of Primary Jungle. The trees were 200-250ft high with all the foliage at the top.

We had often discussed this scenario in the crewroom and realised that the Scout would fall through the foliage and would then have a vertical drop of 200ft, which would be unsurvivable. Stretching the glide was my only option, but ridges blocked my course. Initially I flared off speed and used the Rrpm to create lift to jump over the first and second ridges, building up the airspeed and Rrpm again between jumps.

Then the third ridge loomed with no possibility of a repeat jump to clear it. I therefore turned along the ridge and a lighter green patch came into range. I manoeuvred to it, flared off the airspeed and pulled the nose up steeply to use the tail as a crumple zone as we contacted the ground. The aircraft levelled as we came to rest in bamboo and Secondary Jungle.

A quick check revealed only one injury. Lt. Mike Wilcocks was sitting with his back to a Sun Air Radio mount, which his spine contacted on impact.

I briefed the party that we would need to clear the undergrowth to be seen and rescued. Capt. Mike Dunning and Lt. St Aubin looked for water to activate an indicator balloon, but the search proved fruitless. I set off an electronic distress beacon, SARBE, and made everyone a cup of tea to steady their nerves, using my personal survival pack.

The OC was all for marching out but I prevailed on him to wait for air rescue. Lt. Wilcocks sorted out the aircraft survival pack, and readied the flares. All the cut undergrowth, although green, was piled up and I extracted some fuel from the aircraft to ignite it as a beacon, hoping the rescue aircraft would spot the smoke.

It burnt well, but not with the dark smoke as I had envisaged. Still, it cleared the area a bit. After about an hour and a half we heard the sound of a helicopter, and flares were let off.

A Whirlwind came into view and lowered a winch cable, indicating one pax only. I got rid of the OC first. On its return it indicated one pax only again, so the injured Lt. Wilcocks was next away. On the next trip two pax was indicated, so my pax were all safely away. One of them had a camera, which I confiscated to take pictures of the damage, which may have helped to find the reason for our situation.

I then removed all radio cards turning the sets to zero, gathered all the ***** into my small pack and searched the aircraft for anything of value to an enemy. As I did this, I found the complete 'Op Order' behind the OC's seat cushion, which I placed inside my shirt, donned my pack and was winched out at last.

Arriving at Padawan I was greeted by the the OC and his 'O' Group with a gin, lime and lemonade, and I was able to return the 'Op Order' quietly.

The RAF crew admitted that they were heading for a briefing, and hadn't switched their search equipment on, but saw the flares as they approached Padawan. They needed to return to Kuching and agreed to take me back with them.

At the dispersal, when we arrived, I saw my Flight Commander waiting for me, so I jumped down, saluted, and told I still had four doors with me. He didn't seem amused.



XP905 at Rest

The REME investigation and recovery team were airlifted to the site to prepare the aircraft for airlift recovery by a Belvedere helicopter to Kuching, ready for shipping back to Singapore and finally to Fleetlands, near Portsmouth. Here it was rebuilt and readied for service as an anti-tank SS11 missile carrier for BAOR.



Commencement of Recovery

The recovery team gave me a blade from the tail rotor, which I etched with all names and details of the sortie. *This is now in the Rifles museum at Winchester, together with details of the operation, which went ahead and was a complete success.*

Before they left Sarawak, C Coy officers presented me with a beautiful alarm clock, which I still have, and I gave them the tail rotor blade. I was also invited to Penang for the Shooting Ball, and the CO, LtCol Brammall announced me as an honorary rifleman. Who was I to argue with a man who became a Field Marshal.

Shortly after this I was rotated back to Malaya, only to be informed that the Flight, along with our families, had moved to Terendak Camp, Malacca, in our absence. We were bussed to the Camp Guardroom and escorted by MP's until claimed by our respective wives. (She had her chance to get rid of me, but missed it).

Terendak was a great improvement on most camps, with an Olympic Pool, Beach Clubs, shops and superb married quarters.

It was great for visiting the Messes of each Unit. The Australian Regts' still held a 6pm swill, as at home, the Kiwis had great 'Hungies' at the Beach Club, and the sports fields covered every event.

All too soon we were back in Singapore for the Bristol Freighter trip, back to Kuching and more excitement.

The cause of our engine failure turned out to be a servicing error, which allowed the fuel line to break away from the ECU.

