

# **THE CHINTHE**



**656 Squadron Association  
Journal  
Autumn 2007**

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# EDITORIAL

Your committee decided that we should publish three Journals this year, the usual Spring and Summer editions, and a special edition to cover the reunion which was held much later than usual.

I think that our reunion this year was the best that I have attended and a huge vote of thanks must go to Maurice Haynes for his efforts. He was ably assisted by Andrew Simkins when he was available. I know that Maurice has already started his planning for next year, probably to be held at Wattisham.

The PJM was presented to some forty four people on the night of the reunion dinner. Details of how the rest of the medals will be distributed appear elsewhere in this Journal. (*see page 42*)

The Borneo tour for next year has been finalised and the full details appear elsewhere in this edition. (*see page 14*) The price is most competitive and even if you never served in Borneo, this is an excellent opportunity to visit a beautiful and interesting country in the very best of company. By a pure fluke of planning, it just precedes the Kluang reunion organised by Mick Little and we have the opportunity to tag this reunion onto the end of the Borneo tour, if we wish.

John Bennett resigned his Secretaryship of the Association due to the difficulties of trying to fulfil his duties from France. He remains as Webmaster and Membership Secretary. No one put their hand up to take the job on at the AGM so I have volunteered. I'm sure Sylvia will cope with the extra delegated work! Being Secretary is going to be a hard act to follow. I hope that I can do justice to the task. It was started by Nobby and was continued in style by Derek Walker for some years. John Bennett took over in 1999 and made a giant contribution by gaining us much publicity by virtue of the website. He recruited members in seemingly vast numbers then forged a committee which really works well. We owe John an enormous vote of thanks for his work and we manifested that thanks by presenting him, at the reunion dinner, with an engraved, cut glass, Claret jug on behalf of the Association.

It has been brought to my attention that members are not being notified of deaths in sufficient time for them to attend funerals. Therefore, I intend to advise all members who are on e-mail of deaths as soon as I have the information so that members wishing to attend the funeral may do so. It is not possible to advise all members by post due to the cost and delay.

Last but not least, my constant plea for copy for the Journal. At the reunion, I overheard lots of amusing tales that only seem to get told after the consumption of copious quantities of ale. Come on!! Put pen to paper and let us all share the tales of the ground crews at play and at work. I know of one person who could retell the tale of 'The 656 Battle for the Eastern Hotel' He knows who he is.

*John Heyes*

# PRESIDENT'S REPORT

I am writing this report on the Sunday evening after the Army Air Corps' Golden Jubilee weekend celebrations. From all accounts this was the most successful of Association gatherings. A large measure of that success is due to Maurice Haynes' outstanding organisation. He has our collective warm thanks. It was wonderful to see the Museum buzzing with chat and memories of old times on the evening of Friday 14th September. I personally found it a most moving event, given the wide range of Squadron history that we honoured. It was most satisfying to have the Army Air Corps' Regimental Colonel, Colonel Bill Sivewright, with us to present the forty four Pingat Jasa Malaysia. I know that he thoroughly enjoyed the evening, and was amazed at the depth of friendship and humour on display. And to have the six members of the current Squadron ensured that we retain our close links with current operational deployments. I know of no other squadron which could 'parade' recent DFC, MC and MiD recipients. Such awards are an affirmation of the professionalism, dedication and sheer courage of squadron personnel serving in Afghanistan and elsewhere. We salute you.

On Saturday 15th September we were blessed with perfect weather for the 50th Anniversary events at Middle Wallop, and many Association members enjoyed the wide range of events, and the especially stunning flying displays.

Our Committee continues to work hard for all our members and has started planning our 2008 Reunion, most probably at Wattisham, near Ipswich, the new home of the Squadron. As the Squadron remains very busy, it will be the New Year before we can confirm the details. Meanwhile, we will have a contingent at this year's Cenotaph Parade on Sunday 11th November.

The continued success and increasing visibility of the Association is largely down to the hard efforts of John Bennett. He has been a quite exceptional Secretary, with great drive, vision and compassion. He has decided that living in France has made it increasingly difficult to conduct his duties, and so has handed over much of his portfolio to John Heyes. I am delighted, though, that he will continue to serve us in many ways, and we look forward to seeing John and Joyce for many years to come.

Wishing you all a happy and contented Autumn, and Christmas (should I apologise for being the first to mention the festive season?!), and I look forward to meeting up with as many of you as possible in the near future.

*Andrew Simkins*

## OC's REPORT

This has been another momentous period for 656 Squadron, both on operations and in peacetime. Please indulge me if I cover what may be news to some of you already, I will use this opportunity attempt to summarise what the finest Squadron in the AAC has been up to over what has been a truly significant year in the Squadron's and the AAC's history. To give you an idea of the pace of life in the Squadron I am writing this in Afghanistan, serving with 3 Regiment AAC. By the time this goes to print all of the Squadron's aircrew will have spent another month in Afghanistan helping to address the shortage of AH pilots created by supporting operations, whilst we continue grow the AH capability simultaneously. In short, the Squadron's main effort for the foreseeable future will continue to be preparing for and conducting operations in Afghanistan as part of Operation HERRICK.

You will be aware that the Squadron returned from Afghanistan at the end of February after what has been the most kinetic of the AAC's three month rotations to date. The work that the REME detachment, the ground crew and the aircrew completed in the hostile and austere conditions that they found themselves in never ceased to amaze me. Despite being away over Christmas, the Squadron as a whole remained committed to success on operations which was no more fittingly demonstrated than in the events that took place during the recovery of LCpl Mathew Ford at Jugroom Fort. The extraordinary events that took place that day will forever be remembered around the world for the courage, bravery and audacity which members of the Squadron displayed in an effort to recover a fallen comrade. This was one of many events throughout both tours where the action of both aircrew and ground crew alike resulted in lives saved for both coalition forces and Afghan civilians at threat from the Taliban. There are too many individual actions to mention, but it was with great delight that we learnt of the award of a Mention In Dispatches for WO1 Mulhall's first tour as well as the the Longbow Trophy (awarded to an individual who has contributed most for the development of the Attack Helicopter Capability as a whole). The Operations Officer Captain Piers Lewis was awarded a Joint Commanders Commendation for his actions during the same tour. For his actions on the second tour Captain Nick Barton was awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross for his command of a patrol with his pilot SSgt Anthony Ebdon. During support of Troops in Contact their aircraft was hit by small arms fire, resulting in multiple systems failures. Despite the potential danger of prolonging the flight they remained on station to continue to defeat the enemy allowing the Marines to break contact. Captain Barton was also the patrol commander providing covering fire at Jugroom Fort where WO1 (now Capt) Tom O'Malley, SSgt Keith Armatage WO1 Ed Macy and SSgt Carl Bird landed on to recover LCpl Ford. WO1 Macy and SSgt Armatage were awarded the Military Cross for leaving their aircraft to lead the Marines to LCpl Ford and assist in his recovery on the ground. Capt Tom O'Malley was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his command of the rescue mission. Sadly in the current system of quotas for awards SSgt Carl Bird was only awarded a Joint Commanders Commendation for his actions as the pilot and aircraft commander of the Apache that recovered LCpl Ford, but it must not detract from the outstanding bravery and

courage that he displayed on that day.

After returning from Operations our focus switched directly to the move of the Squadron from 9 Regiment Army Air Corps in Dishforth to rejoin 4 Regiment Army Air Corps in Wattisham as part of the collocation of all Field Army Attack Helicopters at one central hub. It is certainly a shame to say goodbye to 9 Regiment and Dishforth Airfield, leaving behind the close ties that we have made with the local community and the superb training areas of the Yorkshire Dales, Moors, Otterburn, Spadeadam and the Lake District. However we must succeed on Operations and in the current resource constrained climate the move was all but inevitable. I can report that we have been made extremely welcome 4 Regiment under the helm of Lt Col Neil Dalton, as I am sure you well know a former 656 Squadron OC. We are now formally part the first fully established British Attack Aviation Regiment. Just prior to the move we took the opportunity to complete some adventurous training at Penhale in Cornwall, which proved perfect for the Squadron to take to focus away from operations, relax, and do some 'gnarly' surfing, despite the mediocre accommodation. Likewise, a number of the Squadron took part in the Corps 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations by sailing a Challenge 67ft yacht from Tahiti to Panama taking in the Galapagos Islands on the way. By all accounts, this expedition wasn't nearly as easy as it sounds with the crew not seeing land for 28 days at one point!

