



# THE CHINTHE



## **656 Squadron Association Newsletter**

Summer 2004

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## Secretary's Report

It is with great sadness that this could be my last Secretary's report but I have had to reluctantly give up the position with my move to France. The logistics of running the Association from here make it unfeasible, but I intend to be of whatever assistance I can, indeed I will continue as Membership secretary and Newsletter editor.

The year had been reasonably quiet until November when I started to investigate the possibility of having a reunion where members and guests could take to the air in the Austers again. Netheravon was chosen as the venue, with its connections to the Squadron it seemed ideal. Then came the vexing question of Public Liability insurance, a necessary encumbrance in this day and age of litigation, a fact we must bear in mind for future reunions. It's a sorry world when a gathering of Old Soldiers needs to take this step. This was not the end of it. As we were to cover the flying fuel costs it was tricky to have ask members to pay, without infringing the Pilots insurance conditions! Anyway we found a way round it! The week-end was well attended and those who could make it had a splendid time. We had a good selection of Austers but unfortunately one or two did not have the required insurance documentation and so were not permitted to carry our members.

Following the last mailing I had various members asking who Mick Smith was, who's name appeared on the return address label. Well, in preparation for my move, Mick volunteered to assist the Association by addressing, stuffing, stamping and posting all future mailings, for which I am extremely grateful. We had a few hiccoughs to start with, getting the mail merge to work on his slightly older machine, but we managed it.

At the AGM Maurice Haynes undertook the position of General Secretary, for which I thank him and wish him every success. We are still looking for volunteers to be the Honorary treasurer as Ken is short listed to move to Australia, and a deputy treasurer owing to the resignation of George Mckie due to his work load. Someone please step forward to fill these positions, they are not too difficult.

Until we meet again I wish you all the best of health, and live life to the full

Joyce and I moved to France two days after the reunion, and if you are ever in my new neck of the woods contact me and we can meet up.

*John Bennett*

## **PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

I am writing this in mid August during the Olympics when we all wish for good competitive sport and some cheering British success.

Talking of success, the Association was blessed with perfect, clear blue skies for our Auster Fly In at Netheravon Airfield on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> June. In fact, the whole weekend exceeded all our expectations. The moment I arrived at the Officers' Mess on the Saturday night, I knew we were going to have a wonderful evening – and so it proved. What a fantastic setting, and a natural, spiritual home for our Association. We could not have held the event without the unstinting support of 7 Regiment AAC, and I have written to the Commanding Officer to pass on our collective thanks.

We are now discussing with the International Auster Club the possibility of holding a Biennial Auster Fly In, and the prospects are good. The Club members were particularly impressed with the facilities at Netheravon, so it is most likely we will be returning there in 2006. For 2005 we are looking at holding an event in June. The aim is to hold a Dinner on the Saturday night, and a visit to the Museum of Army Flying at Middle Wallop on the Sunday. We will pass you details as soon as they are firm. Please let us know if a particular weekend clashes with other events.

The Association continues to go from strength to strength. I thank all of you who completed the Questionnaire in the previous Newsletter. This produced some interesting and invaluable information about the future direction of the Association. Many of the issues were discussed at the Sunday morning AGM, and key decisions are detailed throughout the Newsletter.

One item we discussed was whether the Association should have a contingent at the Cenotaph Ceremony on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> November. There appears to be good support for an Association Contingent, and the Royal British Legion (RBL) have given us the green light. If you wish to participate could you please fill in the proforma elsewhere in the Newsletter and return to me as soon as possible? I need to give the RBL our details by the end of September.

I would like to take this opportunity to pay our collective thanks and gratitude to John Bennett. Most of the recent success of the Association has been thanks to his tireless work on behalf of us all. He has been loyally supported throughout by Joyce. I wish them both contentment and happiness in their new home in France. I am sure they will make as much a success of their new life as they have in their many other endeavours. You will not be surprised to hear that John is keeping in close contact, and continues to provide sound advice and support.

I am delighted to report that Maurice Haynes has stepped into the Secretary post, and has made an immediate impact. As ever, your Committee continues to need new members. If you believe you can provide help of any description, please contact any of the Committee members.

You will see from Andy Cash's Report that the Squadron is well on the way to achieving Apache Operational Capability. We wish the Squadron every success as the Army's first Attack Helicopter Operational Force.

**Andrew Simkins**

## SQUADRON COMMANDER'S REPORT

It is 8 months since I wrote my last entry for the Association Journal, but the Squadron seems to have managed to cram in at least 12 months worth of training during that period! Nonetheless, we are just back from 3 weeks summer leave with batteries recharged and morale buoyant, but with another busy training schedule facing us.