For this episode I was awarded a Mention in Dispatches, plus a green endorsement

656 LIGHT AIRCRAFT SQUADRON, ARMY AIR CORPS 1961

Courtesy of the Regimental Office

1961 has been a year of many changes in Malaya. Some while back it was decided that Commonwealth Troops would have to be withdrawn from anti-Communist Terrorist Operations being conducted on the border between Thailand and Malaya. the question has always been - "When"?

Re-deployment has been in everyone's mind for a considerable time. All have been watching the building of a brand new cantonment at Terendak. near Malacca. and in spite of many difficulties 28 Commonwealth Brigade Group broke away from Jungle Operations in November, 1961, and moved from Taiping to Terendak in December, 1961.

28 Commonwealth Infantry Brigade Group will now devote most of its time to conventional warfare training on airportable equipment scales with a view to fulfilling its role as a "Fire Brigade". 7 Reconnaissance Flight will reside with Squadron Headquarters at Noble Field, Kuala Lumpur, prior to concentrating with the rest of the Squadron at Kluang during June, 1962.

With the departure of 7 Reconnaissance Flight from the North, all light aircraft tasks in support of 2 Federal Infantry Brigade will be carried out by 2 Reconnaissance Flight stationed at Ipoh. 2 Federal Infantry Brigade is now the only military force campaigning against the Communist Terrorists in the Border Security Area in Malaya. The Federation Police Field Force continue to harass Terrorist couriers and camps in North Malaya and South Thailand, in conjunction with the Thai Border Police.

It may be of interest to the "old hands" to know that 10th and 12th Regiments are reported to have joined forces in the Bentong Salient whilst 8th Regiment continues to operate in the general area of Sadao.

Visual and contact reconnaissance continue at a slower pace than before but this is not surprising when one considers that there are only about 350 hard-core Terrorists left to carry the flag, raised in 1947.

During 1961 the Squadron flew 9,436 hours on Austers and 314 on Beavers. Operational sorties carried out by 2 Flt. and 7 Flt. in support of 2 Fed. Inf. Bde., Units of 28 Bde. and the Police Field Force, consisted mainly of visual reconnaissance and supply drop, supporting border operations. These commitments have gradually decreased during the year and only 2 Flt. are now permanently involved. 7 Flt. now operate on air portable scales with 28 Commonwealth Brigade.

11 Liaison Flight, based at the Naval Air Station at Sembawang, supports 99 Gurkha Infantry Brigade Group on Singapore Island, whose main task is Internal Security. However, with the arrival of the Beaver one foresees an increase in their liaison duties.

14 Liaison Flight, based at Paroi Airstrip, Seremban, remains as 17 Gurkha Division's Liaison Flight. Its duties have been varied and, with 7 Reconnaissance Flight, is now training on airportable scales of equipment. The flight has just taken delivery of its Beavers, and is now equipped with 3 Beaver and 3 Auster IX aircraft

16 Reconnaissance Flight, alas, is virtually no more. It will officially disband in Malaya on the 1st of April, 1962, and will re-form in Aden as one of the four R.A.C. Manned Reconnaissance flights. Some R.E.M.E. servicing personnel will be transferred to Aden with the Flight to uphold its good name. They will be sadly missed. The remaining two pilots and the gunners will be absorbed within the Squadron. It is only by this means that we shall be able to continue staffing the other Flights at a reasonable strength and move 7 Flight to Noble Field. What remains of 16 Flight will be run as a Squadron H.Q. Section until we can all concentrate later at Kluang.

Many changes have occurred in Flights due to the continued exodus of Pilots going home or to Hong Kong, the picture is now as follows :-

S.H.Q. (Noble Field)

C.O.	Lt.-Col. J. H. CRESWELL, O.B.E., R.A.
21.C.	Major P. M. WEST, R.A. (late of 2 Flt.)
Adjt.	(Capt. E. J. MARSHALL. R.A. (Relieved (Capt. R. HORNE. R.A., in July, 1961).
Q.M.	(Major A. F. STEVENS. R.A. (Relieved (Major E. A. Froud, R.A.. in May. 1961).
Q.f.l.	(Capt. F. LEGG, M.C. (due to be relieved by (Capt. J. ELSTON. A.A.C., in January. 1962.)
D.A.D.O.S. (Air)	(fMajor J. T. PALMER, R. A.O.C., Relieved (Major T. P. ATERSON. R.A.O.C., in January, 1962.
Wing E.M.E.	Major J. B. PALMER, R.E.M. E., relieved Major D. WEATHERHEAD in January handed over the Workshop to
L.A.S.W.	Capt. I. F. LEDGER, R.E.M.E.