The move to Wattisham went as well as it could have done taking account of the other commitments we were dealing with at the same time. We are now well established in Hangar 1 (the non-Apache hangar!) and are getting to grips with the new Wattisham organisation. To elaborate on this, Wattisham have instigated a new 'station organisation' for the Apache. There now a station wide flying programme, but the aircraft are all held centrally. The plus side of this, when it has cleared its teething problems, is that the flying program should run smoother and provide more aircraft prioritised correctly, however, it also means that we lose our close relationship with the REME detachment, which, for 656 Squadron has always been very strong in recent times.

Although not directly related to the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations, the Squadron also featured in the Falklands 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with a ground element featuring in the mass march under Capt Steve Lunn, SSM Hartnett, and the Flypast consisting of two Apaches. This was a poignant reminder not only of the lives lost in that campaign, but also the Squadrons distinguished past.

The look ahead includes 656 Squadron conducting the Land Combat Power Demonstration (Staff College Demo to most of us) again this year on Salisbury Plain. Our focus in the New Year is to take the newly reformed Squadron and run through a full Apache Conversion To Role Training program starting at the end of January. The culmination of this six month training program will be a deployment to Arizona in August next year to conduct essential pre deployment Environmental and Live Fire Training before the Squadron returns to Afghanistan in Jan 2009. As the current OC I will endeavor to keep you abreast of the Squadrons activities, please remember that the Squadron's doors are always open.

*David Amlót*

***This letter was written to the Editor of the Army Air Corps Journal some time ago and it appears to be reinforced by David Amlót's report. I also heard the subject raised, quite independently, by two other people at an AACA lunch two days ago.***

Dear Sir,

I read, with great interest, Joe Kay's article 'The Other Side of the Pond' in the Army Air Corps Newsletter no 212. My reason for writing is that, on page 39, he implies that the REME personnel in today's Army Air Corps are not integrated into the first line support for Squadrons and Flights. I have talked over this subject with a number of my peer group and they are as equally dismayed as I. I do not attempt to speak for all REME Air Technicians, only those with whom I have discussed this subject.

We all did our basic training with REME and then came to Middle Wallop for our Aircraft Mechanic training, (We were not designated as 'Technicians' until later), straight from Vehicle Mechanics training. On completion of training at Middle Wallop, we were awarded our pale blue berets of which we were very proud. In my own case I was posted to 656 Squadron in Malaya and it is on this experience that I base my following comments.

On posting we were sent to the 'Light Aircraft Squadron Workshops' no mention of REME workshops in those days, it was a 'Squadron Workshops'. After a few months of gathering experience in the workshops, we were then often sent out to Flights. We became an integral part of the flight, not only performing our first line servicing duties but often flying as observers, many qualifying for their observers wing. It was not unusual for a REME mechanic to be detached with an Auster, a pilot and Gunner driver/Signaller to a remote landing ground when a search was on for a missing aircraft or a lost infantry patrol. The driver would monitor the radio on the ground and the mechanic would fly as an extra pair of eyes. On landing he would refuel the aircraft, perform the turn round inspection, if lucky grab a cup of coffee then go off on the next search sortie. This has been known to go on for fourteen days. On detachment away from base the REME personnel would often act as recce party, locating suitable landing grounds, ensuring that the area was clear of obstructions and safe for the following Austers to land.

Many of us felt a greater kinship to AAC than REME. We felt that REME rather washed its hands of us once we were in the AAC orbit. This may or may not be true but this is how we felt. By the mid sixties, it appeared to us that REME hierarchy suddenly realised that there was a lot happening in Army Aviation over which they had no influence. AAC organised our postings and most of our administration and REME appeared to only have a token influence on our careers and prospects. Suddenly, we became REME workshops, not Squadron workshops. A new REME chain of command appeared where there had been none, or very little before. The end of our close relationship with AAC was fast approaching.

Many of us had joined the Army Air Corps Association in its formative years, rather than, or as well as, joining REME Association. I am certain that, when the Army Air Corps Association was young, the majority of its members were REME and RA cap badged.

I am of the belief that we should have been transferred to AAC on completion of our training. By the nature of our training, we would serve the rest of our service time with AAC and not with the general pool of REME mechanics who would serve in disparate LADs, never developing the loyalty to the unit to which they were seconded, unlike the men attached to AAC who became fiercely loyal to their units.

Surely, AAC would benefit by having their REME personnel firmly embedded in their units in the same way that the US Army does?

John Heyes, a long retired REME Air Tech

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*The Red Arrows paying tribute at the 50th Anniversary of the Modern Army Air Corps , Middle Wallop 15th September 2007 Photo: Ron Ward*

# SECRETARY'S REPORT

My report this year covers the fifteen months since the last AGM. The reunion having been put back to co-incide with the 50th Anniversary of the Army Air Corps, although 656 are, as you know, now into their 65th year.

Thanks to our new website, which went 'live' last September your Association grows steadily and we are getting new recruits directly from it. Since the last AGM we have had sixty seven new members altogether, with forty from the website. Total membership now stands at five hundred and seven with another forty one who have moved and not notified us of their new location, so we are unsure as to their whereabouts.

Your committee held a meeting in July to discuss this reunion and its arrangements for the Saturday. Maurice Haynes has done a sterling job on our behalf and fought our corner well with the AAC Association, who placed numerous obstacles in the way. Meanwhile John Heyes has had much to contend with regarding the PJM presentation. He found that some members had also applied via the NMBVA and others with no application expecting the MoD to do it automatically! This has all taken considerable time and effort from John and I'm sure we are all grateful for the medal Presentation last Friday. (see page 42)

The Squadron are taking turns with the ongoing Afghanistan operations and I'm pleased to say, have conducted themselves with dedication, pride and efficiency and have been duly rewarded with suitable decorations. (see page 12) We are sending the Squadron our collective congratulations on their achievements.

This year's reunion saw the attendance of a Dutch lady who has an original invitation to a dance held by 'A' Flight in Medan in 1946. Her sister, who had originally accepted our invitation, unfortunately had to decline at the last minute with family concerns. They had both been interred, by the Japanese, in Indonesia, along with their mother. The ladies and the dance have been remembered by, Ray Pett, Jack Hallum, and Russell Matthews, who initiated the invitation, as well as others of that time.

This will be my last report as General Secretary. I requested the President and Committee to allow me to relinquish the position, as it is difficult to perform it fully from France. I will retain the Membership Secretary and Webmaster positions as they would not necessarily require my presence at a committee meeting. John Heyes had volunteered to take on the secretaryship.

In closing, I would like to thank the committee and Association members for the support, help and advice offered to me during my nine years in post.

*John Bennett*

# Minutes for the AGM 656 Squadron Association Meeting

held in The Travel Inn, Andover, 16<sup>th</sup> September 2007 Commencing 0900hrs

Welcome by the president, Lt Col Andrew Simkins OBE

Apologies: L.Edgecock, G.Gilson, T.Fleming, M.Smith, L.Walker, R.Ward, T. Maslen-Jones, N.Frost, P.Beard, A.Davison, S. Burns, J. Dandy, D. Hingley, M, Dempster, D, Miller, R,Goodwin.