The first 3 months of this year saw the ground crew complete their individual conversion courses onto the Apache and the aircrew began and completed their Night Vision System (NVS) and weapons training at Middle Wallop. This included our first live firing of CRV7 rockets and 30mm cannon on Otterburn ranges, which was also the first time that the aircrew were supported by our own ground crew in the Apache era. I think both sides were suitably impressed.

The aircrew returned to the Squadron at Dishforth in April and Cpl Tovey, under SSM WO2 James Lyons' direction, had organised a fantastic Top Table Dinner for the whole Squadron, which went down very well and provided a good focus for the reuniting of the Squadron just before our Easter leave.

Then began probably the most hectic period the Squadron has experienced for some time. The Conversion To Role course (CTR), put together and coordinated by the Air Manoeuvre Training and Advisory Team (AMTAT), occupied our every moment, day and night. The difficulty of undertaking, what is in effect, a full time training course, while also dealing with the demands of Regimental life cannot be understated. As you would expect, everyone pulled out all the stops and despite fatigue and frustrations managed to maintain good humour and achieve the training objectives. For the ground crew, they practised deploying, setting up and operating, initially, 2 point Forward Arming and Refuel Points (FARPs) by day and night and progressed to the more complex (for Command and Control) 4 point FARPs. The aircrew undertook progressively more involved tactical formation flying by day and night leading up to reasonably complex night operations in an Electronic Warfare threat environment. The operations, both in the air and on the ground, have been very exciting and have given a real sense of coming of age for the AAC. We're in the 'big boys' league' now; when we visit RAF bases it is now *them* that come over to look at our aircraft, rather than us theirs!

Our ground and air crews are operating as a much more interdependent team than hitherto, with our Mission Planning Station operators actually planning the missions with the aircrew. Our ES support has been fantastic. The technical burden has been high for both technicians and aircrew, but the team has worked well and we have not lost significant numbers of sorties due to technical failures, we have asked for (at least) 6 aircraft per day and have usually received more, an incredible achievement even if from a Regimental pool of 16. The weather has been less forgiving and we have lost significant numbers of sorties and, indeed, entire exercises due to bad weather. I can't remember a June quite as bad, but it has been exacerbated by aircraft release limitations and by our own caution when dealing with marginal weather and inexperienced Apache aircrew operating with an unforgiving night Thermal Imaging

system.

Towards the end of July we had our first 'exam' to pass as a Squadron. The 9 Regt AAC Battle Group ran us out and put us through our paces on Exercise LIGHTNING DAWN in the North of the UK. Sadly, due to the poor weather we had lost 2 previous opportunities to deploy as a Squadron, so this test was our first chance to try it all out. The Squadron performed very well achieving all the tasks it was set in difficult circumstances. We conducted 3 missions; a screen, a deliberate attack and an advance to contact and exploit. However, we achieved much more than just that. We proved that we can talk to and operate with the HCR recce screen and the Parachute Regiment providing ISTAR and Close in Fire Support. We can operate with the E3 and our own Lynx from 672 Squadron. We can plan complex missions involving Joint and All Arms assets, support them and execute them. We can sustain for suitable periods and still provide flexibility to respond to changing circumstances. We can rely on our people, especially our JNCOs, to come up to the mark when it is demanded of them. Obviously, we were far from perfect and we continue to learn, but, we are getting there and the advances since we began CTR, only 4 months ago, have been substantial.

CTR training has not yet finished, by the end of October we must make up lost training, undertake advanced live firing and Composite Air Operation (COMAO) training with Joint assets and take part in Combined Arms Tactics Training. We will then be tested by 16 Air Asslt Bde as part of 9 Regt AAC BG during Exercise EAGLES EYE 10 – 22 Oct in order to confirm our operational capability. All this before we begin to consider the continuation training required, which falls outside of the CTR syllabus. There is light at the end of the training tunnel. We will be declared as having achieved the Initial Operating Capability (IOC) as at 31 August, although because of the training still to be completed this will be at a substantial readiness state. We are also gradually regaining control of our own destiny from the training establishment. We are beginning to feel the surge of excitement that goes along with leaving home for the first time.

Exciting days are not too far ahead.

Andy Cash.

## **COMMITTEE NEWS**

Unfortunately, George McKie has had to resign as Treasurer, due to pressure of remunerative work.

The President and the committee members thank George for his sterling efforts over the last few years and wish him well for the future.

Maurice Haynes has taken on the responsibilities of General Secretary on the departure of John Bennett to his new home in France. Once again we all wish John & Joyce well for the future.

We welcome Mick Smith to the committee and thank him for his offer to organise the mailing of the newsletter.

The Committee still requires a Deputy Treasurer, please let us know if you can help.

