

**THE
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**656 SQUADRON ASSOCIATION
JOURNAL
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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

I reflect on a highly successful 2007 for the Association and Squadron. It is with great pride that we continue to hear of the tenacity and courage of the Squadron personnel, as they continue to serve with distinction in Afghanistan. Here is wishing them continued success, and a safe return home as they each complete their respective tour of operational duty.

As an Association we continue to grow and develop. Our continued success depends, in large measure, on our close relationship with the Squadron in Wattisham. Captain Piers Lewis has been our Liaison Officer for the past few years. This has been one of the busiest operational periods for the Squadron, when he has been deployed to Afghanistan on three separate occasions. Yet, throughout, Piers has maintained close contact and proved an excellent ambassador for the Squadron and the Army Air Corps. He is due to be posted from the Squadron at the end of January. I therefore extend our grateful thanks, and wish him every success in the future.

While 2007 was busy for the Association, I sense that 2008 will be equally varied. We are currently finalising the details of our May Borneo Trip, which should be most rewarding. I am also pleased to report that OC 656 Squadron has kindly agreed to host our Reunion this year. Thus we have included details of the event, to be held at Wattisham, near Ipswich, on Saturday 28 June. This should prove a fascinating and privileged insight into life in an operational Apache Attack Helicopter unit.

Our Committee met in October at the National Memorial Arboretum, near Alrewas, Staffordshire. Now that the Armed Forces Memorial has been unveiled on the site, by Her Majesty The Queen, it is acting as a magnet for service personnel, veterans and families. I commend it to you all. The location is now used on Remembrance Sunday, as an alternative to the Cenotaph Parade. I wonder whether there are members and families who would wish to join an Association Contingent this coming Sunday 9 November? If you wish to attend please let us know and we will make the arrangements. We will, naturally, form a Contingent in London again this year, where we continue to receive excellent BBC coverage, which is remarkable for such a small organisation.

I wish you all a successful and contented 2008, and look forward to meeting up with as many of you as possible.

Andrew Simkins

OC'S REPORT

This has been another unique period in the Squadron's history, the highlight of which has been establishing ourselves in 4 Regt AAC at Wattisham Airfield as part of the AH 'Super-Base'. After our move from Dishforth we saw the Squadron strength plummet from 98 personnel to only 37 as individuals were posted to the other Squadrons to ensure full manning was achieved in time for their pre deployment training (664 Sqn) and Conversion To Role (654 Sqn). I am pleased to say that as I write this we are now back to our full strength as we start what will be our training year prior to deploying again on Op HERRICK in Jan '09. The last four months could be summarised in three distinct periods; our support to 3 Regt AAC with our pilots deploying on Op HERRICK, a period of steady state (whatever that is supposed to be?) and our preparation for the forthcoming CTR.

Beginning in August but running throughout the period up to November we have been backfilling 3 Regt AAC's commitment to Op HERRICK with a Flight of 4 AH pilots on month long rotations. The shortage of pilots available in 3 Regt AAC was brought on by the complications of deploying the aircraft in May '06 whilst still trying to fully grow the capability and with a training system that can only produce a given number of trained pilots every six months. Whilst in tour interval harmony terms deploying between your own Sqn tours cannot be seen as a good thing, everyone involved including myself considered it relatively painless. It was extremely interesting to see just how much the theatre has changed in only six months. Whilst there were many situations where we found ourselves back in the thick of fighting, the frequency was certainly down from our previous tours. Significantly it was an almost entirely 656 Sqn Flt that flew on the longest range vehicle intercept to date. At the end of an already long duty day the Flt was tasked at short notice to support an SF Operation that resulted in a successful vehicle intercept capturing key enemy personnel and equipment. One of the upshots from these deployments meant that the aircrew have been able to remain current and conversant with the latest goings on in theatre where otherwise we would have risked going un-current in the resource constrained environment we currently find ourselves in.

October was another busy period for the Sqn. We were chosen once again to support the Land Combat Power Demonstration (Staff College Demo to you and me) by live firing over one thousand 30mm Target Practice rounds in a Role Demonstration and as part of a Combined Arms Firepower Demonstration. Judging by the amount of video clips that have since appeared on *Youtube* it was a resounding success as well as being some invaluable live fire training. Throughout the flying demonstration the groundcrew manned a superb static demonstration of an AH FARP. Some of the soldiers only weeks out of basic training did an excellent job in answering some very tricky questions from some very senior officers.

After our time on Salisbury Plain we moved to join the rest of the Regiment at Otterburn on Exercise VOLKERS CHALLENGE, aimed predominantly at completing mandatory annual training serials and individual

live firing on the ground. We took the opportunity to complete further aircraft live fire training in which we were permitted to use the moving target facility ...right up to the point that we destroyed it with 30mm! In conjunction with our own live firing we trained 30 new Fire Support Team personnel from 7 RHA, in the art of calling in AH for Close Combat Attack (CCA). In addition to day and night FARP training, the groundcrew conducted some excellent Signals training completing the Sqn's conversion to BOWMAN, the British Army's new communications suite. Flying from Otterburn also allowed us to use the excellent Electronic Warfare (EW) Ranges at Spadeadam. Here we were able to conduct Day and Night Offensive EW training sorties that allowed the crews to finally gain their AH Combat Ready (CR) status. Crews now have a Combat Ready status log book that allows them to record the different training serials required to gain the CR status, the majority of which are completed on CTR with the award of Limited Combat Ready (LCR). The irony is that due to timing many crews will deploy to Afghanistan before gaining full CR status, though the outstanding disciplines will not be required in that theatre.

November and December could be summarised as a period of centralisation at Wattisham Airfield and as the time in which we began the final preparation as a Sqn to become fully established and trained in order to start CTR in January. As part of the collocation of all AH at Wattisham a number of other establishments have become centralised. The movement and start of all aircraft are now conducted by a Station Airfield Troop (SAT) made up of groundcrew from across the two regiments. The pre flight planning using the Mission Planning Stations (MPS), authorisation and briefing are conducted in a central briefing facility manned again by groundcrew from across the two regiments. REME support is no longer conducted in Sqns but three hangars known as Flight Line, Maintenance 1 and Maintenance 2. The affiliated Sqn's Fitter Sections have now been taken away into Red, Yellow and Gold sections that rotate through each of the hangars on a three month rotation. Finally the flying programme itself is now centrally run for the station for which the crews bid for hours weeks in advance. Whilst I cannot say that this has helped Sqn ethos and has certainly meant a step back in the excellent relationship we enjoyed with REME in Dishforth, the centralisation has been taken out of necessity in order to provide us with aircraft to fly and attempt to maintain currency.

Our CTR preparation phase saw our Sqn strength shoot up to full establishment with many personnel away on final courses such as AH Basic groundcrew, MPS user, Forward Air Controller (FAC) and BOWMAN conversion. During this period we also held a function to farewell fourteen aircrew who have left the Sqn in the last eighteen months, a testament to how difficult it has been to align all of the planets and have everyone in the right place at the right time. A number have now retired at the end of their long and distinguished service, trained as QHIs to seed the training environment with operational experience and others posted on to the inevitable staff appointments. The result is that the original 656 First Attack Sqn personnel are

now few in number. We will receive the latest Conversion To Type course from Middle Wallop in order for them to undergo CTR (sixteen Aircrew in total) however some are destined for other Sqns once they have completed training with us. Finally 656 Sqn has achieved another first in receiving the AAC's first Sandhurst Direct Entry (DE) Officer in the Role of Ground Support Flight Commander. Second Lieutenant Helliouse Goodley is the first officer in what promises to be a full career stream aimed at providing promotion and command opportunities in areas such as Sqn 21C, Adjutant, HQ Sqn OC and beyond allowing DE aircrew to remain in flying appointments longer before serving behind the desk. Importantly allowing for a greater return of service in the cockpit for the amount of time and money invested in their training.