- 1 Two minutes silence to remember fallen friends.
- 2 Minutes of last meeting accepted as true copy. Prop. J. Dickson Sec. T.Williams
- 3 Secretary's Report by John Bennett (*see page 9*)
- 4 Treasurers Report by Mark Meaton. The Association is solvent and well managed.
- 5 Acceptance of financial report: Prop: M. Haynes Sec: R.Pett
- 6 Vote of thanks to Maurice Haynes for organising the dinner and reunion. It was agreed by all that this years celebrations were exceptional. Prop: J.Bennett Sec: D. Walker
- 7 Appointment of Derek Walker as Deputy Treasurer (Volunteer) Prop: J.Heyes Sec: T. Williams
- 8 Appointment of John Heyes as Secretary. Prop: W.Sanders Sec: T. Danton
- 9 Appointment of Committee for further year:  
President: Lt Col Andrew Simkins OBE  
Secretary: John Heyes  
Treasurer: Mark Meaton  
Deputy Treasurer: Derek Walker  
Events Organiser: Maurice Haynes  
Journal Editor: John Heyes  
Journal Compiler & Distributor: Sylvia Heyes  
Membership Sec. & Webmaster: John Bennett Prop. R.Pett Sec: J. Smith  
The archives were discussed and Andrew Simkins asked for a volunteer archives 'Keeper'. This is a fascinating job which would enhance the Association's archives, and provide better access to members.  
The Website was discussed. It has brought many welcome comments and around forty new members have joined online since the new website took off.
- 10 It was decided that should any 656 Squadron members be on Active Service over the Christmas period, the Association should send them a token gift each. Last year the Association sent Squadron members an Association mug, which was greatly appreciated by all. Prop: S. Heyes Sec: J. Bennett  
Mark Meaton mentioned that last year we had some £450 or so in donations towards the 'Comfort Parcel' for the troops, £200 of which was

- from your committee the rest from various members. It is requested that members consider supporting this worthwhile venture.
- 11 Proposals for the 2008 Reunion: Maurice Haynes has many ideas already. The dates depend on the Squadron's Commitments. Venue to be arranged, it will probably be held in Wattisham, Suffolk, (near Ipswich) the new Squadron Headquarters. Maurice Haynes also suggested that if we are able to get a lottery grant next year, that it should go towards paying for our members on income support, to attend the reunion. This would all be done in the strictest confidence.
- 12 The Committee and members of 656 Squadron Association send their heartiest congratulations to the Serving squadron members for their dedication to duty and honours awarded to them. In particular Captain Tom O'Malley DFC AAC, WO1 Ed Macy MC AAC and S/Sgt Keith (Geordie) Armatage MC AAC for their awards. The crews were deeply involved in a rescue operation and S/Sgt Armatage left his Apache under fire and, armed only with his pistol, led the Marines to the wounded man using his Night Vision equipment. We also congratulate Captain Nick Barton AAC for the award of DFC for pressing home an attack on Taliban positions in his Apache which had already been badly damaged by ground fire. Captain Piers Lewis received a Joint Commanders Commendation and WO1 C. Mulhall was Mentioned in Dispatches. Andrew Simkins will write a letter to the Officer Commanding, on the Association's behalf. Prop: D.Walker Sec: C.McLeod
- 13 Any Other Business:
1. It was decided that Maurice Haynes should be awarded travel expenses in connection with his Events Organising. Prop: T. Williams Sec: J. Smith
  2. John Bennett pointed out that there is no 656 Squadron representation on the War memorial in Kuala Lumpur. Andrew Simkins and John Heyes are to look into this matter. Prop: A.Simkins Sec: M.Meaton  
Ray Pett told us he had arranged for the Association Plaque to be placed in Rangoon Cathedral.
  3. A Heartfelt vote of thanks went to John Bennett for his sterling work as General Secretary for the past few years. Prop: A. Simkins Sec: M.Meaton
  4. Andrew Simkins discussed the dedication of a Light at Salisbury Cathedral on Friday 16<sup>th</sup> November. Anyone wishing to attend should contact Cherry Barrons, AAC Association Secretary, HQ Director of Army Aviation, Middle Wallop, Stockbridge, SO20 8DY to make arrangements.
  5. Anyone wishing to attend the Cenotaph parade should contact Andrew Simkins.
  6. John Heyes talked about the Borneo Trip 2008. Anyone wishing to go on this trip should contact John before mid November 2007. Late bookings may be taken, but possibly at a slightly higher cost.

# HONOURS AND AWARDS

On behalf of the Committee and all members of The Association we congratulate the following members of 656 Squadron on their Honours and Awards.

## HONOURS

### **DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS**

Captain T O'Malley AAC

Captain N Barton AAC

### **MILITARY CROSS**

Warrant Officer Class One E. Macy AAC

Staff Sergeant G Armatage AAC

### **MENTIONED IN DISPATCHES**

Warrant Officer Class One C Mulhall AAC

## AWARDS

### **JOINT COMMANDERS COMMENDATION**

Captain Piers Lewis AAC

## Lt Col A J N Simkins OBE



12th July 2007 saw our Association President Andrew Simkins receiving his OBE from HRH Prince Charles, and afterwards he was pictured with his wife Jane, daughter Alice and son Jonathan outside Buckingham Palace.

Congratulations once again Andrew, from everyone in 656 Squadron Association.



## Association Borneo Tour May 2008 *Contact: John Heyes*

I have negotiated a very good price with the travel agent for top class hotels in Borneo and air travel by Malaysian Airlines. The price is about £600.00 cheaper than other travel agents have quoted for exactly the same airline travel and hotels. I think that this is an excellent value for money holiday at **less than £100.00** per day for **two weeks in Borneo**. The hotel in Kota Kinabalu I can vouch for myself, having stayed there recently. The hotel is on the beach and has excellent facilities. It does not have a beach as such although it is by the sea. It has a fitness centre, jet skis, canoes, para gliding and inexpensive boat hire to visit the beautiful nearby islands where there are excellent beaches and seaside restaurants. It is just a few minutes from the airport and the city centre. I cannot vouch for the hotel in Kuching but it is one of a well known international chain which has a very high standard. The Kuching hotel is on the river and about twenty minutes from the city centre. You can look up both hotels on the Internet and see photographs of the accommodation and facilities.

I have not arranged any group outings for the party as there is such a wide range of places to visit and we all seem to have served in different places in Borneo. I have arranged for the travel agents representative to be available every morning between nine and ten in order that he can take bookings for member's excursions on subsequent days. You will see that I have arranged to stay in Kota Kinabalu for longer than in Kuching, the reason being that there are potentially more excursions from Kota Kinabalu than Kuching. For those wishing for lazy days on the beach, Kota Kinabalu has more in the way of facilities than Kuching where the hotel has just a swimming pool and no beach facilities. For those who do not want to do the 'Military Thing', this tour provides for a most pleasant and very economical way to enjoy a holiday in one of the worlds most beautiful and interesting countries.

Mick Little is again organizing a reunion for anyone who served at Kluang. The dates of the reunion are 25th to 28th of May 2008. More details are available on the website [www.helicopter.com.kluang](http://www.helicopter.com.kluang) our travel agent is aware of this reunion and can book you suitable arrangements if you wish to add this reunion onto the end of the Borneo trip. Accommodation in Kluang will be at the Prime City Hotel. See attached itinerary for this part of the tour.

Would you please complete the enclosed form, one per person, for all persons wishing to register interest and return it to me **as soon as possible?** **Completing this form does not obligate you to travel.** Having your information to hand will make my planning for potential numbers much easier. We are aiming for a minimum of forty people travelling and the quotation has been given on that basis. We can take more people if there is sufficient interest. Please do not forget that this tour is **not limited** to Association members only, we will welcome friends and family of Association members who may wish to take advantage of our arrangements and prices.

**Malaysian Airlines are currently offering substantial discounts on a limited number of tickets. These tickets are being sold on a strictly 'first come first served' basis. Those who confirm their intention to travel on our tour first will get the benefit of these discounts. Those confirming after these**

***tickets are sold will have to pay around £150 more for the tour. Please let me know as soon as possible if you wish to take the benefit of these discounted tickets by booking early.***

**The following notes should be read in conjunction with the itinerary.**

1. Because we have negotiated substantial discounts with Malaysian Airlines and the travel agent, we will not be able to change or cancel any arrangements after tickets have been issued. Please ensure that your travel insurance covers this point.
2. If members wish to extend their tour to Peninsular Malaysia and/or Kluang reunion and Singapore they may do so but they must arrange this with the travel agent before issue of tickets. *See 1 above.*
3. Members wishing to travel in business class must arrange this with the travel agent before issue of tickets. *See 1 above.*
4. Those members not travelling from UK to join the tour and wanting the hotels and domestic Malaysian travel part only, should book the hotels and domestic Malaysian travel through the travel agent in order to secure our reduced prices.
5. The travel agents local representatives in Kota Kinabalu and Kuching will be available from 0900hrs to 1000hrs each day to take bookings for day excursions the following day.
6. A 20% booking fee will be required by mid November
7. Closing date for bookings will be around mid November 2007, final date will be confirmed later but it will not be before late November. Later bookings may be accepted but there **may** be an increase in cost for late bookings
8. There will be no increase in the cost of the tour if the airline introduces fuel surcharges after our deposit is paid.
9. Final payment date will be about six weeks before travel and will result in the issue of tickets. *See note 1 above*
10. After receiving your registration form, I will pass your details on to the travel agent who will contact you at a later date to confirm your intention to travel.
11. Excursion prices. All prices are for the day return trips. All arranged tours include lunch. Prices are calculated at the rate £1.00 = RM 7

Cont.....

