



THE CHINTHE



656 Squadron Association Newsletter

Summer 2002

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Diary Dates

Reunion - Dishforth - see page 5 14 Sept 2002

There will be no dinner this year.

60th Anniversary - Dishforth - End May/Beginning June 2003

Secretary's report

The AGM and Burma luncheon was held at Langport on June 9th where 19 member and their ladies gathered at the Langport Arms. The meeting was preceded by a wreath laying at Huish Episcopi memorial, when inclement weather made us leave rather sooner than in past years. All items on the agenda, as published in the last newsletter were carried. Following on from last years AGM (where the fees were increased) various members had spoken to me saying the increase to £3.00 was not enough, and they would willingly pay “£10”, “£15”, “£5” etc One member has already amended his Standing Order to £20 p.a., whilst others did not cancel their previous S.O., and so pay £5. A proposal to give current and new members the option of a voluntary annual or monthly donation by S.O., was carried. Any member now wishing to contribute a little more should contact either myself or the treasurer to obtain a form.

At the conclusion of the luncheon a committee met to discuss the program for the 60th Anniversary. After much discussion over the pro's and con's of the location and format, it was decided to hold the celebration within the Squadron at Dishforth. For operational reasons the date has now been put back to a week-end sometime at the end of May to the beginning of June. The Saturday will be a formal presentation of the cabinet to the Squadron, followed by an afternoon reunion. It is hoped to have Austers demonstrating their roll within a Squadron, and available for members to fly in. We are trying to get the AAC band to beat retreat. The evening will be a hangar dance with full buffet. Sunday we will hold a church parade, with a short march of soldiers and Association members, to the chapel.

More details will be posted as soon as we can get them. Members with Web access should watch the website (www.656squadron.org) where I will post details as well. I sincerely hope to have a large gathering of members for this occasion, so please make a note for next year somewhere so it won't clash with other dates.

I look forward to seeing you all at Dishforth on September 14th.

I'm sure all members would like to join me in congratulating Major Neil Dalton on his selection for promotion to Lt Colonel when he relinquishes his current post.

Squadron Commanders Report

Life has continued at a furious pace within the Squadron. Exercises have ranged from a Brigade Field Training eXercise all over Scotland, a Squadron live-firing FTX at Otterburn to leading the 16 Air Assault Brigade participation in a joint, multinational air exercise at RAF Leuchars. Additionally, two detachments have been sent to Kenya on Exercise GRAND PRIX, last autumn and early in the New Year, whilst the Squadron was also warned for potential operational deployment to Afghanistan.

In other areas there have been notable successes; Squadron personnel have featured heavily on all recent promotion boards; we have held several excellent parties, fostering a stronger cohesive spirit; and, of particular note, we have been the first flying Squadron to win the Boroughbridge Sword (the Regimental inter-Squadron sports competition) since its inception ten years ago.

The coming months promise to be equally challenging. In the next few weeks changes will take place in the Regiment to cater for the commitments in the coming year. 656 Squadron is going to be restructured as a Gazelle only Squadron and will be undertaking several long-term operational commitments concurrently. The commitments are; a two Gazelle detachment to Kosovo on Operation AGRICOLA (one year); a two Gazelle detachment to Bosnia on Operation PALATINE (six months); and a two Gazelle detachment UK-based at 12 hours notice to move on Operation SALVAGE (one year). This will be in addition to other routine exercise and training commitments and the ongoing preparations for the

60th Anniversary celebrations

See Page 9 for Outline proposals.

Next Newsletter should have more details.

REUNION 2002

And Squadron Families Day

DISHFORTH 14th September

13:30 Welcome by Squadron Personnel, and refreshments in crew room

14:00 OC's address

14:15 Notices, then out to Arena displays and get-together in front of Hangar (indoors if wet!)

17:30 Bar-B-Q. There will not be a formal dinner this year.