The future? Well as I write this we have just embarked on CTR 8 at the start of our training year prior to deployment in January '09. I cannot think of a better vehicle to train the Sqn in the basic individual and advanced collective skills required to be ready for Operations in the demanding environment that we will once again find ourselves in. CTR is due to be completed at the end of June followed by a two month deployment to Arizona. Having trained there myself I cannot think of a better place to conduct demanding, realistic training in such austere desert and mountainous environments that the State has to offer. Here we will conduct everything from environmental to Joint/Coalition, live fire training coupled with a superb period of desert survival. We will return to complete our mandatory individual pre deployment training package in October before the first tranche of aircrew deploy on the third of four, three month long rotations for the aircrew of 4 Regt AAC's year long deployment from May '08 to May '09. The Sqn HQ and groundcrew element will deploy to theatre in January '09 to complete the third of three, four month Sqn deployments, bring joined by the remaining Sqn aircrew in February. Complicated? It is a very pragmatic solution aimed at ensuring harmony and setting in place what in future is planned to be four month long rotations every two years for both aircrew and groundcrew thus maintaining Sqn integrity for deployments. This should ensure that we can remain fully trained and established for what promises to be an enduring commitment.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all well for 2008 and I look forward to meeting some of you for our reunion this summer.

Major David Amlôt MBE

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Having taken over the task of Association Secretary from John Bennett, I find the job far less onerous than it was in John's day as he has kindly retained the jobs of looking after the membership lists and managing the website. I delegate most of the work to Sylvia and just deal with the more interesting bits.

Andrew Simkins finally left the Army at midnight on 13th January. I don't know if he should be commiserated with or congratulated, only time and Andrew will tell. He is staying on as our President even though he now has to find a proper job. I wish him luck on behalf of all of us in the Association.

I would like to thank all those who sent extra money to pay for the postage and packing of their PJM's and the photographs from the last reunion. All contributions to our fund are welcome and your generosity is much appreciated.

We have had a number of very complimentary letters about the Journal. It's nice to know when we are getting it right but we'd also like to know if we are getting anything wrong and if you wish to make suggestions for content. I reiterate my previous appeals for copy. We are getting some good articles from members but we need more of your reminiscences, be they tales of derring-do, amusing incidents or just plain old fond memories. I was particularly pleased to publish an article by Diane Haynes in the last Journal. Perhaps we can get some more from the wives point of view? I would very much like to get a members' letters dialogue running in the Journal, we seem to have started it with this edition and I would like to see it continued in future Journals, so put pen to paper.

The arrangements for the Borneo Tour in May are well in hand, those who have confirmed their interest have had an update of the latest state of play from me recently. There is still time for anyone wishing to join the tour to do so. Detailed information is in the last Journal but if you have recycled your copy and want information, please give me a ring or drop me an email.

The next reunion will be at the Squadrons new location, Wattisham, in Suffolk. Arrangements are in hand and details and registration forms are with this edition of the Journal.

John Heyes

ANNUAL REUNION 2008

Saturday 28th & Sunday 29th June at Wattisham

The reunion will be held at Wattisham Airfield, Ipswich, Suffolk, by kind permission of Commanding Officer, 4 Regiment AAC

The outline programme is as follows:

Saturday 28th June

1200hrs: Assemble at 656 Squadron AAC Hangar. Buffet lunch available.

Squadron Display of Equipment and Aircraft

Auster Flights (tbc)

1700hrs: Disperse to accommodation

1900hrs: Annual Dinner. Dress: Jacket/Suit and Tie

It is our intention to arrange a Dance Band for the evening

Sunday 29th June

0930hrs: Coffee (Location TBA)

1000hrs: AGM (Location TBA)

1100hrs: Disperse

As with previous events, the Association will subsidise the event. Thus the planned costs per person are as follows:

Saturday Buffet: £10.00

Saturday Dinner: £22.00

Sunday AGM Coffee: £ 2.00

Aircraft Flights: £15.00

If you wish to attend could you please complete **both** sides of the enclosed slip and return it to Derek Walker by the end of March. If numbers are limited for safety reasons, applications will be on a first come first served basis. If we are oversubscribed, any cancellations will be filled by the next in chronological order.

LETTERS

Sir (*This letter was sent to Andrew Simkins*)

I want to thank you for the warm welcome you gave me. What a surprise - you pronounced my name properly! In Holland we always think the English are very reserved, but I have experienced otherwise.

What a nice and memorable time I've had. My compliments for all the work that was done! Those two days were for me, 'once in a lifetime' events. The weather 'gods' were really with us that day, in Middle Wallop - what beautiful weather!

On Sunday we visited the Matthews family. Again a very warm welcome - with champagne! And we stayed for supper. Really wonderful people.

We stayed on in England for another three days, touring and sightseeing, and sleeping in B & B's. The weather was still very good, so we were very lucky. All in all it was very nice but tiring.

Again my thanks.

Ineke De Swart-Van Der Tak.

Sir (*This too was sent to Andrew Simkins*)

I would like to record my thanks to you and the members of 656 Squadron Association for allowing me to march with you at the Remembrance Day parade this year.

The very poignant event was made all the more memorable by the friendly welcome extended to me by the Association members present.

I would like to thank Ross (Skingley) for 'shepherding' us all to the Naval and Military Club, an experience in itself.

I wish yourself and the Association continued success in the future.

Alison Siskin

Sir

I would like to say I fully agree with your letter on page seven in the Autumn 2007 Journal. Your description of integration is highly accurate. For many of us, contact with REME meant nothing more than brief visits between postings to a concentration camp somewhere near Aborfield.

Keith Stone. Odoom, Holland.

Sir

In the first instance I must really say many thanks to all regarding the recent reunion, the first time that I have attended the function. My wife was also very impressed and enjoyed it tremendously even though she is in effect much later in my life than the military period.

There were only three names that I recognised, and I would have surely passed them in the street - as they would have passed me, but I did indeed feel part of the 'system' once again. You yourself accused me of supplying a cardboard cut-out of you in the 656 Squadron photo that I sent to you recently!

I may well send you copies of some other photographs in due course

I also noted your letter about REME/AAC attached personnel and considered it very relevant to my own thoughts on the matter. As you did, I moved into the AAC from REME, but not directly from training. In 1961 I was doing a tour in Malaya with 2 Inf Wksps, part of 28 Brigade in Taiping. Moved to Terendak camp and then my posting came through for transfer to Wallop for training. I think it was because I showed an interest and was given the publicity blurb by Les Perry during a visit to the field at KL. Met up again with Les at Kluang a bit later. I joined an E I and R course at Wallop as an experienced Class 1 Field Radio Technician (full Corporal) and was passed out as a Class 2 Radio Technician with additional Instruments and Electricians qualifications, with all the Lance Corporals at the end of the course. Needless to say I was a bit peeved about that especially after being stuck with the 'Senior Rank' syndrome for a year, but I fought my case on the grounds of a 'conversion' course rather than a basic training event. Admin did agree eventually that I remained at First Class status. If you recall it was necessary to have all the First Class qualifications to hope to get to Sergeant and I had got all mine in 1960 and was dead set against starting again. If I recall rightly, we started off in 656 with a Captain as Workshop Officer and ended up with a Major when we went to 75 Aircraft Workshops REME.

We did indeed fly as observers etc, even the 'Greenies' When I served at 70 Workshops on return to UK I was involved with the initial trails of Police Helicopters, we fitted a Police radio to a Sioux and pottered about the country dropping in on Police Forces that were interested. I received my Observers Wings from the pilot after a stressful day navigating by ordinance survey map from Wallop to Lewes in the fog and popping under the HT wires to read the road signs.

I have received with interest the Autumn 2007 Journal and in response to your plea have cobbled together two articles for your perusal. One deals with my very first Army flight, the other with a typical workshop incident reminiscent of the 'Powley' era. I'm sure there are people still around that will remember.

Brian Hill

"Try to look unimportant; they may be low on ammo."