## **Borneo Tour 2008 Itinerary. 7<sup>th</sup> May 2008 to 21 May 2008**

- 7<sup>th</sup> May. Day 1                    **Dep. LHR 1050hrs to Kota Kinabalu** via Kuala Lumpur.  
( 2 hr 25 min layover in KL)
- 8<sup>th</sup> May. Day 2                    **Arr. Kota Kinabalu. 1210hrs.** Transfer to **Shangri La  
Tanjung Aru. Superior room with breakfast**
- 9<sup>th</sup> May to 15<sup>th</sup> May  
Day 3 to 9                    **At leisure. In Kota Kinabalu**  
**Potential day excursions:-**  
Brunei, Visit 7 Flt  
Labuan Island  
Kudat and the tip of Borneo  
Mount Kinabalu National Park  
Sandakan, Orang Utan rehabilitation centre at Sepilok  
Central market  
State Mosque  
Poring hot springs  
Tunku Abdul Rahman Park. Short boat ride from hotel.  
Steam train ride down the coast to Tapar and Beaufort
- 16<sup>th</sup> May. Day 10                    Transfer from hotel to Airport for flight to Kuching.  
**Dep. 0905hrs 1hr 20min Flight**  
Arr. Kuching transfer to Holiday Inn. Superior room with  
breakfast
- 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> May  
Day 11 to 13                    **At leisure in Kuching**  
**Potential day excursions :-**  
Sarawak Museum  
Longhouse Safari  
Semenggoh Orang Utan Sanctuary  
Sibu  
Kapit  
Belaga
- 20<sup>th</sup> May  
Day 14                    **Dep. Kuching for LHR** via Kuala Lumpur (2hr 15min  
layover in KL)
- 21<sup>st</sup> May  
Day 15                    **Arr. London Heathrow 0525hrs**

## Kluang Reunion - Additional itinerary

20 <sup>th</sup> May Day 14	<b>Depart Kuching for Kuala Lumpur. Transfer to Renaissance Hotel</b>
21 <sup>st</sup> to 24 <sup>th</sup> May Day 15 to 18	At leisure in Kuala Lumpur
25 <sup>th</sup> May Day 19	<b>Transfer from hotel to Kuala Lumpur railway station for trip to Kluang</b> Arrive Kluang, transfer to Prime City Hotel
26 <sup>th</sup> to 27 <sup>th</sup> May visited Day 20 to 21	At leisure in Kluang. Mick Little arrangements to be advised later.
28 <sup>th</sup> May Day 22	<b>Transfer from hotel to Kluang railway station for trip to Kuala Lumpur Airport</b> <b>Dep Kuala Lumpur for LHR    <i>To be advised</i></b>
29 <sup>th</sup> May	<b>Arrive London Heathrow at    <i>To be advised</i></b>

### Price includes:-

Economy flights throughout  
 Round trip transfers airport/hotel/airport at KKB and Kuching  
 Accommodation based on twin room inclusive of tax and service charges  
 Meals as specified ( Breakfast to be included in hotel room rates)  
 UK Air Passenger Duty Tax  
 Malaysia departure Tax  
 Services of Rex Air local agents in KKB and Kuching

### Not included:-

Day excursions as above  
 Meals other than breakfast as above  
 Airport Taxes payable locally on departure  
 Travel insurance  
 Early/late check in charges  
 Personal costs e.g., laundry, drinks etc  
 Tips

Total cost for the above itinerary.	£1099.00 Twin Sharing
Single supplement	£ 300.00
Above itinerary but with business class travel	£3300.00 Twin Sharing
Business class single supplement	£ 350.00
Kluang Reunion supplement	£ 265.00 Twin Sharing

<b>Excursion</b>	<b>Airfare only</b>	<b>Airfare &amp; Arranged tour</b>
<b><u>From Kota Kinabalu</u></b>		
To: Brunei	£75.10	£115.10
To: Labuan	£45.60	£ 81.60
To: Sandakan	£55.60	£ 85.60
To: Tip of Borneo		£ 36.00
To: Mt.Kinabalu National Park & Poring Hot Springs		£ 30.00
To: Central Market & State Mosque		£ 8.00
To: Tunku Abdul Rahman Park (Islands) with BBQ lunch		£ 30.00
<b><u>From Kuching</u></b>		
To: City Tour and Sarawak Museum		£ 13.00
Two days, one night Longhouse Safari. Full Board		£ 78.00
To:Semenggoh Orang Utan sanctuary		£ 13.00
To: Bako National Park		£ 36.00
To: Sarawak Cultural village		£ 19.00
To: Crocodile farm		£ 14.00
Sunset River cruise		£ 17.00
Kuching to Sibul Return Airfare only	£ 54.60	

Excursion prices are quoted at today's £ to MR rate.

## 2007 Reunion at Museum of Army Flying Middle Wallop

The setting splendid, the company auspicious, the food excellent and the atmosphere brilliant. One could run out of superlatives to properly write an appreciation of the night. We have already had a vote of thanks, at the AGM, for Maurice Haynes's efforts in arranging the reunion week-end but it must be reiterated that he had to overcome great difficulties in securing the use of the Museum, getting the band and organising the catering and transport. Once again, we thank him on behalf of all those who attended. Quite how he managed to get the Army Air Corps to put on the splendid show on Saturday to celebrate Andrew Simkins birthday is beyond comprehension, perhaps there was another reason for the event?

The dinner was attended by one hundred and sixty guests who included, The Regimental Colonel AAC, Colonel Bill Sivewright, four recently decorated serving members of the Squadron, Capt Tom O'Malley, DFC, Capt Piers Lewis, Joint Commanders Commendation, WO I Chris Mulhall MID, S/Sgt Geordie Armatage MC and WOs II Tony Ebdon and Paul Hartnett (SSM). In addition we had three Dutch guests, one of whom had attended a dance organised by 'A' Flight of the Squadron in Medan, Indonesia, in 1946 and remembered it well.

After dinner, loyal toasts and a welcome speech by Andrew Simkins, John Bennett was presented with an engraved, cut glass, Claret jug in recognition of his services as Secretary to the Association.

Colonel Bill Sivewright kindly presented the Pingat Jasa Malaysia medal to forty three members of the association on behalf of The Supreme Head of the Federation of Malaysia.

A raffle was held raising over £300 for the Association. Our grateful thanks go to the members who generously provided prizes for the raffle.

The week-end was quite splendid in all of its aspects. A benchmark has been set for future reunions.

*John Heyes*



*Ineke, our Dutch guest, shown here with Andrew Simkins at the AAC 50th Celebrations*

## Pingat Jasa Malaysia Recipients



*List of Recipients at Reunion Dinner (some absentees from this photograph) Lex Barker, REME, Peter Beard, REME, John Bennett, REME Harry Blunden, REME, Peter Brown, REME, Slim Burns, REME, Frank Dagnan, REME, Jack Dandy, REME, Bob Danton, RAF, Ali Davison, REME, George Dempster, REME, Bill Dick, REME, Jim Dickson, RAOC, Roy Drummer, REME, Len Edgecock, REME, Alan Edwards, RA/AAC, Tom Fleming, REME, Alan Flint, REME/AAC, Nev Frost, REME, Will Harrell, RA/AAC, Maurice Haynes, REME, John Heyes, REME, David Hingley, REME, Geordie Hitcham, REME, Ed Kelly, RA, Wilfred Knowles, RA, Colin Macleod, REME, Geoff Mansfield, REME, Tony Markham, AAC, Doug Miller, REME, David Monk, REME, Mike Moran, RA, Peter Needham, REME, Peter North, REME, Lofty Richards, RA, Peter Robinson, RA/AAC, Charles Robinson, REME, Les Rogers, REME, Bill Sanders, REME, Mike Smith, REME, Derek Walker, REME, David Williams, REME*



*George McKie, Douglas Fox and Alan Hay, before dawn, waiting three hours to march off*

George, Douglas and Alan took part in the National Day Celebrations at Mederka Square, Kuala Lumpur on the 31 August 2007 where they received their PJM along with 210 Veterans from UK, Australia and New Zealand.