Finally, a vote of thanks to Sylvia Heyes for her sterling efforts in taking on the production of the newsletter at short notice.

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### **75 A/C WKSP REUNION 22-25 MAY 2005**

Mick Little has once again organised a reunion in Kluang for ex 75 A/C Wksp old boys. He has also invited members of 656 Sqn and 11 Flt to join in. Dates are as above.

More information is available on the 656 Association website and on Mick's website [www.helicopter.com/kluang](http://www.helicopter.com/kluang)

Mick little can be contacted on the following numbers:

Mobile: +60 193 131369

Tel: +603 457 7053

Fax: +603 4256 8053

The reunion is being held at the Prime City Hotel in Kluang and to date it looks as though 50 plus people are already signed up.

The trip is good value for money, hotels, meals and travel are inexpensive in Malaysia.

## REUNION 2004 REPORT

June 12th and 13th will be remembered for some time by our members who attended Netheravon. The setting could not have been better, nor the weather kinder. We started on Saturday when we held a social and buffet in the Officers Mess. This is a WWI listed building which still bears the Royal Flying Corps crest over the entrance. The company was pleasant and the food excellent. It was pleasing to once again see Arthur and Margaret Windscheffel in attendance, and a mention must be made of Ed Kelly, a fairly recent member, who adjusted his holiday dates to attend from Australia!

The Squadron commander, Major Andy Cash, gave a report on the latest position of the Squadron, their training and future objectives. All very complex stuff compared to our good old Auster days!

Andrew Simkins made a speech and gave a presentation to John & Joyce Bennett in appreciation of their work for the Association. The meal rounded off with the usual Loyal, Squadron and Association toasts before members retired to the bar. Lack of local accommodation needed members to depart early for their respective homes/hotels etc.

Sunday morning dawned bright and sunny when members once more gathered in the Netheravon Officers Mess for our AGM, the largest gathering for very many years!!! Following on from the business everyone made their way to the airfield where a feast of Austers awaited their gaze! We had a couple of members with Austers but the others were all members of the International Auster Club, who gave their time to come to support us and give members and guests short flights.

Tables and chairs were set out on the grass and a drinks tent provided liquid refreshment. There was also a range of filled sandwiches for people to help themselves to. I believe that all members and guests who wanted to were able to fly and enjoy the superb visibility of about 50 miles!

Our thanks must go out CO 7 Regiment AAC for his kind permission to hold the event, to the Air Traffic Controllers, I.A.C. pilots, the Air Training Corps, and Medical Corps personnel who helped make the day a great success.

If all future Reunions are as well attended and enjoyable as this one was, then the Association can only go from strength to strength..

## MEMBERS CONTRIBUTIONS.

Our President sent out a questionnaire with the last newsletter asking for members to contribute to the newsletter. We need members to relate their experiences, memorable moments, serious, not so serious or just funny. These will help to compile a total picture of life with 656 over the years, as well as giving members insight to events at other locations. Compiling the newsletter is difficult when I don't get contributions, so come on chaps, don't just stand at a bar relating your experiences to just one or two listeners, tell the whole membership please.

Not wishing to ask members to do what I won't do myself here is my small contribution:

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At the end of August 1963 whilst on operations in Brunei, Auster Mk9, XK414 piloted by the late Capt Jocot de Bernod, made a routine landing at Long Somado, a jungle strip at a small jungle village, to contact the local Ghurkha commander. However before he could take off to return it was found on the pre-flight checks the Blackburn Bombardier engine had failed. (possible oil pump?) A radio message was sent to base to tell of the problem. And so I came into the picture. I was to be flown out by RAF Twin Pioneer aircraft with a replacement engine, to perform a change of power plant. I was to take minimal tools, as the troops would render 'all necessary assistance'. The journey and arrival went without hitch, with the local force of Ghurkhas unloading the engine on its cradle, and field took kits. I started to prepare the ECU for removal, getting as far as I could before dark, as with the operational state at that time there were no lights permitted. The village perimeter was bristling with Ghurkhas expecting trouble at any time, and I settled into a wary sleep under a temporary shelter.

Early the next morning I completed disconnections and called for help to remove the lump. With the airframe not having the tail raised on a trestle as was usual, it meant the engine was not only high but, the mountings were inclined upwards! I was given 6 Ghurkhas, 3 tent poles and 3 ropes to do the operation! The ropes went round the engine and the poles so that 3 men on each side could lift and move the engine forward, out of the airframe. That's fine, except Ghurkhas are by nature of smaller stature than Europeans, and by the time the lift was ready the poles were almost head height to the Ghurkhas. When it came to the 'lift' it was indeed a struggle for these very willing men to lift high enough to clear the mountings. Nevertheless it was achieved, and the replacement fitted in reverse order. After reconnection of all parts a ground run was carried out which was satisfactory. The tool kits were loaded into the rear, I strapped the Auster to my back and with JdeB in control we trundled down the short strip to climb and complete the air test during the one hour flight back to base at Brunei Main airport.