CENOTAPH PARADE



Those attending this year: Andrew Simkins, Vera Deacon, Ross Skingley, Christian Cooke, James Stirton - carried wreath, Clive Howe, Tom Carroll, David Murray, John Lyon and Neil Maher.

The Association yet again formed a contingent at this year's national act of remembrance at the Cenotaph. Although a little chillier than previous years, the promised rain held off and the crowds were as big and appreciative as ever. After the moving ceremony, in the presence of the Queen, our contingent moved off. Our drill this year was particularly impressive, thanks to Ross Skingley's clear and loud words of command. We were therefore well placed for James Stirton to handover the Association wreath as we reached the Cenotaph. We were also mentioned by the BBC, thereby maintaining our 100% record! At the end of the march, having saluted Prince Phillip, on Horseguards Parade, the majority of the party went onto the Naval and Military Club for lunch. For this especial privilege we thank Ross Skingley. As the President has stated a number of times, the event is one that every veteran should aim to attend at least once in their lifetime. It is a truly moving event.

Andrew Simkins



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MEMBERS' CONTRIBUTIONS

A 656 Squadron service to the Black Watch in 1973

by Geoff Allcock

My last visit to Malaysia and Singapore whilst working as a serving member with the AAC with 656 Squadron AAC in Hong Kong took place in 1973.

We were detailed to take two Sioux to Johore to support a company of the Black Watch, who were then currently serving in Hong Kong, based at Boundary Street Barracks in Kowloon, during jungle training in Johore. Unusually I guess, as the senior Sergeant on the trip and a Greenie to boot, I had overall responsibility for loading and transporting the Sioux onto a Hercules for the trip to Seletar. This was, I remember, only a notional responsibility. There was a Blackie Sergeant travelling as well! and it was he who was responsible for the removal of the blades and heads of the two aircraft prior to the loading on the Hercules.

I had a much more important duty to perform, as will be revealed. The Sioux had been comfortably loaded on board by the RAF loadmaster, when the Colonel of the Black Watch battalion arrived in a staff car, asking for Sergeant Allcock. He explained that the Commonwealth BSM, who was one of his ex RSMs, was doing extraneous duties in Singapore and was having difficulties in obtaining their regimental scotch whisky, "The Famous Grouse". He handed me a case of that whisky and asked that I deliver it to the BSM on arrival in Singapore.

I responded that surely there were many Sergeants in the company on their way to do jungle training, and why couldn't one of them deliver the whisky, as I had a few more slightly important duties to perform on arrival in Singapore. Little things like clearing the aircraft and our aircraft spares through customs etc..... He said to me, and I quote, "Are you bloody mad! That case of whisky would be empty before they left bloody Hong Kong!".

Well, the case of scotch was secured on the centre seat of one of the Sioux, under the survival kit



Geoff Allcock

covered with an army blanket and well strapped in, it passed through customs successfully . 6RAR provided us with a couple of Landrovers and a Ford Falcon Ute on arrival at Seletar, and delivery of the case of scotch was successfully done. The BSM opened the case, placed six of the bottles on the Sergeants Mess bar, and would allow no other drink to be served, apart from mixers, until they were drunk.

The other six bottles went up to his room in the mess and the Blackie Sergeant and myself were able to help him demolish one of them when he invited us to dinner in his own private dining room a few days later. The Blackie Sergeant's name has been suppressed to protect his otherwise impeccable reputation.

I mention this incident as just another example of how we in 656 Squadron were able to extend our services to our dependencies far beyond our normal responsibilities.

An after thought on this particular trip was, we were only able to spend one night in the Johore jungle with our Black Watch colleagues as someone in Honkers had neglected to obtain political clearance in time to allow our aircraft to remain in Malaya overnight, and, apart from that one night, we had to return them every night to Singapore. What a bloody shame!

Other than that, it was all a complete success.

"Flying the airplane is more important than radioing your plight to a person on the ground who is incapable of understanding or doing anything about it."

The First Flight

by Brian Hill

How many of the frequent fliers that you know (including yourself!) listen assiduously to that regular and often fun figured menu item known as the flight briefing? Yes, I know, done it all before - and unless it's a different type of aircraft (which *might* elicit a quick glance around for the nearest door) up go the newspapers and magazines, out come the notes and papers, all I suspect to give the nuance of the experienced and much travelled individual who has better things to do. Well let me take you back in time to when a flight briefing became all important to me.

As the winter of 1962/63 was particularly bad with Salisbury Plain cold, 'orrible and knee deep in snow, I had elected to return to the Far East for a second dose of sunshine and was posted to 656 Squadron Workshop at Kluang. At this time there was the obligation to assist the civil power in Borneo following the 'invasion' attempts in December of 1962 by the troops of South Kalimantan, and in due course in February 1964 I found myself detached from Kluang to Tawau on the East coast of Borneo near Sandakan Island. On my arrival at the tented camp I was introduced to active service conditions in the area by being warned that in the event of an emergency, not to raise my head above knee height as the Gurka contingent would be firing on fixed lines down the pathways between the tents!

The following day dawned bright and clear and on reporting to the 'line' for work I was invited to take a flight as observer to 2/Lt R Pugh who was taking up an Auster to check out some suspected gun running near the island, but first of all I needed to be briefed on the flight procedures. This was undertaken by fellow corporal Mick Mortimer, a man who has a permanent place in my memory as he effectively saved my life. He briefed me on the aircraft, the belts, the seat, the life jacket (we were going over water), the door, in fact just about everything in sight; "Don't have your straps too loose - you will fly out of them and hit your head" (no bone domes issued to passengers in those days), "Don't have them too tight as you will break your neck if the life jacket collar inflates prematurely"; "Oh, we won't need the door on for this flight" and it was removed. What he was insistent on was how to exit the plane in an emergency. We practised this several times, even to the extent of diving sideways to exit. With all this done, the pilot was aboard we were ready to go!

Shortly after takeoff we were over the sea and checking out a canoe from about 150 feet. With a smart wing-over turn to Starboard the pilot put me in a position to view inside the canoe with the 'bino's, then things went rather pear-shaped. The aircraft stalled, went into a dive to regain flying speed and we tipped the water with the wheel doing about 80 knots. My recollections after that are waking up under water upside down and trying to exit, with no result. Believe or not the Mick's words started to run through my mind: "Don't try and get out with the plane still attached to you! Hand down, twist buckle, release and away!" This was indeed successful and I emerged from underwater quite quickly. Fortunately the door had been removed before take-off or I would not

be writing this now! I surfaced alongside the wreckage along with the pilot and we swam to the 'suspect' canoe which picked us up, and that was my last physical movement for about two weeks! I was cas-evac to Labuan, and then on to Singapore by RAF Hastings - which did not improve my thoughts on flying when it developed problems and shut down both port engines before diverting to Kuching!

I returned to complete my tour later, and others in due course, but never quite recovered that absolute 100% feeling of invulnerability! Please note: I also listen carefully to the flight briefings!!

Footnote:

On a Spring evening in March 1966 when with 70 Workshops at Wallop, I was finishing off some work on a scout system when the crew chief popped out and asked me to do an air test with a pilot. It was getting rather late and there was no one else around so I agreed, and around the corner came the pilot. No prizes for guessing who: Yes! To my trepidation it was Mr Pugh, who had now converted to rotary! Fortunately we had no problems and we returned to earth in the approved manner - gently!



Auster XP 379 Tawau February 1964 - View of Passengers Exit!

Through the wall

by Bernard Redshaw Ex RSO & LO, 1 NZ Regt
- a frequent client of 2 and 7 Recce Flts in Malaya 1958-59



There's an assumed apocryphal story going around about an officer breaking an arm whilst being thrown through the wall of the Officers' Mess at Sabroan Camp in 1959. Well, it's not apocryphal – it's true, and I was the 'victim.'