*The UK Contingent, followed by the Kiwis in tropical whites. George McKie is in the 4th row, wearing REME beret, behind maroon beret and to the right of the blue 656 Sqn beret of Alan Hay. Douglas Fox of 656 Sqn is to the far left in blue beret.*

# MEMBERS' CONTRIBUTIONS

## FLYING FROLICS or KEEP IT STRAIGHT & LEVEL

*by Peter Higgins*

An article 'Farewell to Cyprus' by Major Adrian Palmer in the AAC Newsletter No. 197, reminded me of the many happy and sometimes hair raising times flying as passenger/observer with Auster pilot Captain Mike Grove RA, then with 1910 Recce Flight based at Kermia Camp, Cyprus during the hectic years of anti-EOKA operations in 1956-1958.

Mike Grove was a long standing great personal friend with whom I had previously served in Malaya in the 1<sup>st</sup> Singapore Regiment RA in 1950-1953. Together we had adventures in Malaya, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and Hong Kong.

In early 1954 I attended 101 AOP course at Middle Wallop, but due to bouts of air-sickness which I was unable to overcome, failed to achieve my wings. However, later on I was able to enjoy straight and reasonably level flying in a Piper Tri-Pacer with the Kenya Police Air Wing whilst I was serving in the Kings African Rifles at Nakuru in Kenya.

Then in 1956 I arrived in Cyprus and was reunited with Mike Grove, then flying with 1910 Flight and myself with an independent Gunner Battery on special operations. Naturally, we were both keen to restart our adventures again, some of which certainly broke the flying rules of the day. For example – unauthorised landings, low flying, carrying of illegal passenger and broadcasting (accidentally) our flight conversation of the previous night's party activities on the RAF Air Traffic Control net, to give but a few!

Of course we did not come out of these activities totally unscathed. Mike had to appear before a Group Captain RAF to explain for low flying (over Famagusta beach) and again why he negligently jammed Cyprus Air Traffic frequency with our Saturday night party revelations of who did what to whom. He has also to explain to his Flight Commander how, on one flight, the passenger who I delivered as a female dressed as a male, was revealed as a female on their arrival back at Kermia.

One unauthorised landing we arranged, did not escape from the wrath of an Army Staff ranking officer. If I knew that Mike was to be flying in my area of operation, I would contact him by radio and if it was at all possible, I would request a pick up to return me to Kermia as my own HQ was not far from the strip. This would save me from a longer and often more hazardous journey by road. I would recce a suitable landing site, often a straight road and on this particular occasion, on the main road connecting Nicosia to the Karpas peninsula just NE of Ayios Theodoros.

Having positioned my vehicle and escort to control any road traffic, I waited for Mike's imminent arrival. Unfortunately, on this occasion, it coincided with the arrival of Senior Officer and party. Asking me 'What the hell is going on here'? I explained that I was waiting for the arrival of an Auster which had been arranged to pick me up. Before I was drawn into what could be difficult and

unsubstantiated reasons, Mike landed. I hastily disengaged myself from SOP and rapidly made off to climb into the Auster with the now angry SO's comments of 'How in hell does a mere Captain get this sort of service whilst I'm often denied'?

Needless to say, there were a few ruffled feathers around to smooth after this, but fortunately it was explained away by sympathetic Commanding Officers, I believe using one's initiative was a factor! However, all these misdemeanours did not leave Mike without some sanctions although they did not curtail his flying.

In fact, it did not impede him from eventually becoming Defence Attaché to the British Embassy in Tokyo. Unfortunately, he contracted motor neurone disease and died in 1996, not very long after we had enjoyed an Army Air Corps Association dinner at Wattisham.

As for myself, after these Cyprus adventures, in 1964 I was re-established with the Army Air Corps on being appointed Adjutant of 656 Squadron AAC in Kluang, Malaysia, then Staff Captain Air with HQ Wing AAC in Borneo and Singapore. Finally retiring in 1972 from 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment RHA in Colchester.

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## **Inverted Auster Cyprus 1963/64?**



*Oops! Photo: Anon*

## 'C' Flight - Bandung Blarney - A Section Pilots memory

*by Russell Matthews*

1945, with the surrender of the Japanese and Malaya re-occupied after Ex Zipper, with allied POW's and civilian internees to release and repatriate and with increasing unrest in the former Dutch colonies of Java and Sumatra, the Squadron stood poised for further adventures in the Far East.

'A' Flight, in November, first to form and determined to stay, many from Squadron HQ, set off with units of 26 Indian Division to Surabaya on the far east part of Java. There they were soon engaged in a small but hectic war with Indonesian guerrillas.

'B' Flight moved to Sahang on the North coast, Squadron HQ to Batavia (Kemajoram Airfield) with its mess in a Dutch coloured style house in the suburbs of the city.

In January 'C' Flight moved up on the central massif at 3000 feet to the delightful hill station of Bandung (Andir Airfield). Because of the danger on the roads, the Dutch RAPWI Organisation referred to almost total air evacuation – Andir was a busy place. The airfield just two miles out of Bandung had been the most up to date pre-war Dutch Air force base in the Pacific. The runway was undamaged and the buildings virtually intact. The Flight together with a small RAF Servicing and Despatch unit settled in comfortably, the only other large unit being a battalion worth of Japanese POW's.

*Andir Airfield*

*'C' Flight area*



*We used the  
taxi track as  
the strip*



On 15<sup>th</sup> April, after a short period with Squadron HQ, I flew up to Andir with Major Frank McMath, the Squadron CO to join 'C' Flight, my uniform tin trunk and valise travelling up in the daily Dakota with him. The flight was not a happy one with morale low; perhaps it was a feeling of anti-climax after the hectic war years and as many had been overseas a long time were counting the days to

demobilisation. The National Service replacements were not keen to be so far away from 'blighty'. There was a distinct lack of female company, mail took a long time to arrive and the worst thing of all was an acute shortage of beer.

Things were soon to alter with the Indonesians becoming more aggressive against the road supply convoys from Batavia. Flight Commanders changed with Roy Bromwich from 'A' Flight taking over. The Indonesians soon realised that by halting the head of the supply column with fallen trees and there being no air threat, the following vehicles closed up head to tail – a sitting target! They posted snipers a vehicle length apart, in the jungle edged roadside and as the 3 tonners stopped they stepped out and at point blank range shot the drivers in their seats, then melted back into to the jungle. Mike Cabbage became very much involved in one such convoy episode. He managed to engage fleeting targets with artillery fire and then had virtually a forced landing on the return to Andir with fuel running low, low clouds and poor visibility.

My log book shows that on 1<sup>st</sup> May I managed to gets guns to fire in support of a patrol just North of Bandung, to clear a kampong occupied by insurgents. During a previous patrol action an Indian infantryman was seriously wounded but the daily Dakota had already left for Batavia so it was up to us to air-lift him, not an easy job for an Auster. First, the observers seat had to be removed to allow the medical orderly to kneel behind the pilot holding the saline drip, then out went the wireless set to allow the stretcher in sideways through the removed starboard door and finally for the poor man to end up with his head under the dashboard and his feet strapped to an airframe longeron I flew him down to Batavia, the trip taking an hour and for the whole flight I was conscious of the cargo, bewildered eyes watching my every movement. I doubt if he had ever been in an aircraft before. Unfortunately, there is a sad ending as my log has a short note – 'He died, in the Dakota to Singapore'

An Officers' club opened and proudly announced a weekly dance night. Dutch ladies, awaiting home flights, gallantly found or made up suitable evening attire and these evenings were soon a great social success. Not being a twinkle toed Fred Astaire, I was not a dancing man so usually frequented the bar. However, it was not long before a valiant young lady offered to teach me to dance. Little did she realise the enormity of the task. I was not an adept pupil and I certainly would not get an 'A' grading. I did scrape through with achieving -'straight and level – just adequate – turns – more dual needed'. In fairness I must add that to learn the basic steps in the small mess ante-room, with only a 78 wind-up gramophone and with a limited number of scratched records including one by Fats Waller at his piano playing " Your feet too big" I was at a slight disadvantage.