21:00 Disperse

Members will be admitted to the airfield from 13:30 onwards. Please **DO NOT** arrive earlier.

The cost will be **£5.00** a head for members and their guests, please remit with details of your party and your vehicle make and registration to me as soon as possible. Don't wait until the last minute as we have to organise matters with the Squadron.

Any (single) member who would like overnight accommodation at Dishforth on Friday 13th and/or Saturday 14th please let me know before 25th August. Accommodation will be on camp at a standard charge, (a lot better than Hotel charges) with limited places. This will be on a **FIRST** come **FIRST** served basis, so if you delay you may miss out.....! (Note: I will be away from 30th July to 12th August so don't phone then!)

Following the article in Autumn 2001 Chinthe about the crash of WZ 706 in Thailand, I am grateful to 'Chalky' White for the following account.

WZ706: The First Time

23rd May 1956

Late that afternoon Sergeant K. G. McConnell, Glider Pilot Regiment left 1902 Flight IPOH for **Noble Field K.L.** His last radio message was **K.L.** thirty minutes, but he did not arrive.

At the same time Maky experienced a violent storm and it was thought Sergeant McConnell had been caught in it. A search centered on Bidor was organized for first light the next day.

24th May 1956

At first light several Austers of 1907 Flight took off from Taiping, WZ706 being on of them.

Captain P. K. Myers Glider Pilot Regiment was the pilot and I was his observer.

Early afternoon whilst we were refuelling at Biddor one of the flight's RAF technicians asked if he could accompany us on the next flight. At the time WZ706 had a third seat fitted rather than the usual long-range fuel tank.

We had been flying some time when suddenly there was a loud bang. The propeller slowly became visible and then stopped. In the silence that followed Captain Myers sent out a mayday signal. Another aircraft in our flight, which also had visual contact with us, immediately acknowledged this.

We made a 'leisurely' decent towards Tin Dredgings, near the Bidor Tapah Road. I waited for the 'flop', but it never came..., the engine suddenly started! Captain Myers swung WZ706 starboard towards a piece of hard ground that had become visible, landing at what seemed a great speed..

The piece of land was only short with a high bank at the end. Captain Myers had to swing WZ706 round sharply to avoid the bank. We had made it to solid ground. We had landed at Grid Reference VJ9613 13. There was a short walk to the nearest road where the local police met us -they had watched our decent. Some of them stayed to guard WZ706, whilst the rest took us to the police station at Biddor.

WZ706 was recovered by the RAF and returned to the flight after rebuilding. Faulty fuel injectors where found to be the cause of the engine failure. I last flew in her on the 17th February 1957.

27th May 1956

Sergeant McConnell was presumed dead and the search called of.

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Do you remember when the R.A.F. display team were flying Hunter jets and they were called the 'Black Arrows'?

At that time (1961) 14 Liaison Flight at Paroi camp, Seremban was commanded by Capt John Bedford-Davis, who had a penchant for formation flying, and the Flight performed at various ceremonies, such as the Sultans Birthday Parade.



The '**BLACK SPARROWS**'
practicing over the Straits of Malacca

BATTLEFIELD TOUR

The tour of the battlefields had been cancelled due to lack of interest.

BENNETT's Bed & Breakfast

Four Diamond

English Tourist Board Classification

To any members of the Association holidaying in Wiltshire, or just passing through, Joyce and I offer half price accommodation in our Bed & Breakfast. Situated on the outskirts of Chippenham facing open countryside. Within easy access to Bath, Bristol, Cirencester, Swindon, the Cotswolds and Somerset. Visit the website www.holywell-house.co.uk, any Tourist Information Office, or just ring us on 01249-652922

656 SQUADRON 60th ANNIVERSARY

Progress is being made for the celebrations of the 60th birthday, and an outline plan in place. As was written in the Secretary's page it will now be held at Dishforth. The reasoning behind this is that we would not have a Unit to host us at Middle Wallop or Netheravon. A formal dinner would cost in excess of £40 per head, which we thought a lot of members would decline. There would be difficulty in using MW airfield as the ATC and fire departments are civilianised. We appreciate that the majority of members are in the South, but hope this will not deter them from attending such a momentous occasion.