As in most battalions, the subalterns of 1 NZ Regt were quite a lively group, and some of the many high-spirited Mess activities we got up to were quite creative. At some time, the attap wall of the Mess had been accidentally damaged (probably whilst furniture was being moved), and we had discovered that it cost only a few ringgits to replace each attap panel. So, one evening, the game of 'throwing the officer through the

wall' was invented. With one subaltern on each arm and a third on his legs, the officer in question was charged horizontally through the attap wall. It was all great fun – or so it seemed!

I was about the third subaltern to be projected, but the trio had great difficulty getting me through the wall. So, with reinforcements, they tried again – and then again. I was very much aware why they couldn't get me through. There was a wall stud that came between me and the holder of my right arm. With each successive charge, my right forearm bashed agonisingly against the stud.

I can't recall the actual choice of words I used to let my brother officers know that I was in such pain that they should desist; but it must have been effective, because eventually they did. My forearm was now the size of a football.

At that time, we had a Brit RMO attached to us, a hilarious Welshman by the name of Dave Evans. Dave quickly rushed me down to the Medical Centre, where he splinted my arm and gave me a pain-killing injection. After a very uncomfortable night, I was taken down to BMH Kamunting for an X-ray. It eventually turned out that my arm wasn't broken, and after a few days, the swelling went down. I am left-handed anyway, so it didn't affect my work – but saluting was painful.

Anyway, some months later, when we had a new Kiwi MO, he showed me my medical notes. Here was the Request Form that Dave Evans had sent off to BMH on the morning in question. On it was written: '*Lt Redshaw injured his arm whilst passing through the wall of the Officers' Mess last night. Suspected fracture of radius or ulna, or both. Please X-ray.*' As far as I am aware, that request remained on my Medical File throughout my service.



'Daisy, Daisy give me your answer do'

by Brain Hill



Joining in with the excellent reunion for the first time this year and sitting yarning with table friends does, as our many-hatted Journal Editor comments: "lubricate the brain cells very well," and seeing some old acquaintances up on the rostrum for their PJM's caused me to think back about the small and perhaps insignificant event of the 'Daisies', and I wonder if any others remember it? It was during my posting with 656 Squadron Workshops at Kluang, sometime between 1963 and 1965.



With quite a few personnel away with the flights and the MSRD detachments in Borneo, the workshop floor seemed quite bereft at times, whatever your trade or occupation might be. It was during one of these spells that a small daisy cut from fluorescent SCOTCHCAL appeared. It wasn't very big, and remained unnoticed for some days. As any gardener will know, what often happens with these most pernicious of flowers (weeds?) given a period of neglect they will often flourish. Indeed, it wasn't too long before other bright orange daisies began to appear in the workshop area, some in the most unusual of places: in the locked areas at the side of the hanger, on various walls, and I did spot one specimen in the flap space of an Auster - not visible of course unless the flaps were fully extended, obviously an example of *Compositae; Bellis-Perennis Obscura*.



As time went on daisies appeared in more and more places; behind the locked cage of the A&E section one specimen started to grow - every other day or so, the daisy would appear larger. Then another appeared and within a week they were surrounded by a family of small daisies (all together ooooooh!). These daisies in fact were quite mobile as was proved one pay parade when a certain Staff Sergeant went out to collect his pay, there flapping up and down on the back flap of his OG jacket was..... Yes! A Daisy!

Eventually, they became so adventurous that their reign of terror was terminated. This was caused one morning by the Workshop Officer (Captain Weston?) declaring war on any daisies found after a timed deadline. This state of hostilities apparently was triggered by the fact that when he opened his locked and secured confidential drawers in the morning, a daisy was found inside, a sample of "*Bellis-Perennis (Special Forces)*" perhaps?

Such events are the sources of morale and memory!!



Medan Muses

1946 'A' Flight. A Flight Commander's Memory

by Russell Matthews

It was in about April or May that 'A' Flight re-deployed to Medan in Sumatra, after a short but hectic period in Surabaya. The move was by sea arriving at Belawan (Medan port) en-porté i.e. Aircraft dismantled and loaded in TCV's (converted 3 tonners) then driven the dozen miles to Medan airfield just south of the town itself. The Airmen and Gunners occupying an attap roofed abode on the edge of the airfield near the river boundary and the Officers in a small bungalow in the town suburbs.

After assembling the aircraft the first air test flight had not been a success with the aircraft being hit by S.A. Fire just over the river boundary, the pilot making a good forced landing back onto the strip with a dead engine. Subsequently, a modified take off drill evolved. Take off on the grass near the center of the airfield, climbing turns within the boundary limits to 1000 feet, then off the circuit. Fortunately, there was little other air traffic so the Flight had almost uninterrupted use.

Operational flights soon became the daily routine covering and reporting the progress of the numerous infantry patrols round the garrison perimeter. The use of artillery fire was very restricted, the armoured car squadron being used to alleviate difficult situations. Insurgent random shooting was almost a nightly activity with alarms and excursions. These kept everyone on their toes.

It was on 19th June, with Warby's words "Go and look after Sumatra" ringing in my ears that Jock, my bull terrier and constant companion, and I left Batavia on the early morning Dakota milk run for Medan. This uncomfortable and hot trip in canvas bucket seats took six hours with a refueling stop en route. The first thing that struck me about Sumatra was the sheer geographical immensity of the island - some 900 miles from North to South and astride the Equator. A thin Western coastline with small fishing villages, then a massive, black ridge running its whole length covered with thick primary jungle - finally a vast, almost swampy plain to the East, virtually a huge paddy field. Large tobacco plantations in the North, round Medan, the house of the famous pre-war Dutch cigar industry. Most surprising was the lack of good road communications, so it was obvious that all movements would have to be by air. Jock and I quickly settled in to the mess and we were up bright and early the next morning, as my log book shows for 20th June 'Familiarization Recce SE Medan'. I later took over from John Baker when he departed on demobilization.

Demobilization parties became a bit of a trial and endurance test with each successive one being more formidable than the previous one, more food and more drink with the inevitable indigestion and hangovers.

One incident marred my early days as Jock decided to kill the Brigade Commander's marmalade coloured cat in the Brigade Mess garden - so for a period there was a most unpopular Air O.P. Flight Commander in the Far East.

Billy Wolfe arrived from 'C' Flight, then David Greaves from Squadron HQ. Shortly after arrival David volunteered his section for detachment to

Bandar Ache, to the very North tip of the island. Bandar had only a small garrison and was the hot bed of insurgent activity. It was within Auster flying range but the ground party had to follow by Dakota. After a few exciting sorties it was decided that this outpost was too extended and unsupportable and the small garrison was recalled to Medan.

A similar detachment was organised for Humphrey Beech to Padang away down on the SE coast. Padang was well outside Auster range, so could the aircraft be transported by Dakota? It was a question of suck it and see. We dismantled the propeller, the wings, struts and with a lot of "to you, from me, up a bit, down a bit" we managed to squeeze baby safely into mummy's womb. Humphrey quickly re-assembled on the Padang strip then found and moved to a grass area on the very edge of the town, it was the old rifle range. Take off was downhill, over the butts, short beach then out over the lagoon. Landing back was a bit tricky as the strip was short with no clear overshoot. The strip became known as Padang Central.

I went down to visit him and straight away went for a flight in Auster 389. On take off over the lagoon I noticed a great number of very large, evil looking reptiles lazily swimming in the sea. "What the hell are they"? I enquired, "No worry, they are only hammer head sharks, the locals say they are not hungry when spawning" was the reply. I instructed Humphrey that on no account was he to undershoot on landing - I had no desire to act as shark bait to challenge local folk lore. The section stayed there until relieved by 'C' Flight under Hugh Morrissey on re-deployment from Java. I knew Hugh well as we had been on the same Air O.P. course together, so when I heard that he was unwell with septic prickly heat I went down to visit him. Arriving unannounced at the local sick bay there was Hugh lying on his tummy stark naked, clutching the bed rail with a large red bruise on his right buttock. Standing beside the bed was a QA nurse in her starched white uniform, holding a wicked looking syringe and in fits of laughter. I well remember Hugh's words-"Sister, to you penicillin may be a wonder drug, but to me its just a pain in the arse"!