John Bennett

**NEEDLE IN A HAYSTACH OR AN AUSTER IN THE JUNGLE!**  
(both are hard to find!)

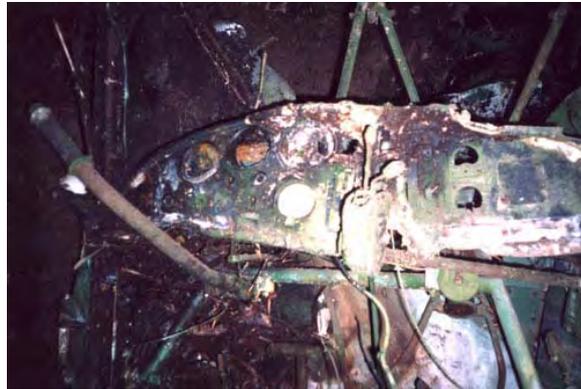
In mid February I received an E-mail (which was also copied to Tom Browning an ex RAF chap who is researching RAF crashes in Malaya) from a chap by name of Shaharom Ahmad (MHG\* - Researcher), with the subject "New Auster Wreck". In it he said: "Currently we found an Auster lying on top of tree near Gua Musang, Malaysia and gave details of various serial numbers from the tail plane, fin and wings, all of which were TAY numbers. Could I find out any information on this aircraft." With no military serial numbers left after all these years I did not expect to be of much help, but, I took the numbers to be Taylorcraft markings and contacted Peter Stoddard an Auster factory archivist. He regretted that with such scant information he could not help, but passed me onto Ian O'Neill.

Ian is compiling an exhaustive history of every Auster produced, its where, when and final destiny. He has covered most of the AOP/AAC Squadrons and recently started on 656. I rang Ian and gave him the scant details that I had and he said he would call back in a couple of days with any answers. Lo and behold within a couple of hours he was calling me back to tell me thought the aircraft was VF 602, put on charge with 656 on 29 June 1951, which crashed into the jungle canopy on 3rd June 1952 with Sgt John Rolley, DFC, Glider Pilot Regt, at the controls and Assistant Superintendent D Lockington as passenger. They managed to climb down from the trees and walked out of the jungle over the following 12 days. I reported back to Shaharom with the details but with a request to try to find the fuselage serial number to confirm the findings, and also any photos they may take of it.

The only snag in the investigation was the map reference given by Shaharom was a long way from Rolley's site, so the investigation continued. Tom Browning found that it could be another Auster, this time VF 551 which had been flown by Sergeant E J Webb with Police Cadet J Underhill as his passenger. In the '656 Squadron Chronicles' - compiled by Les Rogers, for November 1951, the Squadron Headquarters (Sqn. HQ) report reads: 'Sgt Webb force landed in the jungle to the west of Gua Musang in the wildest country in Malaya. His passenger was a police officer who was engaged in visual recce of the area. Both survivors were rescued, and were little the worse for their ordeal. This time the aircraft crashed in deep jungle due to engine failure, but fortunately the wireless remained intact and there was sufficient charge left in the damaged battery for an SOS to reach his Flight. This was made possible because he was carrying a wire aerial in the aircraft, which he erected as soon as he landed. The survivors were located after forty eight hours and, after receiving a supply drop, sailed away happily down the River Perolak and Betis under Auster escort, on a bamboo raft, back to Kuala Betis police post. From here they walked twenty five miles to Gua Musang and were then flown home. Thus ended successfully a rescue and search operation which lasted for four harassing and difficult days.'

1911 Flight's report, for 3 Nov 51 reads (Sgt Webb was a member of 1911 Flt and based at Seremban) reads: 'At midday the wireless operator on duty rushed into the

Flight Office reporting 'Air Emergency' explaining that he had heard faint calls from an aircraft that had crashed in the jungle. Immediately an officer went to the set and was just able to pick up a message from Sgt Webb who said that he had crashed in the jungle near a river west of Gua Musang. This remarkable transmission was made over a distance of 100 miles with an ordinary 62 set and a fading aircraft battery with a length of wire slung between the trees in dense jungle. An aircraft was sent at once to the scene.'



This indeed was the remains of VF551, as confirmed by the map reference. Shahrom by the wreckage.

In the last Email from Shahrom he asks “did any Auster crashed near Hulu Langat? Just informed by villagers there that in 1950's there is one Auster crashed and found in 1960's by army patrol” Anyone with any clues??