The date is to coincide with the start of intensive training to re-role into Apache mode, and I will let you know as soon as I can so that you may earmark this, and maybe take it as part of a holiday in the beautiful Yorkshire dales.

20 Years On

In March Col John Greenhalgh started a search to try to contact as many ex Squadron members as possible who took part in the Falklands conflict. The object was to try to hold some form of celebration to mark the 20th Anniversary. Our Association was approached, but at that time we only had 3 Falklands bods. Nevertheless out of all that J.G. managed to contact, a total of 44 were keen to meet, and decided to hold a dinner night. This was held in the Officers Mess at Netheravon on 18th May, as your secretary I was invited to attend. The function was a full silver service dinner and as could be expected, was excellent. Everyone had a thoroughly good time, and it was nice to see so many old comrades meeting again, many for the first time in over 15 years. Photographs of the event are now on our website for all to see. I'm pleased to say that I took along a handful of application forms, and now have more members with us. Col John Greenhalgh, who was awarded the DFC, has also sent me his account of the Falklands campaign for our archives.

Whilst I sat at the table I had in front of me a beautiful Silver Auster and the plinth was inscribed 'to 656 Squadron from 14 Liaison Flight'. I hope steps are being taken to retrieve this from Netheravon and into our own Squadrons' custody.

THERE I WAS AGAIN – AGAIN
or
HOW NOT TO SHOOT AN ELEPHANT
By Maj I.E. BELL. DFC RA 14 Flight 1956-59

It was such a long time ago that I only have to close my eyes for a moment and I can see it all as bright as day. Malaya, (when it was) nineteen fifty seven or something. Pitch black night over the jungle [or was I], no radio communication, my Auster 9 beginning to get short of fuel and nowhere else to go. How the Hell did I get myself into this? Well, are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin.

All those years ago I was a first tour, (but even so, of course, very experienced), pilot with 14 Flight of the Glorious 656 based at Seremban. Down the hill from our home bungalow lived 'Bill', the game warden of Pahang, when he wasn't in the jungle doing his thing. My wife, the kids and I often used to walk the dogs down there of an evening to have a chat and look at any of the sick or damaged animals he often had in and about his garden. One mid-week evening he happened to mention that there was a rogue elephant which was causing several sorts of mayhem over at Fort Iskander by tearing apart the Sakai ladangs, (the indigenous, little, jungle people of Malaya's 'small holdings') and asked me if I'd like to join him there some ten days later - the time it would take him to walk through the miles of intervening jungle - and help him 'sort out the problem'. In short order I'd spoken to the Flight Commander and arranged to 'borrow' WZ 377, (Yes! That's it in the museum now!), for next week-end and got a pink chit from 'She who must always be instantly obeyed'.

The following Friday afternoon saw me kicking the tyres - no fires to light in those days - and leaping happily into the luft, East through the Kuala Pilah pass, over Bahau rubber plantation with, close to its Southern edge, its little strip which runs through the estate's nine hole golf course and, setting the new course for Fort Iskander in the great empty, jungle covered middle of Pahang State. It was a lovely late afternoon and, as I saw the lake which surrounded the fort in the distance and began to descend towards it, I called base, told them I was landing and, wishing them "Goodnight" told them to close down.

As I landed Bill came running up. "Ian" he said "There is a Gurkha soldier who has just lost a confrontation with a spitting cobra. Will you take him back to Bahau where an ambulance will be waiting for him?" There was no need for me to tell him to bring the soldier along as two of his fellows were doing precisely that. A quick mental calculation told me I had plenty of fuel and sufficient time to get there and back before dark. I didn't even unstrap. "Shove him in the other seat" I said and in less than three minutes we were on our way with Bill running back to the wireless room to get the Police to contact my base to re-open radio contact.