Now for Exercise Euston - the military take over of the short railway system between Medan and Belawan. Up until July the local Indonesians had run this railway but the track was constantly under sniper fire and needed piqueting and Division decided it was high time to take over control. Great secrecy was involved, the plan being for the 2nd Patialas to piquet the track - Sappers to provide the train driving expertise while we provided constant air cover from dawn . All went well until it was discovered that the Indoes were aware of the plan and had switched off the water supply for the engines. Motor bowsers came to the rescue and by 7am, with full steam up, all was ready for the grand send off. David was on patrol with the rest of us listening in on the radio having our scrambled eggs and chilli rice, a special breakfast treat prepared by Ah Fong, our Chinese cook. "The first trains off"! Came the joyful news - pause - "It's down the track, round the bend and has stopped" - pause - "Second trains off" - longer pause - "First train still halted, but the second train hits it". We sat poised awaiting the final act in the drama. "I've won my bet, it's



*Medan Airfield
Picture courtesy of Netherlands Institute of Military History*

pranged into the back and there are three carriages overturned” Sad to record, there were some casualties. We photographed the wreck and made an enlargement for the Officers’ Club that evening.

Life continued with plenty of small scale operations up to Battalion strength to keep the insurgents away from the immediate perimeter. A log book entry for 3rd August shows that during an operation to Tembang to the East, with Gunner Bowles as rear observer, my aircraft was hit by small arms fire. Neither Bowles nor I could see any damage and as the controls appeared normal, we completed the sortie. On landing the port tyre shredded and we completed a full ground loop. The bullet had punctured the tyre and locked the brake drum.

Both David Greaves and later Mike Webb were to experience similar small arms strikes. David was luckier as the bullet passed in front of his face before entering the port wing and removing part of the port aileron. With sloppy controls he nursed the aircraft back and said a silent prayer on landing.

It was on the 5th October that Mike Webb joined the flight. I had been warned by Warby over the Squadron net to expect him on the Dakota milk run. I was delighted to see him again as we had joined as gunner recruits at Bordon on the same day way back in 1941.

That afternoon the flight was engaged on a kampong clearing exercise covering the 2nd F.F. Rifles. Billy Wolf suddenly reported that he could see large numbers of insurgents gathering to hinder the infantry withdrawal but he was very short of fuel. Acting as standby pilot, I shouted to Mike to grab a helmet and come as rear observer. Once over the disputed area we spotted the nasties. This time permission was given to use artillery fire and two quick targets put a stop to their interference. Mike’s remark on landing was “At last I have arrived somewhere where something is happening”.

‘All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy’ - so for recreation the Flight organised the odd evening dances - the Dutch ladies enjoyed the relaxed informal atmosphere after their harsh Japanese internment in prison camps. Unfortunately, the number of lady partners steadily dwindled with their repatriation to Holland.

Operations continued through October as steadily more and more Dutch troops, mostly Ambonese, arrived to take over portions of the perimeter. This only seemed to antagonise the insurgents who responded with increased sniping.

Although we had no more strikes on aircraft, all pilots kept reporting that they were sure that small arms fire was being directed at them. As all calls for artillery fire were refused it was felt that some form of retaliation was necessary. Dropping grenades was considered too hazardous, the only possibility was for the rear observer to use a Bren. The answer was to cut a hole in the port side of the fuselage behind the pilot, remove the seat and for the Gunner to squat with the gun between his knees and the muzzle through the hole. A trial site was found - the trunk of a lone, dead tree in the middle of a small, black, waveless mangrove lake near the coast. First firing trial was not a great success as the spent cartridge cases burnt the Gunner’s legs and scorched the aircraft floor

boards. Our fitters solved this with a wet, canvas bag attachment under the gun. Second trial proved that some form of sighting device for the pilot was needed. Answer, a wire ring sight half way along the port strut. The firing drill being, *a*. Select target, *b*. Dive down to 250 feet, *c*. Level out, pilot to line up target in the ring sight, *d*. Order fire, *e*. Gunner to fire a full magazine burst, *f*. Steep climbing turn to starboard. The final live firing saw the water round the tree stump straddled with splashes. However, both the pilot and gunner noticed that the stump looked different from normal. A closer look showed sitting on top of the post was a large, brown, eagle looking owl who leisurely took off and glided into the surrounding mangrove. All we had managed to do was disturb his afternoon siesta. The result of this was deemed that the Auster was not an effective ground attack fighter. Looking back, we were fortunate not to have had an occasion to try it against an insurgent target - we might even have started a private war of our own making.

November started with rumours and counter rumours as to where the flight would re-deploy. News from Batavia confirmed that Squadron HQ and the other flights were destined for Malaya with Kuala Lumpur the best bet. However, 26 Indian Division in Sumatra were warned for a return to India - were we to go with the Division? Finally, a signal from Warby ordering me to get an officer and 'Captain Jock Killen' to KL. As luck would have it, there was a visiting Harvard at Medan - would the pilot take a passenger with a large, white bull terrier to KL? He agreed and away went David with Jock sitting on his lap for the one and a half hour trip and for a new aircraft type entry in Jocks flying log.

On 15th November, at last movement orders - Pack and move en porté to Belawan for embarkation in a Dutch ship for Penang. At least there would be Amstel beer in the ships canteen and plenty of gin in the wardroom.

On departure the flight received the following validation order dated 16th November 1946. I quote - " 'A' Flight 656 Air O.P. Squadron. Before you leave Medan I want you to know how much I appreciate all the splendid work you have done for 26 Indian Division. You have earned the gratitude of all our fighting units with your willing, cheerful and efficient co-operation which has so materially assisted them to carry out their tasks. Thank you all very much, good bye and good luck.

Signed R.C. Hedley, Major General,
Commander Allied Land Forces (Sumatra)'

This finally confirmed that Malaya was to be our next area of activities. Our trip to Malaya will be the subject of my next article
Quiens Sabé

"Don't draw fire; it irritates the people around you."

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The following items are taken from the Archives, we thought them well worth another airing.....

Experiences in the 7th Division Admin. Box

by Reg Bailey 'C' Flight 656 Air Op Squadron RAF 1943-46

I was asked by Nobby Clark to set down some account of the siege of the Admin. Box in the 7th Indian Division in early 1944. I had some reservations. In the first place I did not think many people would be very interested, and in the second it might sound like some sort of line-shooting. However, on reflection I decided it might be worth doing. There may be people, the few who are left who were there, who would be interested and other members of the Association who would also be interested. Therefore, I have decided to have go. There is one thing I must stress before I start. After nearly 50 years, memory, in particular mine, is very fallible so there may be a great many inaccuracies. It is not so much the events - they are as clear in my mind now as they were then - it is the order of events, the chronology, which is so vague. I would therefore like to apologise in advance to anyone I have mis-represented or have in any way confused with any other person.

As far as I remember, we arrived on the Arakan in January 1944, after a long and dusty trek in convoy across the breadth of India. By 'we', I mean of course 'C' Flight of the Squadron and I believe we first camped somewhere beyond Cox's bazaar towards the Nha Peninsula. I am not sure how long but I would think within the next two weeks a small section of 'C' Flight was sent to join 7th Indian Division on the other side of the Mayu range in preparation for the assault on Buthidaung and presumably an advance towards Akyab. We entered the Nyakidauk Pass which was little more than a path through the mountains with deep ravines first on one side, then the other, crossed by wooden trestle bridges. It had been little more than a mule track but the army had opened it up to take vehicles and even tanks. We were to be very grateful for those tanks later. Either side of the road was mostly thick jungle and the bottom of the ravines were littered with wrecked vehicles that had gone over. A grim warning to drivers. We emerged from the pass on to a plain with small hills dotted around, which seemed to be covered in thick scrub jungle. We turned north and traveled for a mile or two, on our right in the distance was the Kaladan range and on our left the Mayu range. We were traveling away from the direction of the Japanese and had the comforting thought that safety lay between us and them. I believe there were 7 or 8 of us in the party under the command of Sgt Roe and, after a while, found a suitable place for a landing strip for Capt. Boys to join us. The ground was mostly very flat and it did not take long to prepare the landing strip and were were subsequently joined by Capt. Boys who flew in some time later. How long he remained I am not sure but he did take off again but was quoted as saying he had "gone to look at the Japs". After he had gone we set about preparing camp and two of us looked at a rocky outcrop of the Mayu range, where there was a stream tumbling down the side. It was our intention to build some sort shower or bath there, suitably ducted through

bamboo pipes.