2 Recce Flt (Ipoh)

Taken over in May, 1961, by Capt. J. Vetch R.A., who in turn handed over to Capt. P. Watson, R.A., in December, 1961, before returning home.

The Pilots are now Capt. J. Adair, R.A., Capt. J. Valenzia, R.M.A., and S./Sgt. Tester, R.A.

7 Recce Flt. (Taiping)

Commanded by Capt. J. M. R. Fleming, R.H.F. (who took over from Capt. Ritchey. R.A. in April. 1961) with Capt. Roberts Gloster, Capt. Williams, R.A.. Capt. Panton, R. Signals, Capt. Munro, Q.O.H. and Sgt. Nicholls, R.E.M. E., in support.

16 Recce Flt. (Noble field)

Commanded by Capt. F. Smith. R.A., who returned home to retirement in January. 1962. Due to the fate of 16 Flt.. Which disbands in Farelf 1962, there will be no relief. Remaining Pilots are Capt. I. M. Horsley Curry, R. Signals, Capt. A. Calder, R.E., and Lt. R. Andrews, R.N.Z.A., and Lt. C. Brown, R.N.Z.A., the latter two are New Zealand Army Pilots, who joined the Squadron in December, 1961, and will serve with 7 Recce Flt. when they have completed their continuation and conversion training early in 1962.

11 Liaison Flt. (Sembawang)

Commanded by Capt. J. A. Newby, R.A.S.C., who took over from Capt. D. Cholerton, R.E., who left for home in August, 1961. The remaining Pilots are Capt. P. A. Beacon, R.A.S.C., Capt. J. Tadman, E. Anglian, W.O. II Standen, R. Signals, and S./Sgt. Adamson, A.A.C.

14 Liaison Flt. (Seremban)

Commanded by Capt. J. Bedford Davies, R.A., and supported by Capt. R. Hulton Harrop, 9/12 Lancers, Capt. W. Duthoit, Staffords, Lt. I. Stevens, A.A.C., and Lt. C. Carey, R.A.S.C.

The Beavers arrived in September, and now that six Pilots have been converted as well as the C.O. and 2 I.C. the demand for V.I.P. communication Flights is increasing. To date the Beaver has. performed well and except for the, we hope, temporary difficulty of spares is likely to prove a great asset in Farelf.

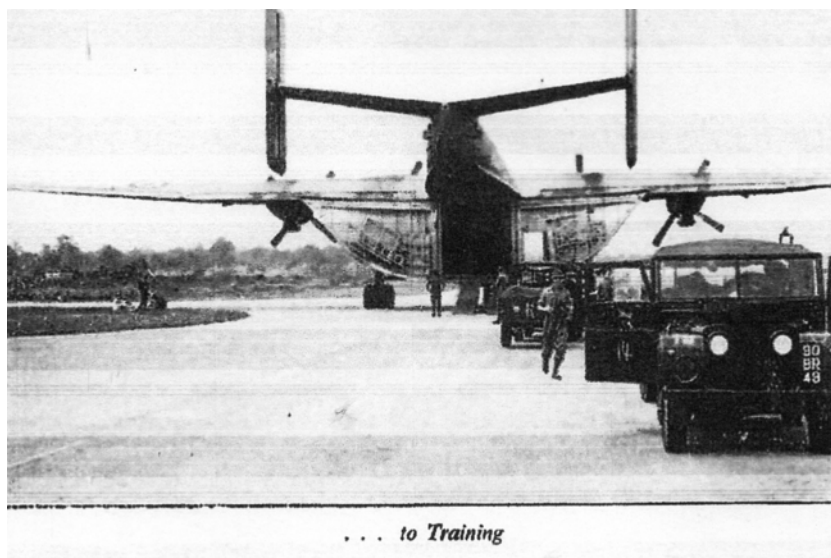
Squadron exercises. have been held on the East Coast during the year and successful landings have been carried out on H.M.S. Hermes and H.M.S. Bulwark by II Flight and several of the Pilots from S.H.Q. and the other Flights.

In conjunction with 2nd and 26th Regts. R.A. a number of pilots have carried out successful shoots at Asahan Ranges and II Liaison Flight have done many shoots with the Royal Navy.