The eye-wrapped Gurkha behaved well although he was obviously in considerable pain and worried that he would go blind before I could get him to where he could get expert treatment and the trip back to Bahau was a quick fifteen minute synch. I knew it well and had flown over it as a way point before setting off over the flat and

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trackless jungle towards Iskander. I turned into wind over the estate manager's bungalow and landed on the grass of the strip which was neatly laid out with black and white painted oil drums cut in half lengthwise and laid flat, marking the edges between it and the fairways, bunkers, bushes and trees.

The ambulance was waiting by the club house as I taxied up. I closed down, helped the patient out of the aircraft and into the van, didn't bother to kick the tyres and was off, passing over the great square of the Bahau rubber plantation as I set course, once again, for Fort Iskander. No answer to my repeated calls on the (was it a?) 64 set even though I had remembered to wind out the aerial!

About fifteen minutes later and just as I had mentally pre-flight planned as I left Iskander with the casevac, there it was again right on the nose in the last of the evening light. I made a blind call to base and throttled back before I saw that the whole of the lake's surface was covered in mist. There was not a single clue to the whereabouts of the strip. "Christ! What does 'A' do now?" I asked myself as I thrust on full throttle and climbing, turned sharply back towards Bahau.

Now pause a moment. For those of you who may not have been lucky enough to serve in the Far East with 656, nor even in the tropics, (if not for those of you who have and will know all about tropical twilight), there isn't any! Twilight that is! Three minutes after the sun disappears below the horizon it is full, dark, black night and that is what happened even before I'd climbed to my cruising height of 3,000 feet.

It was dark over the jungle and the jungle itself was even darker and, even though I had flown this exact route less than half an hour previously, there was nothing, not even an outline of the central Malayan mountain range some fifteen minutes flying ahead, to give me a clue to my exact position. There was no moon! The stars were bright, but the jungle wasn't! I did some frantic mental time and distance calculations even before I checked my fuel state and realised that I now had insufficient fuel to get back to my base at Seremban which seemed to have remained closed this late Friday, despite my message left at Bahau as well as Iskander, as there wasn't a peep from my set apart from the static. There was no other place to go apart from Bahau, but how the hell do I find it in the dark?

I turned the instrument lighting down to 'Tock Aitch lamp' standards (and if you are too young to know what that is, ask Iain Scott, 'cos he are it!), stuck my head out of the window, as I had, instead of the usual aircraft observation fit, put the doors on for this sortie and, right on my time estimate saw a straight line of even darker black running North/South below me. "It must be the Eastern edge of the Bahau rubber estate!" I was no longer 'temporarily unsure of my precise position'. (Who ever admits to being really lost?)

I turned gently South with my eyes glued to the junction of the jungle and the rubber and lost it almost immediately. A gentle rate one turn would have been nice but a rate 4+ gets one round quicker and there, under my starboard wing, was the South Eastern corner of the estate delineated in two shades of black. I knew now that the strip was somewhere below and just ahead of me and that the foot hills of the mountains were at

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least two safe minutes flying time ahead.

I carried out my downwind checks before descending gently as I didn't want any distractions as I got closer to the ground. Fuel was a bit tight but would keep me airborne for sufficient time to have a good look, a dummy run and an overshoot or two. I switched on the landing light and wondered if the bulb had blown as there was no glow on the clear air ahead. It's not the sort of thing one checks very often. Do you? The black became patchy underneath and I realised that I was now over the golf course, but where the hell was the strip?

I flew round a couple of times, they could hardly be called circuits and I realise now how much easier it would have been if I'd have had a helicopter strapped to my nether regions, (but they weren't Army equipment in those early days), instead of a fixed wing which was going to have to touch the ground, or something even harder and more vertical, at 45 knots or so.