While we were doing this a party of what appeared to be Burmese approached us, the leader made himself known as a British officer. He asked who we were and what we were doing. This was because as far as I knew there were no other units within several miles of us. We explained who we were and that we were awaiting ~ the return of our Officer who had flown out on a reconnaissance. He then told us that there were 800 Japs following him down the

valley. They had infiltrated along the Kaladan range, crossed the valley and entered the Mayu range, working their way back towards the Nyakidauk Pass. This would of course mean that 7th Division was completely encircled and he expected it to be closed within hours, or certainly by tomorrow. He then had a word with Sgt. Roe and told us we should await the return of our Officer and then move to within the defensive positions of the Division. If, in the meantime, the Japanese arrived, we should put up what defence we could.

He then strode off up the valley to give warning to Div HQ. We then took up our positions on a small hill and waited. It was one of the longest afternoons of my life. What I remember mostly was the heat and the buzzing of the flies and insects. We were straining our eyes up the valley to catch our first sight of the Japanese, but hoping not to. How long we lay there waiting I do not know. It was certainly several hours. The first heartening sight we saw was that of several columns of Sikh Infantry moving slowly up the valley on either side, presumably to meet the Japanese. However, they seemed pitifully inadequate in numbers to face 800 Japanese.

After a wait of several hours it was quite obvious that Capt Boys would not be returning to the strip. Either he had met with an accident or perhaps the warning had been passed on and he had landed back at 'C' Flight. We later heard that he had been shot down but the good news was that he had been brought in by the Burmese although he had received serious injuries. I do not remember that we had any radio communication with him, in fact I am sure we did not, otherwise of course there would have been no uncertainty. However, Sgt. Roe decided there was no point in waiting any longer and we packed our trucks and moved back into the 7 Div. enclave.

We were directed to a small river bed. The actual bed was very wide with steep cliff-like banks overhanging but the stream in the centre was very narrow with a sandy beach either side. We parked our trucks close up on the banks, put the camouflage nets over them and were then directed to what we later knew as Ammunition Hill. This hill was perhaps 150 yards long, 30/40 ft high with steep sides and very narrow on the top, almost like a ridge. It was covered with trees and thick jungle. When we got to the top we found that slit trenches had already been dug right along the ridge by previous occupants, either Japanese or our own.

The occupants of the hill were a very mixed bag, ourselves, "Kosbies", artillery men without guns, some RAF radar operators who had come back from

advance positions but for the time being we were all Infantry. I think at this stage the gravity of our situation had not really penetrated. We knew of course that the Pass was likely to be closed but we did not know that it had been or that it would be. In fact we were far more interested in the situation of getting a meal. As far as I recollect, due to the events of the day, we had had nothing to eat since breakfast, and we were expecting HQ to send some rations across at any time. In the event they never came and next morning, or rather the next day, we found out what the extent of our rations were going to be for the next 2/3 weeks. They consisted in the main of two hard biscuits a day and a tablespoon of mushy bully beef. Occasionally this was augmented by the odd soya link. After a couple of weeks of this we really were starving. I can remember one incident which perhaps illustrates this. My companion in the slit trench, Tubby Cherrington, found a packet of old biscuits lying in the bushes, presumably discarded during better times. It had been gnawed by some animal, possibly rats but we did not hesitate to eat these biscuits and felt very grateful for them. This is what hunger can do to you.

Water was another problem. No more than two men could be spared from the hill at any one time and it involved two going off with a galvanised chergil some way across the plain to Div. HQ to get a few gallons of water. The heavy container had to be dragged back and pulled up the steep sides of the hill to the top. Needless to say, there was water for drinking only, no washing or shaving was allowed. It can be imagined what we looked like after a week of this. Particularly as our faces were smeared with mosquito cream, and the impact of shells at night, while we were lying in the trenches caused the dirt to fall and stick to our faces.

To return to the evening we arrived on Ammunition Hill. Our worries about food began to dissolve when we saw what was happening below. Strings of vehicles of all sorts, columns of infantry were coming along the road towards us passing the end of the Hill which ended in a steep cliff and headed on towards Div. HQ and the Nyakidauk Pass. As I said earlier, we did not as yet know whether or not the Pass was closed and the awful thought struck us that perhaps they were heading into the Pass and out, leaving us to fight some sort of rearguard action. In the absence of any kind of information, rumours flew around and we all began to fear the worst. However, in fact what was happening was that they were simply drawing back to form a defensive ring around the Admin. Box which eventually included our Hill too.

The following day life took on the pattern that was to rule for the next 2-3 weeks. This consisted of shelling and strafing by aircraft in the daytime and attacks by Japanese infantry at night. Of the former, the shelling was far more trying than the aircraft attacks. The aircraft could easily be seen and we usually had a fair amount of warning and in any case the Japanese Army 01 was not a particularly effective aircraft against troops as, for instance, a Beaufighter would have been.

The shelling was another matter. It was accurate and the Japanese obviously knew that much of the Divisions ammunition of all types was stored in

the undergrowth around the base of the Hill and they concentrated on it. They hit the Hill time and time again, each time starting fires and setting the ammunition exploding. For those of us on top of the Hill it was rather like sitting on top of a bonfire on Guy Fawkes night - flames everywhere and bursting shells and shrapnel screeching through the trees. It would not have been so bad if we had been allowed to do what all our instincts told us to do and that is lie low in the trenches. However, shovels were distributed, I do not know where they came from, but with these we crawled down the Hill to throw dirt or soil on to the fires and try and extinguish them. Of course it was quite futile but at least we had to try and do something. It was here that Sgt Roe set a fine example and did what he could, probably more than anyone, to try and put out the fires but he was hit by a piece of flying shrapnel and injured in the throat. With great courage he dressed this serious wound himself and was later to receive a "Mention in Dispatches".

However, despite these trials by day it was the night that was really hideous. The Japanese came out of their hiding places in the jungle on the hill opposite and streamed across the plains towards our positions. Of course, we could not see them in the dark but the noise was dreadful, their shouting and their screams as they were hit by the machine gun fire. In this respect we were very, very fortunate in having the tanks with us. They were stationed around us in the form of pill boxes. They did not normally move at night but with their heavy machine guns directed towards the Japanese positions supported by infantry dug in around them with Bren guns, they were able to lay down a curtain of fire which was well nigh impenetrable.

I think very few of the Japanese actually got through and the scenes next morning of Japanese bodies strewn all over the plain bore witness to the carnage of the night before. However, those that did get through wreaked a fair bit of havoc when they could. One party actually broke into the field hospital which was no more than stretchers laid under the trees and bayoneted all the patients. In fact we had one chap with us who was desperately ill with malaria and who could hardly stand but like all of those who became sick he had no wish to be taken to the hospital and preferred to stay with us.

Night after night we stood in our trenches listening to the commotion down below and straining our eyes in the darkness to see Japanese crawling up the hill towards us. In fact they never actually made it that far but the senses played tricks when one is in a high state of tension and small bushes and so on, seen in the gloom, all appeared to be Japanese crawling towards us. We often stood with grenades in our hands, pins drawn, holding the clip down ready to throw them. We were under instructions not to fire unless we were forced to because of giving away our positions. We also had a couple of loaded sten guns in front of our trenches. The plan as far as Tubby Charrington and I were concerned, who shared a trench, was that we would hurl all our grenades, then empty the sten into them, and then take to our rifles and bayonets. As a last resort we each had a machete lying at our sides. One thing was certain, that we, like the rest of the people on that hill, never intended to be taken prisoner.