\*MHG I believe is Malayan Historical Group, a band of enthusiasts who are piecing together all aircraft crashes in Malaya during the emergency.

This in article written at the time the Scout come into service in Malaya.  
No doubt it will bring back recollections of that time to many of our members

### **THE SCOUT DRIVER'S LAMENT**

(to be sung in a low key with rhythmic accompaniment  
of hyperventilation and gnashing of teeth).

“It’s a rugged, reliable, tropical bird”  
Said the Journal last year — we believed every word.  
We qualified then, (PQ’d and all that)  
And sat in the crew room chewing the fat.  
We sought the advice of our elders and betters,  
Who abused the poor Nimbus with words of four letters.

“The new load of gubbins for gauging the strains  
Gives four super readings, - but not if it rains;  
The little black boxes need watertight lids,  
And the ADF’s fine if you fly without skids.  
The magnetic plug needs a check, as you pray  
That it won’t have the look of a hedgehog at bay.”

“With your heart in your mouth, give the rotor a tweak  
And listen acutely for graunching or squeak.  
If thus far assured, pray do not relax;  
Look at snubbers for binding, and trousers for cracks.  
Stock up with adrenalin - tighten your straps:  
It’s a marvelous aircraft, you privileged chaps.”

So sit down, my lads, with the old Volume One,  
And dream up new places  
To look for some traces  
Of filings, magnetic, misplaced:— just for fun.  
A rugged, reliable, tropical bird?  
It’s fine to Back Britain, but this is ABSURD!

### **A SQUADRON COMMANDER'S REPLY**

I think it’s absurd  
That you malign the bird.  
Our Wallopote masters,  
Used to disasters,  
Say it’s reliable  
And militarily viable.  
Who are we to disagree?

### THE NEXT PHASE

For several years  
They've bent our ears  
With the delights of the Nimbus Phase Three.  
But when it got here  
It wasn't 'gear'  
And went home rapidly.

At six hundred hours  
We report the prowess  
And the life of the Nimbus Phase Three.  
Unfortunately ours  
Can't be measured in hours;  
They work for minutes Two-three!

So cheer up my lad  
And be eternally glad,  
Who are we to sing woefully?  
For isn't it sad  
That only a cad  
Would denigrate the Nimbus Phase Three

Last Stanza (to be sung in a low key)  
Oh where, oh where have my Alouettes gone?

### A SQUADRON COMMANDER'S PRAYER

From Turbines that leave us,  
And bearings that fail us,  
And Scouts that go bump in the night,  
Good Nimbus, deliver us.

*Notes for members not familiar with the references:*

Nimbus: the Engine powering the Scout heli

Trousers: The bi-furcated jet exhaust pipe

Iron filings: A regular inspection of a magnetic plug needed to detect early failure of bearings.

Graunching: Noise emitted during Pre-flight, requiring the rotor blades to be individually moved from fore to aft two or three times to ensure the dampers were OK. This was before hydraulic dampers were fitted.

## **WHEN IGNORANCE IS BLISS**

(Report from (the late) John Rolley, when with 656 in Korea)

I had been briefed to fly a reconnaissance sortie over the Divisional Front, flying an Auster Mark VI at a height of between 6-8000 feet. As per usual, very little was to be seen over the Chinese side and I was almost ready to call it a day, when a Sabre from the U.S. 8<sup>th</sup> Air force suddenly appeared on my port side and very close.

Assuming that he, like myself, was a little bored and wanted a bit of fun, I went into a steep turn to look for his partner as I knew they mostly operated in pairs, and saw the other Sabre diving down towards me. For the next five or ten minutes I had a great time dodging the two jets. With my low speed and ability to do very tight turns I managed to out-maneuvre them. After a while they flew off and I returned to my base at Fort George Airstrip.

On climbing out of the aircraft I was met by one of the Sergeant pilots and I began to tell him about the great time I had had, 'Dog-fighting' with two Sabres. "We know all about it!!" he said, "and they were trying to shoot you down, and not in fun either!"

It turned out that one of our Army units in the front line had reported a Chinese light aircraft dropping leaflets over the front and the Sabres had been scrambled to deal with it. When they first flew alongside me, he was checking my aircraft number. This was passed back to our Command Post and the Duty Pilot being out at that time, the Flight Clerk confused the Squadron letter with the aircraft's number and replied that the aircraft was not one of our Flights, so word was given to shoot me down. Fortunately the Duty Pilot returned within a few minutes, was told what had happened, realised what had gone wrong and started to sort the matter out, and the Sabres were called off.

That afternoon a Major and a Colonel from the 8<sup>th</sup> Airforce arrived on our strip to see me, in the event that I wished to lodge an official complaint against the Sabre pilots. I pointed out that as far as I was concerned it was just a lot of fun and not knowing the jets were quite serious, had enjoyed it!