We have carried out various funnies all of which provide varying experience and make a change. They have included illumination by flares of a Helicopter LZ for a casualty evacuation by a R.N. Helicopter from the jungle ; dropping mail to the C.-in-C. Far East Station at sea, flourbag bombing of a minesweeper flotilla and numerous casualty evacuations.

In June, Lt.-Colonels Creswell and Oldman visited 20 Indep. Recce Flight in Hong Kong being kindly invited to make the journey up in H.M.S. Caprice. In return for their kind hospitality the Squadron acted as hosts to a number of sailors from Caprice whilst she was being re-fitted in Singapore.

All our aircraft have now been modified with a " Blackbox " on the back of the pilot's seat containing the Sarah rigged ready for use, the theory being that if in trouble, the pilot, just before hitting the tree tops, can pull the handle so that Sarah will do her bit though he may be unconscious or worse.



The A.A.C. examining team visited us again in Sept/Oct. and we achieved a report which was in general satisfactory; the trend was one of improvement.

Three major search and rescue operations were carried out in quick succession in October and November. The first was for a Royal Malayan Air Force Pioneer which crashed in the Bentong Pass with the loss of all five on board. It was itself looking for a party of 70 schoolboys (and one schoolgirl) who got behind schedule on a jungle expedition. The second incident involved a R.N.Z.A.F. Canberra which took off on a night cross country from Tengah to Butterworth in October, the period of the N.E. monsoon. Of three aircraft taking part, the first turned back severely damaged by hail and lightning; one went missing and one made it. The missing aircraft flew into a cumulo nimbus cloud at 40,000 feet. The pilot lost control and, after repeatedly telling his navigator to eject from what he believed to be an inverted spin, ejected himself at 8,000 feet. This was the third occasion on which he had abandoned an aircraft. He walked out of the jungle after a series of lucky escapes, and two days later Sgt. Major Standen, and his observer, Cpl. Goodey, found the wreckage. The navigator's body was found with the aircraft when the Jungle Rescue team arrived.

Our third and final search, unfortunately a domestic one, was for Capt. Peter Hills R.A., who went missing while on a V.R. in South Thailand on 22 November, 1961. His passenger was Capt. O'Grady, of the Royal Army Dental Corps. In spite of an intensive air and ground search lasting seven weeks no trace of the crew or aircraft has been found. The air search was most efficiently controlled by the R.A.A.F. at Butterworth and, besides our own, aircraft of the R.A.F., R.M.A.F., R.A.A.F. and R.N.Z.A.F. took part. The ground search was carried out by units of the Federation Army and Federation Police in conjunction with the Thai Frontier Police Force. Only the latter two forces were permitted to search in Thailand.

In view of the adequacy of the position reporting system and the completeness of the aircraft's jungle survival equipment, we fear that the aircraft may have come to sudden grief whilst low flying.

In the technical sphere Major J. B. Palmer and Capt. L F. Ledger arrived in April and took over the Squadron Workshops from Major D. Weatherhead who was "filling in " pending their arrival. W.O.1 O'Brians arrival in March coincided with W.O.I. Penfold's departure, in fact their trains literally passed in the night. A considerable number of, arrivals and departures have also occurred amongst the artificers and technicians giving the workshop an almost complete "face change". Further moves have seen the departure of W.E.M. E., Major D. Weatherhead, and his assistant. C.P.O. Fielder, for U.K., their chairs having been taken over by Major J. B. Palmer and W.O.1. O'Brian, leaving Capt.J.F. Ledger as O.C. L.A.S.W. and W.O. II Williams as W.O. i/c.

All our Naval Petty officers and most of our more junior ratings have now returned to colder climates. We are lucky to have been able to welcome five new Naval air mechanics - a rather unexpected bonus. Led by C.P.O. Fielder our sailors have always been of the greatest help. It was with deep regret that we said goodbye to so many who had completed more than two years with the Squadron.

Flight workshops are now all being run by artificers as follows :

2 S./Sgt. PALMER, R.E.M.E.	Vice S./Sgt. VEAR
7 S./Sgt. OREAYES	Vice S./Sgt. BOAM
11 S./Sgt. WILLIAMS	Vice S./Sgt. MASON
14 W.O. II EDGECOCK	Vice S./Sgt. DENTON
16 S./Sgt. PURCELL, R.E.M.E.	Vice Sgt. BOULTER

Despite all these changes the workshop has had to keep abreast of a considerable amount of work. Even though the flying task has been cut from 40 to 30 hours per aircraft per month, the increasing age of the Austers has meant little reduction in the workload. With the introduction of the Beaver all are now busily learning about the new aircraft. This has added a welcome new interest to us who have been operating only the Auster IX for some five years.