Solving the beer problem took a little longer. During my excursions to the small strip at Buitenzog I made contact with the CO and 2I/C of that 6/8th Punjab Regiment. 6/8<sup>th</sup> were predominantly a Mohammadan regiment so I tentatively enquired if they had any spare beer in their mess? To my delight the reply was 'Yes, old boy, how much do you want?' 'Enough to fill my Auster' was my immediate reply. The 2 I/C reappeared with a Jeep trailer load of sealed cardboard boxes. Now the task was to see how much I could load, out went the

observer's seat and the 22 wireless set and my log book entry for 16<sup>th</sup> May shows 'Beer 24 dozen'

With these boxes securely strapped I started up pointing down the strip. Major Roberts appeared at the aircraft door with the words, "Good luck, if you don't make it off the strip and go into the trees, I promise to get you out first" With a wave and at full power, tail up, brakes off, I went down the strip. Airborne, down the valley, skirting the palm trees and then a slow climb to gain height over the Panjak Pass. At 4000 feet I noticed the smell of beer and to my horror I realised that with the warmth in the 'greenhouse' cockpit and the altitude the beer was leaking. Over the pass and it was windows open, down to tree top level and a scoot back to Andir. All was not lost, the tin cans were intact but some of the dumpy bottles of Dow's Canadian with crimped caps had leaked. We restocked the flight canteen.

The Auster beer run became a popular sortie – but no more Dow's. Now, with the fridge replenished the officers decided to clean up a three bladed Zero fighter propeller, paint it with the words "The Get Some Inn" and mount it outside the mess. To our surprise, two days later a huge, beautifully varnished wood propeller appeared outside the Airmens' Mess with gleaming words in gold "The Got – a –Lot Inn" – touché, fifteen - love to the Airmen and Gunners!

Next follows hangar badminton – here the officers felt sure of success. In the mini Davis Cup tournament the officers did scrape home, with three matches to two – fifteen all!

Now for football. This airfield had large areas of grass but it was two feet high. The answer – 'Could the Japanese help?' We explained carefully to the immaculately dressed Japanese liaison officer exactly what we wanted with detailed drawings and no time limits. With a polite grin, a bow and the words 'All possible, will speak with the Colonel' he left, only to reappear half an hour later. 'Colonel says, pleased to make football field today. Afternoon.' Was the answer. Snack lunch over, we went out to the proposed site and there drawn up was half the battalion. Each man a yard apart and each armed with a stick with his jack-knife tied on the end. On the command 'Go' they moved forward whirling their home made scythes. More men followed with bags of powdered chalk, more men to dig the goal post holes, then finally the goal posts. All that was left to do was for our fitters to nail on the camouflage nets. 'Hey, Presto' a new Wembley in four hours.

The stage was now set for the show down – Officers and NCOs' versus Airmen and Gunners. The match proved to be a great success, marred by one ghastly incident. The culprit was myself. I had been dragooned, if that's the right word, as 'inside left' my background was 'rugby' my 'soccer' knowledge was sketchy. I was under the impression that the object of the game was to get the ball into the opponents net, so with the first corner kick, when the goalkeeper stood in the goalmouth with the ball clasped to his chest – why should he be sacrosanct? I tackled him in true rugby style and put him and the ball in the net!

'GOAL!' – but oh dear! No. Whistle - and I was given a severe reprimand by the neutral referee. Before I could say a word one of the airmen interrupted – 'It's OK Ref, he's one of our officers', what he really meant to say was – 'Poor chap, he doesn't know any better, let him off ". 'Sorry Sir, please don't do that again –

Play on' Service decorum must always be maintained. Needless to say, the savage BOR's (British Other Ranks) won handsomely. Thirty – fifteen! To secure parity the officers should have laid a challenge for mixed, indoor hang gliding!

As a side line, let me tell you of the sad tale or should I say 'tail' of Henrietta. She was a rather scraggy red hen, nobody could tell how she appeared, she was just there, liked us and promptly took over. She clucked and scratched round the building walls, complete free entry and exit. Her boldness was her un-doing. One of the officers, I cannot recall who, flicked the stub end of his cigarette out of the bedroom window during the afternoon siesta. Where should it land but in Henrietta's tail feathers. Soon she was a great squawking and shouting and rushing of feet. There she was in great distress rushing past 'trailing smoke'. Cookie cornered her and dowsed her with a bucket of water, but her burns were too severe. Strange, but that evening for dinner, Cookie produced roast chicken with a decided blackened Pope's nose.

On 13<sup>th</sup> June Mike Cabbage and I were briefed to influence the 'hearts and minds' of surrounding native inhabitants in case they had been tainted by Indo Nationalism, communism or any other 'ism'. Our task was to scatter leaflets over the area north of the town. These were typed on cheap paper in European script but in the local language. What was said or what they were supposed to do remains a mystery. The sortie is recorded as 'Indo Daily mail drop' The Auster was indeed a versatile machine.

'All good things must come to an end' and so it proved for me. My halcyon days in Bandung were over and on 15<sup>th</sup> June, on the early morning squadron wireless link came the signal from major 'Warby' Warburton, who had recently returned to the squadron and taken over as CO, to say that RHM was to report to Batavia as soon as possible complete with kit! The words 'All kit' had a particular significance as they referred to include 'Jock' my recently acquired English white bull terrier. I quickly packed, caught the Dakota milk run and arrived at Kemajoram that afternoon, Warby was there to meet me. 'I want you to go to Medan, 'A' Flight are there now, take over when John Baker goes on demobilisation and 'Look after Sumatra!' With the innocence of youth but instilled with military discipline, all I could reply was 'Yes Sir!' With this command ringing in my ears, this 23 years old was substantive captain, substantive regular lieutenant with no idea of the sheer geographical immensity of Sumatra, sauntered off to RAF Flying Control like some wandering Romany with his lercher, to hitch hike a lift to a place he had only just heard about for the first time.

'A' Flights 'Medan Muses' later...

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*"If the wings are travelling faster than the fuselage, it's probably a helicopter -- and therefore, unsafe." Anon*

# SINGLE PERSON'S RE-VISIT TO MALAYA

*by Barry Smith*

As one of those who served and suffered (Regulation Haircuts), back in 1956-'57-'58 I find I would like to go back now and have a look at where one served as a 'Tourist' in uniform, based at Noble Field in Kuala Lumpur.

I popped down to Malaysia House, directly opposite Trafalgar Square and asked for all the usual Tourist Information concerning Malaysia. When I consulted the maps of Kuala Lumpur I did not see a single name I recognised, and even if I had, I must have forgotten it anyway, plus the fact it is now fifty years on and things do certainly change.



The maps naturally, now have all their local names: but I had a belief, that names like Mountbatten Road may have been retained. I remember this road very well as it had a Robinson's Store (now only found in Singapore), plus the jewellers' I obtained my very first possession: an Omega Constellation Watch.

I was totally confused. Still, that is not surprising as I am now an 'Old Age Pensioner' and being confused comes with the territory. Thinking long and hard how and where I could overcome this? I then remembered that APIS or the Army Photographic Interpretation Service had an office in GHQ Malaya Command, where I used to get my developing and printing done, until one of the RAF lads at Noble Field converted the battery Store and Re-charging shed into a darkroom. Though I did find out, while visiting the APIS Offices in 1957, they were in the process of filming the whole of Kuala Lumpur for a complete and up to date survey for War Office and Air Ministry.

At least, by obtaining a copy of this, I could cross reference the latest maps as supplied by the Tourist Office. After several 'phone calls, it transpired, the Royal Geographic Society, at 1, Kensington Gore, London SW7 2AR, Tel: 0207 591 3000 had a copy. If anyone is thinking of following in my footsteps and looking for themselves, ask for the Foyle reading room. This is located in the basement.

If there is any interest for members wanting to obtain a copy for themselves, then they have to request maps GSGS 4476 Kuala Lumpur Sheet 1. (This has noble Field on it) and Sheet 2, this more or less takes in the whole area of Kuala Lumpur of 1957.

The two maps have all the names that we all remember, Rifle Range Road, Alexandra Road, which we all used to get to our lines from the main road, further on was Western Avenue which led to the Family Quarters, or we'd go down Wade Road to the swimming pool or the NAAFI. I recall a request from one of our

members in Taiping, who was looking for information relating to the time he was there; it could be that the Royal Geographical Society may have the maps for the period he is researching?

In my case, as I have a son working and living in Singapore, I asked for the map of the middle of Singapore. It turns out it is the 1935 issue and re-issued in January 1944, ready for the invasion of Singapore. I found that this was good enough for me, as it gave me the location of Tanglin Barracks, which is not shown on the latest maps of Singapore, though all the road names remain the same, unlike Malaysia.