"What about the 'T6'?" the major asked. "What about the 'T6'?" I said. "Well" said the Major, "at the time our aircraft were called, he was on your tail with his rockets armed and finger on the button"

I never did see that T6

I am grateful to PAT MUSTERS for this contribution:-

It was 11<sup>th</sup> February 1955 and I was down to take VF 626, an Auster VI, from the Flight base at Seremban to Noble Field, KL, a 30 minute trip. It was a lovely morning and climbing out on a northerly heading to 1800 feet, the world looked its usual beautiful self at 0830hrs. Passing over the ridge that lay between Negri Sembilan and Selangor, I thought for a moment that I had seen a movement somewhere at the bottom edge of the windshield where two tubular struts ran vertically down behind the instrument panel combing - a cockroach perhaps, but no, nothing. Eyes back on the horizon again - but not for long! There was something behind the instrument panel - for a forked tongue flicked and flicked again, and disappeared - just where one of those struts went down through a hole in the combing. A moment later, waving slightly from side to side, a beautiful large snake came up before my eyes, about 3 feet in front of face, wound around the left of those two struts, stopped and just looked at me.

The day's heat was yet to materialise, especially as I flew without the port door fitted in order to get better downward observation, but I realised that I was sweating. "Vhat to do, Master?" as my Indian Bearer used to say, in another age and another sub-continent. First cool thing down with altitude, I thought, so I put the aircraft into a steady climb to 3500ft and waited for noble Field to heave into sight. From now on everything had be done very slowly, and I began to close the throttle for an approach to land. Even half and then full flap had to be reached for as slowly as possible - and so we came to a sweaty rumbling landing on the laterite surface of Noble Field. The switches were off and the engine stopped in the middle of the strip as I escaped at a smart trot from what I thought had been a close run thing. The ground crew at Noble Field, were quick to spot something wrong and were out there in seconds with extinguishers, the lot, until I explained the reason for my sudden exit.

The upshot of this little adventure was that the snake, scared for its life, disappeared from view down the starboard wing-root inspection panel. As it refused to come out the wing had to come off to get it out. A photograph appeared a year later in the Auster News from Rearsby showing the ground crew holding a six footer over two sticks with a suitable caption, but I could no longer get a round of drinks on that story when it was found that the snake was harmless!

Pat Musters

## A SPROG ARRIVES

So what was it like arriving at the squadron in 1960? **VERY** different to anything that I had seen in the army so far, and **VERY** different from the army of today.

Having joined REME I was sent to Blandford for basic training. We learned how to wear the incredible amount of straps and packs and other kit that we had been given, how to polish boots and the dozens of bits of brass attached to the straps and packs and, most importantly, how to Blanco it all for display on top of our lockers. We were also taught about walking about together, roughly in step, standing and moving about in three straight lines and to perform impractical evolutions with rifles whilst doing the walking about and standing in lines.

On passing out from basic training, I then went on to Arborfield where I was ejected from an electronics course at a very early stage due to a severe attack of density (Or did they just say that I was too 'thick'?).

Taunton was next where I completed the VM course. During the course we learned of the requirement for Aircraft Mechanics, as they were then known, technicians came much later. We could apply to attend a selection process at Middle Wallop if we passed the course with no phase failures and a final pass mark of 86% (I wonder who decided the pass figure and how it was derived?)

Miracle of miracles! I passed the qualification mark and was sent to Wallop for suitability testing.

I failed!!! But, unknown to me at the time, I had an inside track. The RAF Warrant Officer who was in charge of the testing called me in for interview. He told me that I had failed by a very small margin. He then said 'Was your father a Flight Sergeant with 149 Squadron at Wunsdorf?' 'Yes Sir' I replied. 'Well' he said, 'I know your father well and you are going to come on this course and you **will** pass every phase and if you let your father down, I'll kick your arse all round the square!' (At least, that was the gist of what he said!)

Abject terror got me through the course and I passed out second from the top. Those with the highest marks from the trade test were allowed first choice of the list of available postings. I chose Malaya.

We were a party of six, I think, destined for the squadron. We flew out to Singapore by charter aircraft, a Bristol Britannia, and arrived at Payar Lebar in the dead of night having stopped at several places along the route. The course ahead of us at Wallop was comprised of ex army apprentices and, those destined for the Far East, went out by troopship, departing some five

weeks before us and arriving only a few days ahead of us.