Pewter model of Auster AOP Mk. 6. VF576

Obituary

Brigadier Furdoon “Duck” Mehta:

Brigadier Furdoon “Duck” Mehta, the Royal Indian Artillery officer who survived a bullet passing through his cap and later became military attache in Washington, has passed away on his 101st birthday on March 3.

Cut to March 1944: flying a single-seater Auster over the Burmese jungle while directing artillery fire, Captain “Duck” Mehta always had to dodge the flak and the bullets. Having taken off before dawn one morning to locate Japanese gun positions in the Shan Hills, and seeing nothing, he had descended to 300ft when there was a loud crack. Something hit his head and spun it round, and the cockpit was sprayed with red liquid.

A ground observer urged him on the radio to gain height, as the whole Japanese position had opened fire on him. He managed to land at a nearby strip, where an ambulance driver told him his aircraft had “taken a terrible battering”.

The Auster was punctured with bullet holes and one of the main wing spars was fractured. Mehta’s left shoulder was wet and red, yet he felt no pain. A bullet had come through the right side of the cockpit, ricocheted into the first aid box and broken the Mercurochrome bottle.

The driver asked about his service-dress cap, which looked like a fusilier’s with its white plume sticking up. Mehta was dismayed to discover the bullet had gone through it, taking with it the lining and some of his hair. It had been a very pukka cap.



The Royal Regiment of Indian Artillery had its origins in 1827, when a battery was raised in Bombay for the East India Company’s army of the Bombay presidency. The other two presidencies, Madras and Bengal, soon followed suit.

After the Indian Mutiny in 1857, despite the trouble being confined almost entirely to Bengal, all native artillery units were disbanded except mountain batteries. The First World War reversed the policy and the Indian Artillery, led by both British and Indians, was rapidly expanded, serving in East Africa, West Asia and Gallipoli.

Trials in England in the 1930s for gunner officers to fly light aircraft to control the guns led to the formation of "air observation post" squadrons, nominally RAF but with Royal Artillery officers doing the flying and commanding. Number 656 (Air OP) Squadron was sent to India to join Lieutenant-General (later Field Marshal Sir) William Slim's Fourteenth Army on the Burmese border. Mehta was the only Indian officer to serve with the squadron.

Furdoon Siavax Behramji Mehta was born in 1920 into a devout Parsee family in Bombay. His father had studied medicine at Bombay, UCL and Edinburgh, and served as a surgeon captain in the Indian Medical Service in the First World War.

After schooling locally, in 1934 Furdoon Mehta joined the Mercantile Marine Training Ship Dufferin for two years, before going to the Indian Military Academy at Dehradun. He was commissioned into the Royal Indian Artillery in 1940, and two years later answered a call for volunteers to be Air OP pilots.

After initial flying training at RAF Jodhpur and Air OP training and conversion to the Auster at the newly established School of Artillery at Deolali, he joined 656 Squadron.

Nicknames being *derigueur* for pilots, it was perhaps inevitable that coming from Bombay his would be "Duck", which he bore with good humour and even some pride

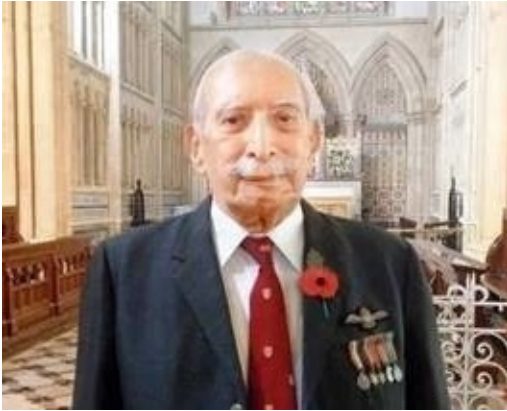
He flew from both earth strips and aircraft carriers in the Gulf of Bengal until the Japanese surrender, and then during the reoccupation of Malaya.

After the war Mehta came to England for the land-air warfare course at Old Sarum, Wiltshire, before attending the Indian Army staff college at Quetta. On independence in 1947, aged 27, he took command of the 9th Parachute Field Regiment, a markedly accelerated promotion to Lieutenant Colonel that no one in the Indian artillery has beaten since.