The cost of these maps, if anyone should be interested, is £10.00 each plus P & P.

For anyone else like myself, who is going out to see their family and do not want to do the group tour, Air Asia X, is shortly (or by the time you read this), doing a Ryan Air for a return ticket to Kuala Lumpur for about £200.00. Ring: 00 60 (3) 8775 4000

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### 3 Flight 'Air Crew' Borneo 1966



*Photo: Anon*



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## Kluang, 1962 – a youngster’s perspective

by Mark Meaton

I was under 3 years old when first ‘posted’ to Kluang. My brother Simon was only 6 months old, and therefore remembers little of our 2 years there; but I was just old enough to be able to remember quite a lot.



*Simon and Mark Meaton*

Our father, Red Meaton, had arrived for his second tour of Malaya, the first being in 1952, at the start of The Emergency, but I was too young to appreciate the actual circumstances – for me, it was all one big adventure.

Talking to those who served in Malaya at that time, it’s clear that adult memories are made up of names and faces. For a child at that time however, the memories that remain to this day are confined to the small world that made up the garden and the jungle – sights, smells, colours, creepy-crawlies and the hot weather.

First, the ability to wear hardly any clothes all day was a revelation. This was clearly *not* Hampshire, and no longer was I required to wrap up in four layers of clothing just to play in the garden – in fact, I soon took to running around stark naked in the mid-day sun, babbling incoherently but quite

happily to myself (I was clearly pilot material).

The garden itself was nothing like any English garden I had seen before – English gardens did not have storm drains big enough to swallow up a 3-year old, his peddle car and all his other toys with plenty of room to spare. I used to spend ages staring at the drains in the middle of rainstorms, wondering where all the water went. So I decided to float something down the drain when it was full, and see where it ended up.

The most obvious article was one of Mother’s shoes, so off it went, poked carefully through the fence; it bobbed up and down for all of a second or two before sinking for ever. But it didn’t matter; 3-year olds don’t feel guilt. My Mother did not realise what had happened until I recalled the adventure some years later; I often wonder where that shoe ended up.

Who could forget the pleasure of standing under the run-off from a roof during a heavy downpour? The distinctive smell of rain in the heat of a Far-Eastern country is still the first thing I’ve noticed on the rare occasions I’ve been lucky enough to return.

Strangely enough, the other smell that remains after all these years is that distinctive, musty pong of parachute silk and old-fashioned canvas tent material – we spent many fun-filled hours putting up tents, hanging hammocks and sleeping off large lunches under awnings (much like the rest of the Squadron, so I'm told...)

Then there were the strange and wonderful insects unknown to us in the UK, such as chit-chats that could walk across the ceiling over my bed – Middle Wallop never had any of those, as far as I could remember. There were enough lizards, snakes, huge ants and slugs to keep a fascinated child happy all day.

But most of all, there were hornets - to this day, I have a small indentation on my cheek, the legacy of a hornet's sting I received 43 years ago. I remember the actual moment it stung me, and then doing a couple of circuits around the house, screaming my head off in pain and fright, being chased by Mother and our amah. The picture I retain in my mind is similar to an early version of a Benny Hill chase. (On our return to the UK, this story naturally became more and more elaborate each time I retold it, and eventually I was telling my wide-eyed school friends that hornets in Malaya had wingspans to rival a bat's.)

The tropical weather also allowed extended periods of unsupervised play in the garden. I discovered a small hand-axe and chopping block, but unfortunately my brother tried to take a close look at the same time I swung the axe. The result was only a glancing blow, but produced enough blood and screaming to wake the whole neighbourhood. I am reliably informed (although I do not remember the event) that my brother repaid the compliment some time later with a vacuum cleaner hose. Happy days.

More impressive still was the jungle – a holiday weekend spent walking in the Cameron Highlands is recorded in several photographs that I still have, and I can remember this trip as if it were only a few years ago. As we rounded a corner in the path we were treated to every boy's dream – a tree with bars of chocolate hanging from it.

However, my suspicious mind was confused, because these bars of chocolate were hanging by gleaming white sewing thread, and were wrapped in foil and blue paper – something just didn't quite add up, but I couldn't quite put my finger on it. Even at that age, I was aware that banana and coconut trees looked to be the genuine article, but the chocolate tree was just too good to be true. But I kept quiet, and didn't let on – stuffing my face seemed the polite thing to do.

Other memories from such an impressionable age still remain vivid today; for example, I can always fall asleep in minutes if there is a ceiling fan clunking away rhythmically. Plus, years before Evian made it trendy I was helping to boil water on a daily basis, and refrigerating it in glass bottles. Ice-cold bottled water from the fridge still reminds me of Kluang.



*Simon ready to fly*

Kluang was also the scene of the first Birthday party of which I have memories - held outside in the garden, under awnings. The local knife-sharpener parked his push-bike up against the gate to laugh hysterically at a mad English boy driving around the garden in his new peddle car, wearing a smart new t-shirt and a cowboy hat. You didn't see that every day in Kluang, except perhaps in the Sergeants' Mess.



*Simon on patrol*

Another strong impression was another visitor to the gate – my very first sight of the smartest, friendliest (and shortest) soldier I'd ever seen – a Gurkha. They had been tasked with patrolling around Sunrise Park at night, following some worrying activity from the Communists.

This started a lifelong respect for the Gurkhas – Red always used to say "If you're ever in a tight spot, you'll be ok if you have the Gurkhas with you" (he always paused before adding "Or any Scottish regiment").

Given the exciting experience Malaya offered a young child, it's easy to understand why it did not register with me at

the time that Father was often away for weeks on end, and on one occasion for a two month stretch, in Borneo.

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In 2006 I returned to Kluang for the first time in 42 years, with various Association members and their relatives. I went with mixed emotions – the 3-year old still inside me was excited at the thought of returning to my earliest memories, but it was tempered by an adult's appreciation of what it was all really about, something to which I was thankfully oblivious at the time of my Great Adventure.

All adventures have to come to an end sometime though, and one family story sums up everything about that time for me. The reaction of my Brother on his return to the UK, still aged only 3, struggling to come to terms with the idea of snow and sub-zero temperatures for the first time, was to announce tearfully that he wanted to go home – to Sunrise Park, Kluang.

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*"When one engine fails on a twin-engine airplane, you always have enough power left to get you to the scene of the crash." Anon*

## Malaya, 1962 - an Army wife's perspective

*by Diane Haynes*



*Christmas party 1963 (me on the left)*

Just a self indulgent female look at youth at the end of Empire days.

At eighteen, nearly nineteen years old, I was on my way to Malaya, I can still remember the excitement, but my poor parents thought they would never see me again and all credit to them, I didn't know this until many years later.

I was six months pregnant, (we were very brave in those days or foolish and unquestioning.) We flew from Stanstead on a Bristol Britannia, landing en route in Istanbul then on to Bombay, just to add to the culture shock, finally arriving at Singapore.



*Kluang floods 1962*

We were taken to a camp to rest, it all seems very surreal now, my legs were like tree trunks and I could hardly hear a thing due to the noise of the propeller aircraft, it was weeks before my hearing fully returned.

Singapore railway station was a hive of noise and activity, the intermittent train ride to Kuala Lumpur was very eventful due to cockroaches scuttling everywhere, *not* my best nights sleep!

Kuala Lumpur was a wide eyed experience. After a while we had a flat in Gombak flats, an Amah, (every woman's dream) but I was very lonely.

Our daughter was born in Kinrara Hospital, I will never forget the care I received and being able to sit in the tropical gardens.



*Family complete, myself and our three children 1969*

Maurice, my husband, was posted to Kluang and there, we acquired an old Riley car. Part of the floor on the passenger side was missing so, in monsoon season I had to put my feet on the dashboard to avoid getting soaked through!

Kluang was lovely and a wonderful place for children to grow up. We were lucky enough to get a second tour in 1968 - 1970 which was pretty rare. It was the best experience which we dedicated to saving for the future in a wonderful warm and happy place. We lived in Sunrise Park, Kluang and

made many friends, our son was born while we were there.

I have never, since, swum, played whist, chatted and played with the children ALL day, every day. Happy days!