We spent what seemed like two weeks, it was probably less, in transit at Nee Soon Transit Camp on the Old Upper Thompson Road in Singapore. The camp was immortalised by Leslie Thomas as Panglin Camp in his book 'The Virgin Soldiers'. His description is so good; I would not have the temerity to try to emulate it here. Naturally, we arrived completely broke and had to wait a few days to get paid. (In all the twelve years that I was in the army, I *never* managed to arrive at any new posting with money in my pocket. There must be some sort of Parkinsonian law that covers the appalling financial management of soldiers!! We were accommodated in 'attap bashas', the permanent buildings being reserved for the permanent staff.

During our time in the transit camp we were instructed in the importance of the 'Hearts and minds campaign'. We were also shown the Lee Enfield jungle carbine and were taken on the range to familiarise ourselves with it. Apart from that little bit of training, we seemed to be left to our own devices for much of the time, it was almost like being on leave. It all seemed very quiet in Singapore but we started to hear, from some of the old hands, tales of ambushed trains and road convoys, which in retrospect were very probably apocryphal. When it came time to leave Singapore by the night train to Kuala Lumpur, we were issued with live ammunition and were told that we were to be part of the train guard party. Suddenly being an active participant in the Malayan emergency seemed very serious. It was all very well playing on exercise in UK with blanks, you know what I mean, 'Bang bang, you're dead, go home and get your dinner, sort of thing, but if they were giving us live ammo then the opposition almost certainly had live ammo too!! Not a comforting thought at all.

The night train ride thankfully proved uneventful though a little sphincter tightening at every strange noise or change of speed. We were met at the magnificent railway station in KL and taken to the squadron headquarters camp at Rifle Range Road. We were issued with our bedding, garter tabs, puttees, stocking tops, tropical pyjamas, green towels and 44 pattern webbing, handing in our Greatcoats, UK weight Battledress and 37 pattern webbing. Quite why we had to carry all that stuff half way round the world just to hand it in on arrival was beyond me but the theory was that we might have been diverted to somewhere more temperate whilst en route. What the hell were stocking tops, puttees and garter tabs? and how the hell were they to be worn?

The camp, squadron headquarters, airstrip and workshops were known as 'Noble Field'. All that remains of Noble Field today is one of the accommodation huts, coincidentally, the one that I slept in whilst there.

The accommodation consisted of a mixture of wooden barrack rooms, attap bashas; brick built ablution blocks and tin sheds. Most people were

accommodated in the wooden barrack blocks, about ten to a room, three rooms per block, but a few were living in the attap bashas. The main part of the camp comprised two back-to-back open squares formed by the wooden barrack blocks and the Squadron offices. The tin sheds were allocated to such important personages as the Dhobi Wallah, the tailor, and the Char Wallah. The remainder of the camp area was utilised by the squadron headquarters offices, signals office, armoury, MT workshop, cookhouse and dining area, QM, a laterite parade square and a wooden Control Tower at the edge of the laterite runway. 16 flight were also resident in the camp, having their workshops, dispersal and offices a few yards up the runway to the north of the main camp.

We were soon introduced to the Char Wallah who immediately allocated each person a number, which referred to a page in his credit ledger. Mine was 14, ampat blas in Malay, and permanently engraved in my memory. Two Pakistanis, known as 'Busty' and 'Slim' operated the Char Wallah's. They would provide hot and cold drinks, sandwiches, and basic meals on credit. Why were Char Wallah's sandwiches were universally known as 'Banjos'? They also operated a weekly money lending facility at no interest but woe betide you if you did not pay off your bill on payday. Your credit facility for food and drinks stopped until you paid up.

The next new discovery was the 'Boot Boy'. Old George, another Pakistani, would clean and 'bull' your boots, make your bed, take your laundry to and from the Dhobi Wallah and keep your barrack room tidy, all for two Straits dollars, about 30p in today's money, per week. George would sit cross-legged on the veranda for hours, polishing boots. Was this different from a training unit in UK or what?

We turned out for our first morning muster parade displaying blindingly white knees and arms. Our OGs were brand new and untailored or starched. Shorts were long and baggy, shirts large and baggy. Puttees loosely wrapped our ankles, itchy, woolly, stocking tops made our calves sweat and the garter tabs cut off circulation below the knee. Muster parade was interesting!! There were Army, RAF and RN technical personnel working at the squadron workshops. The RN does very different drill to the army and the RAF appeared not to have grasped the concept of drill at all. When the parade was brought to attention it sounded like the Calgary stampede. The poor SSM didn't have a chance. At the end of the muster parade the workshop personnel were marched down the airstrip, usually accompanied by an old Tamil gentleman on a road roller whose responsibility was to keep the laterite strip smooth, to the southern end where the workshops were situated.