It is difficult to describe our feelings. Our position seemed hopeless. We knew the pass was closed and as day followed day, and week followed week, it began to seem virtually impossible that we were ever going to get out of the situation. In fact I think most of the people were resigned to the fact that we were finished, but it was just a question of when. I and the rest of the people on that Hill I am sure knew what a condemned man must feel like. Had we known what was going on back at Corps HQ I am sure we would have been even more dismayed. I was recently reading a book about the battle of the Admin. Box, something I had never seen written about before. In it, the writer stated that the General in command of 15 Corp., who I believe was General Christianson, although I am not sure about that, memory fails me, had decided that 7 Div. or what was left of it was not worth saving and was prepared to abandon it and draw fresh defensive positions further back along the Arakan. In this, however, he was over-riden by General Slim who said that 7th Div. must be kept fighting and that it would be supplied by air. Little did we realise on what a slender thread our fate rested.

I can recollect several instances that had an amusing side, if the whole business had not been so deadly serious. One night during an attack by the Japs in which they were near our Hill, or around the base of the hill, the man with Owen Taylor in the next slit trench, I did not know him, perhaps he came from one of the Infantry Regs., apparently pulled the pin out of a grenade and then dropped it. There was a mad scramble to find it in the dark which was unsuccessful and of course they dared not move out of the trench as anything that moved outside the trench was likely to be shot. Eventually, as it had not gone off they did no more about it, but next morning it was found tucked underneath Owen Taylor's bed roll. I don't suppose many people can say they slept with a 'live', primed, hand grenade all night!

Another incident that comes to mind was that of the indestructible Boffers gun. The Japanese were making one of their usual air raids and thoroughly enjoying themselves. They were streaking up and down the valley shooting everything in sight and some were flying so low they actually passed below the level of our hill. I clearly recollect looking down on one with the canopy slid back flying up and down, the picture of arrogance. Of course, their confidence was justified. Until Spitfires arrived many months later they really had little to worry about. However, there was a Boffers gun on the plain below us, perhaps 200 yards away, and the crew of that were obviously determined to do something about it. They were banging away like mad at these planes as they flew up and down until one of them apparently spotted them. He came streaking towards them, obviously bent on mischief but the gun did not stop firing and as

he swept over them he released a bomb. The gun was not particularly protected other than perhaps a shallow pit with a few sand bags around and it looked like the end of them. There was a great deal of commiseration on the hill at the way they had gone, but gradually as the smoke and dust cleared we were amazed to see the gun was not only still there but was firing away like mad. Who the



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gunners were or what Regiment they belonged to I have no idea but it was a magnificent display of sheer guts.

After about 2 weeks the Japanese infantry attacks had tailed off.

There were no longer the succession of night attacks and I presume they were getting short of men, after their heavy losses and of course what we did not know, they were being pressed from the other side by the relieving Div, the British 2nd Div. I believe, although I am open to correction on that. At any rate, the officer in charge of our hill deemed the situation to have eased sufficiently to allow 2 men at a time to go down the hill to the river to get a wash, shave and general clean up. When I arrived at the river there were about 50/60 men in the river which was only a shallow stream, having a wash. As explained earlier, the bed of the river was quite wide with steep overhanging banks with just the narrow stream in the centre.

I also said earlier that we generally got a fair bit of warning of the air attacks. However, on this occasion we did not. The first we knew of it were the whistles blowing and on looking up I could see quite clearly not more than a mile away three O1's bearing towards us and in fact I could see the tracer leaving the front

of the aircraft. Obviously they had spotted the men in the river and had decided to have a bit of target practice. I have never moved so quickly in my life! I simply grabbed my rifle from the edge of the stream and ran as fast as I could, stark naked, towards the bank. There were slit trenches dug along the edges under the overhanging banks and I had a vague impression of a slit trench with 4 or 5 dusky faces peering out and a similar number of sharp bayonets sticking up. I did not hesitate but went for the slit trench at a speed that would have done credit to an Olympic runner and dived in behind them. I did not see the aircraft after that as my head, and those of the other occupants of the trench, were kept so low that we saw nothing. However, I heard the thud of the bombs as they went passed and then it was all over. I got out to collect my clothes and expected to see bodies and perhaps injured men lying all over the place, but there was not a single one. Obviously there were a great many more Olympic runners in the Army! I had lost all further interest now in washing and was intent on getting back to the comparative safety of Ammunition Hill. In this respect, it is interesting that people I spoke to on the plain were horrified at the idea of being on Ammunition Hill. They said it seemed to them impossible for anyone to survive and they were thankful they were not up there. To us however it seemed a relatively safe place, at least unlike those on the plain, we were relatively safe from marauding Japanese parties. Having got back to the top of the hill I decided I was not in need of any more washes until the Division was relieved, if that ever happened.

I and two others did volunteer for another job down on the plain although it may well have been before the previously mentioned incident. I never remember seeing any 25 pounders in the Admin. Box but there was an RA Battery equipped with mortars. One day someone came up on to the hill from this Battery asking for volunteers to pass ammunition as they intended to

undertake a big shoot against the Japanese. As we had taken such a pounding from the Japanese artillery, there was a great feeling of wanting to hit back at them and there was no shortage of volunteers for this job. Three of us were selected, I cannot remember the names of the other two, and we duly reported to the Battery below. It was situated in a small clearing in heavy scrub jungle, quite close to the river. The first thing we noticed, was a 15 cwt truck about 50 or 60 yards behind the mortars, fully loaded, with ammunition boxes containing mortar bombs. There were, I believe, about 16 mortars and laid around these were scores more mortar bombs waiting for loading. After some ranging the Major in

command of the Battery opened fire with all 16 mortars. They fired in salvos of 5 between each re-ranging and with 16 mortars operating, the weight of bombs being got away was very impressive. I and the other volunteers were busy carrying ammunition forward and the sound of those scores and scores of bombs whistling towards the Japanese was music to our ears. At last we were giving them a taste of what they had been giving us, at least that is what we thought.

After this had been going on for some time we heard a whistle which did not sound like a mortar bomb, in fact it sounded very much like a Japanese 75. The crash of a shell some 100 yards behind the ammunition truck confirmed this and our elation quickly evaporated. What was uppermost in our minds was the scores of mortar bombs lying on the ground, not to mention all those in the truck just behind. If any of these were hit there was going to be an almighty bang. After a while the Major gave the stand down and we thankfully retired into our slit trenches. However, the shelling continued and it was very accurate. How it failed to hit us or the ammunition remains an absolute mystery. The Major must have then decided he would bluff it out and called for us to take post again and the mortars re-opened fire. The shells continued for a little while but the bluff must have worked because gradually the Japanese shells moved away and then stopped. Eventually came the final stand down for the day and it was with enormous relief that we scampered back to our hill. What had promised to be a pleasant day, throwing things at the Japanese had turned out to be very nasty indeed. I suppose that old Army maxim applied - Never Volunteer for Anything!

I recall one more traumatic incident which must have occurred not very long before we were relieved. An Infantry Officer and his Sgt. arrived on the hill looking for volunteers for an assault on a Japanese position. We did occasional get visits from the officers from the Div. Who they were or what their rank, we never knew because of course no badges of rank were worn. As, for example, the one who came up during the height of the shelling when shrapnel was flying in all directions and walked around the top of the hill above the slit trenches encouraging us to get our heads above as there was no danger. How he survived that is a mystery, but he was a wonderful example and it made one feel ashamed to be ducking down in the slit trenches.

To return to the story I was relating, it seemed that the Japanese held a hill, No. 1018 I believe it was. The hill had changed hands several times I

believe. It was currently in the hands of the Japanese and gave them a view across our positions, and Div. were very anxious to have them removed. We were told, rather unwisely I feel, that a recent assault by a Company of the Queen's Own on the hill had met with heavy losses and had failed and they were now looking for more infantry.