He then served at army headquarters in Delhi before being appointed chief instructor at Dehradun, future recognition of his leadership qualities. He returned to Salisbury Plain in 1955 to attend the celebrated long gunnery course at the Royal School of Artillery, Larkhill, and then spent the following year on at the British Army of the Rhine.

Subsequently, he commanded the artillery at divisional, corps and many level, and during the India-Pakistan war of 1965 planned and directed the air defence of the field armies and vital points throughout much of northern India, including Delhi. The following year he went to Washington as military and naval attache with his wife, Villie, whom he had met on leave in Bombay six years earlier and proposed to within a week.

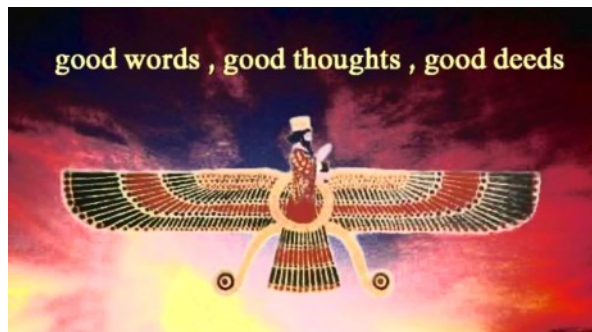
After leaving the army early, in 1969, he worked for many years for Tata Electric. Villie died in 2020. Mehta is survived by a son, Hormuz, who works in financial services, and a daughter, Zarina, who is a television producer and philanthropist.



“Duck” Mehta retained great affection for Britain and returned many times with his wife to attend reunions and meet old comrades. He wore a poppy on November 11 each year and always attended Remembrance commemorations, a living antidote to modern British self-abasement for its Indian past.

The funeral ceremony of the grand old man and well known aviator was performed on his 101st birthday at 3.45pm at the Hodiwala Bungli, Towers of Silence Mumbai. The last wish of Brigadier FSB Mehta was that an Indian Army bugler should play ‘The Last Post’ at his funeral, a wish that was honoured by the Army’s Southern Command.

May Brigadier Furdoon Siavax Byramji Mehta’s soul rest in peace next to his beloved wife Villie, in Garothman. May his fravashi inspire us all to be courageous and voluntarily serve our country.



In Memoriam

Since the Autumn 2020 of the Chinthe Journal, we were saddened to learn of the passing of the following friends and colleagues, who all served in 656 Squadron:

October 2020

Major James Adair RA, who in the squadron in KL and Ipoh between 1960-63

Lt Col John Hoare DFC RA, who won the DFC with the Squadron when serving with the 1903 Flight in Korea between 1053 and 1954. He continued his service with 1914 Flight in Malaya in 1954.

November 2020

Jim Laker, one of REME engineers, who served in 11 Flight in Singapore between 1958 and 1961.

December 2020

Bill Wilkins, one of our last remaining Burma veterans, who we had only 'found' in 2020, passed away after a bad fall shortly after his 100 birthday. Bill was very proud of his service with the Squadron and we understand that the card that we sent him for his 100th birthday had pride of place on his mantelpiece.

March 2021

Brigadier 'Duck' Mehta, another of our Burma veterans, sadly passed away on 101 birthday in March 2021. Duck served with the squadron in 1944-45 and remained with the Indian Army until his retirement as a Brigadier. His full obituary is shown elsewhere in this Chinthe.

April 2021

Stan Read, who was one of the few Royal Navy veterans of our Squadron, passed away peacefully in his care home. He was the last remaining 'Chief' from the naval draft into the squadron in 1959.

Early 2021

Gerry Moore, RA, who served in Sek Kong between 1970 and 1973, passed away after a short illness at the age of 75. His funeral was well attended by his friends and family.

REST IN PEACE, GENTLEMAN. YOUR DUTY IS DONE

New Members

Since the last edition of the Chinthe we have had the following new members joining our Association.

Captain Matthew Collings, AAC, who is currently serving with the Squadron as an Apache pilot. Matt was our liaison officer for the last three years and organized a wonderful reunion at Wattisham in 2019.

Roy Gallimore, REME, who served with the squadron in Kluang 1967-69

Major (Retd) Séan Bonner, Para and AAC, who served with the Squadron in Farnborough and Rhodesia 1977-1982

Major Huw Raikes, AAC, who served with the Squadron between 2010 - 2011 as an Apache Pilot and then again as OC between 2018 – 2020 in Wattisham. During that time he deployed to Norway, Jordan and Cyprus and led the first squadron deployment HMS Queen Elizabeth and RFA Argus

Welcome, Gentlemen to our unique Association.