The workshops consisted of an open sided corrugated iron hangar,

filled with the *very sophisticated* Auster Mk 9's in various states of deshabille!! A number of tin sheds comprised the servicing, bays, offices and stores. Having been interviewed by the OC Workshops we were the allocated to work with hanger crews undertaking major servicing or repairs, or to work in one of the servicing bays. The Char Wallah had a set up at the workshops which was used at NAAFI breaks. Lunch was taken in the dining shed at the main camp and if it were raining at lunch time, a crocodile of various aircraft components, cowlings, elevators etc, could be seen wending their way alongside the airstrip being used as umbrellas.

I am sure that I have missed out many incidents in a sprogs arrival at the squadron but these are my abiding memories. There were the most marvellous characters in the squadron, too many to detail here and I'm not entirely sure that some of them want to be reminded of the stunts of their youth. I had a wonderful time in KL and it got even better when I was posted to 7 Flight in Taiping but that is a story for another day.

John Heyes

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### **ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION CHARGES**

It was agreed at this year's AGM to increase Annual Subscription charges to £5 from 1 January 2005.

The Committee is also very aware and appreciative that many members choose to make an additional contribution.

Could you please amend your Bank/Building Society details, prior to Christmas.

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### **'FIRE BY ORDER' by TED MASLEN JONES MC DFC**

Copies of this outstanding book are available from the Secretary and President at a discounted price of £15.

## **Cenotaph Ceremony, Whitehall Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> November 2004**

The Royal British Legion (RBL) has confirmed that 656 Squadron Association has been allocated places at this year's Cenotaph Ceremony in Whitehall on Remembrance Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> November.

The aim is for the Association to provide a Contingent on an annual basis.

If you wish to participate, please complete the Return below and return to the Association President as soon as possible (RBL requires details by the end of September).

RBL has advised us that the contingent will be standing in Whitehall for at least an hour, and then marching for a distance of at least 1 ½ miles.

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### **Cenotaph Ceremony, Whitehall Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> November 2004**

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**I wish to attend the Cenotaph Ceremony on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> November.**

**From:**

Name:

Address:

Tel Number:

Additional information/requirements:

Please return to: Lt Col Andrew Simkins,  
Watersmeet, Lower Road, Edington, Westbury, Wilts BA13 4QW

## ASSOCIATION SHOP

“Sweetheart Jewellery”



ITEM	SILVER	W/Y GOLD
Ladies Brooch	47.00	140.00
Tie Stickpin	18.00	50.00
Lapel stud	11.00	45.00
Cufflinks (chain or swivel)	45.00	140.00

EXTRA on request: Add a Diamond (£10.00)  
or ruby (£5.00) for the eye

### Commemorative Crystal Ware.

The Chinthe was laser copied from the original Silver 50th presentation statue.. Below the Chinthe is ‘656 Squadron’ but additional text can be added, up to 3 lines. The block is delivered in a stout presentation box which has blue silk look lining.



Prices: Standard block 50mm x 50mm x 80mm tall                   £35.00  
Large block 60mm x 60mm x 120mm tall                           £105.00  
Postage is extra on these items. Orders to Ken Mattocks (Treasurer)  
with who will arrange delivery of them to your home address.

## **NOTICES**

### **History and Archives**

How many times have you heard that someone regretted 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 un-saleable 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

### **MEMBERS WITH INTERNET ACCESS.**

Members with access to the internet and E-Mail can read Newsletters on the website. Hard copy of the newsletter will not be posted who have an e-mail address. Hard copy will be available upon request. By not sending newsletters to members with Internet access we can save a large sum on postage.

The newsletter is published twice a year, usually in Spring and Autumn. Keep watching the website for the latest newsletter.

Any contributions to the newsletter should be sent to:  
John Heyes, contact details on page 24.

**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.

**NEW MEMBERS**

Clifford T.	RA/RHA	'68 -'71 Hong Kong
Anderson R.K.	RA	'56 -'58 1911 Flt. Singapore
Rolley Mrs. B.	Associate	Widow of John Rolley
Rolley M.H.	Associate	Son of John Rolley
Pickthall Mrs. A.	Associate	Widow of Colin Pickthall DFC
Allcock G.T.	REME	'67 Sqn Wksp. '71-'74 Hong Kong

**DEATHS**

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

Maj. C. Pickthall DFC	RA	Died 5-October-03
Maj. Gen. A.G.E. Stewart-Cox DFC	RA	Died 9-November-03
Lt.Col. D.S. Bell	AAC	Died 2-September-03
Capt. J.D. Butcher	RA	Died 16-August-04

## **Committee Members Details**

### **President:**

Lt.Col Andrew Simkins  
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### **General Secretary:**

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### **Hon. Treasurer:**

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Tel: 01507-522102 E-mail: [laureken@btinternet.com](mailto:laureken@btinternet.com)

### **Deputy Treasurer:**

Position vacant

### **Membership Secretary:**

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