I got the impression that I could see a length of clear black roughly on the same bearing on which I had recently landed and taken off again; the strip perhaps? So giving myself plenty of room, I carried out a tightish circuit, pumped on half flap and eased down towards it. Suddenly a single, great tree lit up directly ahead. I hit the throttle before I realised that, thank God, the landing light was working after all. The topmost twigs brushed my wheels, or vice-versa, but I was safely airborne and really worried now about my fuel state as, in the nose up attitude, the needle was solid against the stop. The bottom stop!

I climbed and circuited again trying to see the strip through the blackness. I knew it was down there somewhere almost immediately below me, but WHERE? The fuel state was such that I was going to have to make a landing shortly or be faced with a sudden lack of noise at the front end. Suddenly, a whole bunch of lights came on down below. I squinted in the comparative brilliance. It was the perimeter security fence around the estate manager's bungalow. The very bungalow at the downwind end of the strip!! The one I'd landed over that very evening and it was only a hundred yards or so North of my previous attempt and now right on the nose.

Carefully I lined up the lights on the runway's heading and let down over the lights practically on the stall. As I passed over the last lamps everything went completely black. "What the hell, you're committed anyway" I thought and you can guess my relief when I saw a pair of black and white painted half barrels, with only the white showing, flash by on either side of the aircraft illuminated by the landing light. Even so I stood on the brakes hard enough to lift the tail just in case there was another tree somewhere in the darkness ahead - and stopped!

After a few minutes to let some blood back into my adrenalin stream, I taxied forward, most gently, to the club house again, closed down, left the Auster, took my rifle and went to thank the manager for having the 'naus' to switch on his lights when he heard me in trouble attempting to land. "What's that, Ol' Boy" he said "I always have 'em switched on at this time! Have a whiskey?" I did! A couple in fact. And dinner, but despite his kindness, I slept with my aircraft.

Oh yes! The elephant. (I thought you'd never ask!).

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Shortly after dawn the following morning - yes, that's right, full daylight in five minutes - the reverse of nightfall. Having refuelled I retraced my 'steps' to Fort Iskander to find that they had, very kindly, laid out a 'flare path' of candle filled cigarette tins the night before, (although they hadn't been able to light all of them because some were hard to find in the fog), and that their Police radio contact had failed to contact my Seremban base with my request to switch back on. They hadn't worried too much however!

Bill and I got into a native craft which didn't offer much crocodile protection, I thought, and wouldn't have stood anyone rocking the boat more than five degrees before the freeboard wasn't and we were paddled through limpid water and some beautiful jungle scenery to an island where the elephant had last been seen. We stepped ashore with a Sakai tracker into a very small clearing surrounded by some very thick secondary bush. Almost instantly we found a deep footprint into which the native was able to pace two and a half of his own feet. Now I know that the Sakai are quite small, but 2½ of their feet still means a very BIG elephant.

Bill looked first at the very thick undergrowth, hanging, like an impenetrable curtain just a few feet in front of our eyes, then at me. "I think this is beyond my capabilities" he said, "let's try it another day".

Now that's a very wise sentence which I have, many times since, recommended should be learnt by heart for use by all pilots when conditions just might be more than a little taxing, no matter how experienced you think you are. I learned it by heart and, with the addition of "Sir" or even "General" I've used it myself. Hundreds of times!

*My thanks to **I.E. Bell** for this contribution. Why not put your experiences down and let me have them to publish, and keep in the Association archives.*

Please remember to

notify the General Secretary of any change of address, or phone numbers. The members using **Email**, remember, when you change your ISP you lose your old address. The ability to send you these newsletters by Email saves quite a cost to the Association in postage, stationery and labour! Not to mention full colour pages!

I know we don't like to talk about it, but please, leave clear instructions for your next of kin to contact membership records, so firstly, if possible, we can get a representative to attend the funeral, and then to also avoid sending distressing correspondence. As Membership is open to any relatives of persons connected to 656, they may wish to continue with the Association in their own rights.