Thought for the day

"A magnum is the perfect size for two gentlemen to share over lunch....especially if one of them isn't drinking.

Winston Churchill



Talk to Frank

Everything you need to know about drugs, their effects and the law.

Talktofrank.com

Samaritans

Support for those with suicidal thoughts.



Samaritans.org



Combat Stress

UK's leading charity for veterans' mental health issues.

Combatastress.org.uk

Togetherall

Supporting those with mental health issues 24/7.



Togetherall.com



PTSD Resolution

Help those who are struggling to reintegrate into a normal work and family life due to trauma suffered during Service.

PTSDresolution.org

Contactarmedforces

Charities working with the NHS & MoD to make it simpler to find support with mental wellbeing.

Contactarmedforces.co.uk



Alcoholics Anonymous

For those seeking strength and support through for alcohol related issues.

Alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

Al Anon

Supporting the families and friends of those with alcohol issues.



Al-anonuk.org.uk



Anxiety Network

Helping those with panic disorder, generalised anxiety disorder and social anxiety disorder.

Anxietynetwork.com

Cruise

Bereavement support.



Cruise.org.uk

Middle Wallop - 01264784085

Wattisham Flying Station - 01449728358

1 AAC - 01935453891

3 AAC - 01449728321

4 AAC - 01449728421

7 Bn REME - 01449728721

5 AAC SDO - 07765897270

5 AAC Duty Welfare - 07814624990



Army Air Corps

QR CODES TO HELP

Scan the QR codes in this leaflet using your mobile phone to access help from charities and organisations.

Domestic Violence and Abuse

Family Support

Financial Help

Military Charities

Medical/Health

Domestic Violence & Abuse

Mankind
Providing support to MALE victims of domestic violence & abuse.



Mankind.co.uk

Women's Aid
Providing support to FEMALE victims of domestic abuse.



womensaid.org.uk

Stonewall
Support to LGBQT+ victims of domestic violence & abuse.



Stonewall.org.uk

Respect
Supporting perpetrators of domestic violence & abuse and male victims of domestic violence & abuse.



Respect.uk.net

Divorceaid
Support for those going through the divorce process.



Divorceaid.co.uk


Army Families' Federation
An independent voice for all Army personnel & their families.



AFF.org.uk

Family Support

Recruit for Spouses
Specialist agency bridging the gap between employers and military spouses.



RecruitforSpouses.co.uk

Forces Families' Jobs
Jobs for non-serving spouses and older children.



Forcesfamiliesjobs.co.uk

RBLI Lifeworks
Royal British Legion's support for finding jobs.




RBLI.co.uk

Gamcare
Supporting those with gambling issues.



Gamcare.org.uk

Joining Forces
Credit Union facility enabling Service personnel to save direct from their payroll account.



JoiningForces.scu.co.uk


StepChange
Free debt advice & solutions.



Stepchanges.org

Military Charities

SSAFA
The Armed Forces Charity. Providing welfare, health and support services to serving personnel, veterans & their families. SSAFA.org.uk




RAF Benevolent Fund
Financial Support to the wider RAF Family.



RAFBF.org

Army Benevolent Fund
Financial Support to the wider Army Family.



Soldierscharity.org

Royal Navy Benevolent Trust
Financial Support to the wider RN Family.



RNBT.org.uk

Royal Air Forces Association
Practical, Emotional and general welfare support to RAF Family.



RAFA.org.uk

UK Government
Huge resource for pensions, claims, mental health support, medals and more.



Gov.uk

Note from Editor

Dear Members

Producing this Journal is a satisfying distraction from the current state that we find ourselves in, due to the covid pandemic.

However this journal can only continue with your assistance. We all have stories to tell, whether it be of a good experience, or bad. These stories can be in Squadron service tales, or post demob experiences. Remember the "I learnt about flying/engineering from that" tales.

It's all very well recounting these stories over a few pints, at the bar. The unfortunate fact is that only two or three people will ever hear those tales.

The Chinthe is the ideal platform for these stories to be aired. So please forward your stories, reminiscences etc to either myself, or to our Chairman.

Help keep The Chinthe alive and interesting.

Stay Safe

David Williams

Editor

Mob 07942880886

Email dwilli@live.co.uk