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*Basic Flying Rules: "Try to stay in the middle of the air. Do not go near the edges of it. The edges of the air can be recognized by the appearance of ground, buildings, sea, trees and interstellar space. It is much more difficult to fly there."*

Anon

# France and Maquis Bernard

*by John Bennett*

I live in a beautiful area in France called the Morvan Natural Park. This is in the northern part of Burgundy and covers an area of some 3000Km<sup>2</sup>. The average height is 550m with the tallest peak of 901m, this gives the region a mini climate which is not too dissimilar to UK, maybe very slightly warmer in summer and invariably with a foot or more of snows in the winter. Prior to moving here the countryside was described as the Lake District but without the mountains! We are not sun lovers or beach buddies so this suits us very nicely thanks! The hills are very wooded mainly with Pine although new planting should be deciduous trees. Sheep and cattle farming goes on where there is suitable land, and a big industry is growing Christmas trees!

The towns and villages are quite a distance apart, whilst the largest towns of Beaune, Dijon, Le Cruseot and Chalon sur Saône are over an hour drive away. Our nearest town of any size is Autun, which is a splendid Roman town with a superb Cathedral. There are many Roman artefacts here including an amphitheatre which is used every year to re-enact Roman ceremonies! The Roman walls are not encased behind wire fences!

The Morvan region was also a strong Maquis (French Resistance) area during WW2 and was supported by the S.A.S. On top of a hill outside Montsauche les Settons, over a kilometre from the road and into the woods lies a small well kept graveyard. This is at the place that was used by the largest of the local groups, Maquis Bernard. The small area is fenced off and has been dedicated as a church, and you will notice from the photos that they have not removed the trees; this gives a very cathedral like atmosphere to it as they curve overhead.

There are five graves to the SAS at the rear and seven at the front, to an

R.A.F. Aircrew which crashed locally. Between them are the Marquis ones, all just mounds of moss covered earth with a wooden cross bearing the name. On the first Sunday of September each year local dignitaries, residents and visitors gather for a memorial service to the Maquis, S.A.S., and R.A.F. graves. The weather was fine and mostly sunny, giving a dappled effect to the graves as the sun filtered



through the trees. At the end of the ceremony the sun shone brilliantly and the central memorial with the wreaths was spotlighted with the surroundings in shade, giving an entrhralling effect.

This year there were about a dozen British people amongst well over 150 people attending! We were told that usually representatives of the S.A.S. attend and, whilst they are in this area at present I did not see any, perhaps they were at another ceremony. Last year they were due to parachute in but at the last moment the aircraft was needed for an active theatre, so they came by road! At the conclusion of the ceremony all attendees were invited to partake of drinks and nibbles at the Sal des Fêtes in Montsauche, whilst people who had reserved places followed this taking a meal inside.



*John with friends at the graveyard*

This was the first time Joyce and I had attended not being aware of the occasion. We are so impressed that we decided it would now be an annual event to attend, and also to try to raise funds for the Amicale Des Anciens Du Maquis Bernard, which is similar to a local branch of the British Legion.

Joyce and I are enjoying our new lifestyle here, and are trying to integrate with the locals. I am having the utmost difficulty in trying to learn the language so it's a good job Joyce has an excellent vocabulary! Some of the perks of being here are that the 'council tax' is about one half of what we paid in UK for a similar size home 3 years ago, No road tax and slightly lower insurance, 40% less in income tax in the French system, a far superior health service, and so many other things. The Army pension can be tax free if your UK income is low enough, with this year's pension increase my tax is now £24pa! Wicked!!

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## ASSOCIATION SHOP



### 656 Squadron Association Calendar 2008

#### “David Shepherd Paintings”

To place an order for this Calendar, please contact:

John or Sylvia Heyes  
*Contact details can be found on Page 44*

Calendars cost: £ 8.00 each plus postage at cost.



## 656 Squadron Association Calendar 2008

### “Austers”

To place an order for this Calendar, please contact:

John or Sylvia Heyes  
*Contact details can be found on Page 44*

Calendars cost: £ 8.00 each plus postage at cost.

## ASSOCIATION SHOP Cont.



Fine Bone China Mugs @ £ 6.00 \*

Blazer badges

Gold Wire /656 Sqn @ £10.00 \*

Gold Wire/AAC @ £10.00 \*

Woven/656 Sqn @ £ 5.00 \*



Enamel Lapel Badges @ £ 3.00 \*

Association Tie @ £10.00 \*



Boxed Paperweights depicting various aviation subjects @ £ 5.00 \*

*List available upon request*

## BOOKS

'Fire by Order'

by Ted Maslen-Jones

@ £ 19.95\*

'Tails of the Forties'

Compiled by John Havers & Peter Campbell

@ £10.00\*

## DVD

Historical films covering the period 1948 - 1960 during the Emergency in Malaya. First shown on Malaysian TV3 in 2006, it runs to eight episodes. It begins with the background of the start of the MCP before WW2, and runs through until the victory parade in 1960 in Kuala Lumpur. There are many historical and recent interviews with people in government, military and in civilian life. There is newsreel film showing the life and struggles of the time, relocation of squatters, action in the jungle, etc. It is naturally biased mainly on the Malaysian side and the Malay Police, but nevertheless it covers the Commonwealth forces as well and is very informative.



@ £ 8.00\*

\* Postage on all items at cost.

Contact: John or Sylvia Heyes *details on page 44*

# NOTICES

## Donations

The Committee would like to thank all those who generously donated to the Christmas parcel fund, which helped us send a small token of appreciation to every member of the Squadron on operations last year.

The donations covered the expenses incurred, and the Committee will raise the suggestion at this year's AGM that we continue such a scheme when the Squadron is away from home on operations during Christmas.

The donations received were £381.21, and the costs £364.31.

A simple breakdown of donations shows that the committee members personally donated £150, and others £231.21, which in turn breaks down to the following:

£50.00 x 2 donations, making a total of £100.00

£25.00 x 1 donation

£20.00 x 4 donations, making a total of £80.00

£10.00 x 1 donation

£16.21 x 1 donation (excess from a shop invoice, rounded up for the fund)

*Mark Meaton, Treasurer*

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The Committee would also like to thank the Army Air Corps Association for their generous donation of £250.00 towards the Re-union Celebrations held this year at the Museum of Army Flying, Middle Wallop.

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## Pingat Jasa Malaysia

Those members who attended the reunion dinner and were eligible for the award of the PJM were presented with their medals on the night by the AAC Regimental Colonel, Lt Col W Sivewright.

I know that some other members have already received their medals, having applied through the Malaya and Borneo Veterans Association. We now have the medals for members who are entitled and will be posting them out in the near future.

***Would all members who are entitled to the medal and have applied through our Association, but have not yet received their medals, please contact me to reconfirm their application by 1st November 2007.*** A simple note to accompany the cheque as below will suffice. The medals and their attendant certificates, will then be posted. Due to the high cost of recorded delivery postage and packaging, we are obliged to ask members to accompany their application with a cheque for £3.00, payable to 656 Squadron Association to cover this cost.

Please note. The entitlement to the medal is only for service personnel who served in Malaya/Malaysia between 31st August 1957 and 12<sup>th</sup> August 1966 and in Singapore between 31st August 1957 and 9th August 1965

*John Heyes*

## NEW MEMBERS

Col (Ret) D.W. Fox	AAC	Joined June 2007
Mr. S. Meaton	Associate	Joined July 2007
Mrs. D. Haynes	Associate	Joined July 2007
Mr. T. Lee	AAC	Joined July 2007
Mrs. B. Young	Associate	Joined July 2007
Mr. J. Askew	RAF	Joined July 2007
Mr. N. Hayden	AAC	Joined Aug. 2007
Mr. J. Rimmer	REME	Joined Aug. 2007
Mr. D. Maybury	REME	Joined Aug. 2007
Mr. R. Morrall	RLC/RAOC	Joined Aug. 2007
Mr. P. Knight	RN	Joined Aug. 2007
Mr. K. Cawley	REME	Joined Sept 2007
Mr. P. Southgate	AAC	Joined Sept 2007
WO2 A. Ebdon	AAC	Joined Sept 2007
Mr. M. Barnikel	REME	Joined Sept 2007
Mr. I. Patterson	AAC	Joined Sept 2007

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## DEATHS

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

Mr. R.B. Palmer	Associate	Died Dec. 2006
Mr. F.J. Brock	RAOC	Died Jan. 2007
Capt. I.R.L. Lamont	RA	Died July 2007
Mr. H. Beresford	REME	Died Aug. 2007
Col. B. Bradbrook OBE	RCT	Died Aug. 2007

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