NOTICES

Military Research

If you need research into family military details I can recommend the following source. He has helped both our President and myself with a professional service. His charges are reasonable, and knowing his way round the records office can save a lot of time should you try to do it yourself!

Mr Paul Baillie, Military Research, 14 Wheatfields, St Ives, Huntingdon, PE27 3YD. Phone 01480-465691.

Email Paul.baillie@Talk21.com

NEW MEMBERS SINCE LAST NEWSLETTER			
556	Monk D.	REME	59 - 61 KL
557	Kennealy M.H.F.	REME	65-66 HK, Kuching .66-68 Kluang Wksp FRT
558	Walkling D.L	AAC	86-89 Belise, Kenya,
559	Boys-Karle J	Associate	Daughter of Rex Boys (Deceased)
560	Cooke C.M.	REME	87-89 N'avon, Kenya,
561	Sutcliffe T.R.F.	RAF	47-48 KL, Changi,Kluang,Malacca
562	Collier D	REME	70-73 HK 81-84 F'bro, N'avon
563	Durney R.	RASC/GPR	52-55 1913 Korea
564	Perrins R.W.	REME	64-65 11 Flt
565	Hitcham D	REME	65 - 67 Kluang
566	Finley-Beets L.J.	AAC	80-83 Farnbro' & N'avon
567	McDaniel M.D.	AAC	95-97 Dishforth
568	Sanders W	REME	58-59 KL, 59-60 7 Flt
569	Peacocke R.L.	RAOC	82 Falklands
570	Walker R	AAC	80-83 Falklands 88-91 worldwide
571	Greenhalgh J.G.	AAC	80-83 Falklands, '86
572	Betchley T	AAC	79-83 Rhodesia & Falklands
573	Macintosh G.T.	RAOC	58-60 KL & 14 Flt
574	Chester A	RE/AAC	64-67 11 Flt Kluang & Brunei
575	Coley J	REME	80-82 UK & Falklands
576	Johns M	AAC	69-72 H.Kong 79-83 N'avon
577	Laventure N.I.	REME	76 H.Kong 86-88 N'avon
578	Jones G	RA	64-55 7 Flt Taiping
579	Dalton N.J.	AAC	01 to date
580	Kerr G.K	AAC	80-83 F'bro, N'avon, Falklands
581	Pollard M.R.	RA	64-66 11 Flt Kluang,Brunei
582	Palmer E.T.	RA	60-63 14 Flt Kluang,Brunei

Deaths

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

179 McNinch J.J. Maj RA Died 30-Jul-97

4 Boys R.H.C. Capt. RA Died 13-Feb-02

407 Brown F * Mr RAF Died 11-Apr-02

66 Duthoit W.P. Maj. Staffords Died 13-Mar-02

* Mr Fred Brown has bequeathed 5% of the residual funds of his estate to the Association, which I believe is a 'first', for which I have sent thanks to his relatives. The amount is subject to Probate.

History and Archives

How many times have you heard that someone regreted when an elderly relation passed away their memorabilia and artefacts were disposed of, as they were meaningless to others? It happens all too often as 'house clearance' men dispose of unsaleable items into the rubbish, or relatives have no care after the initial sorrow phase passes, and dispose of them.

PLEASE do not let this happen to anything you own connected with 656 Squadron. Get your relatives to be aware of it, put it in your will, do what you may but please, ensure that anything, no matter how minor it may seem, is sent to the Secretary of the Association. Photo's, letters, diaries all contain an historic aspect of the Squadron.

Even better, why not send them now so you can guarantee they are preserved. We can then decide if and where items should be best kept or copied

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656 Squadron, Auster in N. Malaya 1962
by David Shepherd OBE



Falklands Casavac by David Shepherd OBE

If you would like a copy of these fine pictures, or to find out what other paintings are in stock, please call Dave Whiteley direct. (David is a member of the Association)

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