The Officer then walked around the hill visiting each slit trench in turn, each of which held two men, and selected one 'volunteer' from each trench. I shared a trench with Tubby Charrington and was the lucky one selected. Matters were not improved by Tubby's concern and commiseration. In fact he almost wrote my obituary. He promised that after I had gone he would write to my parents and if he survived the war he'd go and visit them, and asked me what kit I wanted taking back, etc, etc. Once again I felt I knew what a condemned man felt like, a terrible feeling of emptiness and a complete lack of interest in anything, simply an overriding concern as to whether one was going to live more than the next hour or two. I did have some similar feelings, on later occasions, but never to the same extent as that.

The party gathered together was effectively half of the defence of the hill which suggests the way the tables were steadily turning. It was now felt that the hill could be left partly defended, and the attack was being carried to the Japanese.. However, the significance of this was lost on us at the time. The Sgt. gathered into a group to lecture us as to what was going to happen. He indicated his complete disgust with the 'soldiers' that had been allocated to him but said what we would have to do. He thought that our appearance would be enough to frighten the Japanese. When I look back I have great admiration for that Sgt. Despite all his wise-cracking and pseudo insults he must have felt as frightened as the rest of us at the prospect of climbing up that hill through thick undergrowth against hostile defended position on the top. The chances of survival had to be pretty slim but yet he gave no sign of it. After a while, after checking all our weapons he went off saying he would return for us as soon as they were ready for the assault. We sat around for a couple of hours which must have been one of the worst periods in my life. We saw him eventually coming back up the hill. Doom was approaching but when he got up he announced we would not be required, as he put it ' they had found some real soldiers'. What a relief and yet I could not help thinking about the men who were going to have to do it. How they got on I never knew. A few days later we received the news that the 2nd Div. I think it was, had broken through and the pass had been re-opened. This was accompanied by some pretty heartfelt cheering and within hours we could see men and vehicles flooding onto the plain in the direction of the pass. The actual entrance was obscured from our view.

That's about it really. Within a couple of days we received the order to collect our vehicles and return to our Unit, an order that we were very happy to comply with. It was a great relief driving back through the pass, but everywhere there were signs of the struggle that had taken place to re-possess it - a terrible battle.

What I have written is in no sense a kind of account of the battle of Admin. Box. It is simply recollections of things as they happened to me and what we were told at the time. However, as I mentioned earlier I have recently read an account of this battle in a war history book and it seems most of what we were told or believed at the time was substantially true.

I had no close contact with the Japanese again until the next year. Again on the Arakan when my section was attached to 73 Brigade for a long range penetration down Arakan Coast as far as Akyab. As they say, that is another story, but it is strange that once again we were to lose our Officer who was forced down on the other side of the Mayu range into the Kaladan Valley. I believe he was Capt Maslen-Jones but I do hope he will forgive me if I am wrong about that. Like Capt Boys before him he was brought in by the Burmese and a 'duck' amphibious vehicle was sent down the coast as far as Akyab Island, which was still occupied by the Japanese, then up the Kaladan river to meet the Burmese party and bring him back. He must have been one amongst many hundreds of British troops who owe their lives to the Burmese, so that thinking about it, British rule could not have been so objectionable as modern day cynics would have us believe. At any rate they seemed to prefer us to their fellow Asians, the Japanese; but given the appalling record of the Japanese in China, perhaps it is not surprising that they are almost universally hated by their fellow Asians.

..... Also from the Archives



3 Cdo Bde Air Sqn, supported by 656 Wkspcs aboard HMS Intrepid 1968

HOW TIMES HAVE CHANGED!

*The following is an extract from a Newsletter found in the Archives,
as written by 'Nobby' Clark*

News Letter No. 3. February 1953

As usual I will start off with details of the arrangements for the Annual Reunion, our seventh, and one which promises to be of more than average interest. Here they are:

Date: Saturday 21st March, 1953 *

Time: 5.30pm to 10.30pm

Place: The Lotus Restaurant, Norris Street, Haymarket, SW1 (Third turning on the right down Haymarket from Piccadilly)

Cost: 11/6d per head: Drinks extra.

For catering purposes an early and accurate estimate of the numbers who will attend is essential. Applications for tickets should reach me not later than Wednesday, 11th March. Members living in the London area who can offer a spare bed for the night are asked to let me know. Provincial members should give early advice of their requirements.

It is quite certain that our numbers will be boosted by the attendance of several recent members of the Squadron, headed by Major David Oldman, DFC, and so, I repeat, please let me have your applications as early as possible.

To those of you who may be undecided, I would like just to pass on two extracts from letters received last year:-

1. C.R. Taylor (Norfolk) "I shall be there this year if I have to walk"
2. J.R. Stevens (Staffs) "I feel sure that the fellows who could be present but fail to turn up don't know what they are missing"

Finally, please remember that 1953 subscriptions are due and send along the humble 1/- as soon as possible.

*Rugger fans may like to note that this is the date for England v Scotland at Twickenham.

From: "Soldiers in the Air"

by Peter Mead

In the middle of August 1944, travel stained and very tired, I was passing through New Delhi on my way back from the Burma front at the close of the Chindit operations. It occurred to me to visit GHQ, to see if there was a chance of an Auster conversion course; to my surprise I was told there was, and in a fortnight I was on my way to join 656 Air OP Squadron at Ranchi in Bihar.

656 Squadron had just been withdrawn from operations in Burma to refit, to rest and to train a new batch of pilots fresh from Jodhpur. I joined them and started to learn about the Auster III. The training version was necessarily a two-seater; in operational aircraft a wireless set replaced the second seat. It was exceptionally light, took to the air after the briefest of take-off runs, and was reliable and easy on fuel. Unlike the Tiger Moth the Auster III had flaps, hinged surfaces at the back of the wings which could be lowered when approaching to land. This changed the effective shape of the wing permitting a slower approach, a shorter landing and a quick stop. After an intensive month I did some effective Air OP shoots while flying it, but could not claim to land it on a short strip with much skill or consistency.

I was duly pronounced a qualified Auster pilot, but GHQ (India) declined - on what seemed to me inadequate grounds - to give me my Air OP wings.

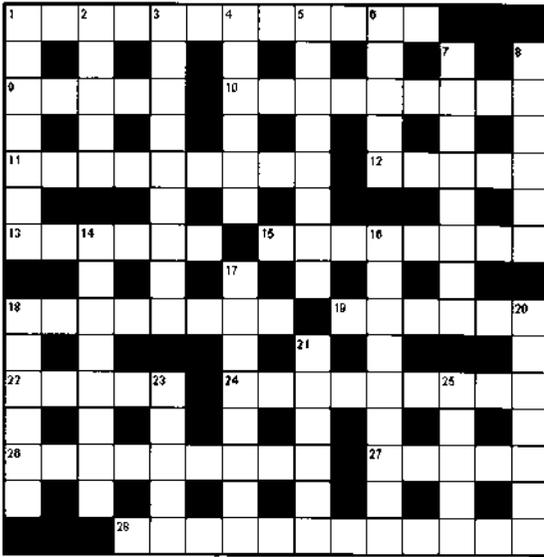
"A slipping gear could let your M203 grenade launcher fire when you least expect it. That would make you quite unpopular in what's left of your unit."

Cryptic Crossword

Set by Alberich

Source: www.freecrosswords.net

Please let us know if you would like this to become a regular item in the Journal.



ACROSS

- 1 Blooming tooth robber! You have the legal right to fine him (12)
- 9 Dostoyevsky's Prince Myshkin gives one girl books (5)
- 10 Bursting in and bursting out, we hear (9)
- 11 Completed dub on soundtrack extraordinarily quickly (9)
- 12 Recent time lost makes one tardier (5)
- 13 Some metal boxes get returned, flattened at the edges (6)
- 15 Radioactive metal found in protein by one university microbiologist originally (8)
- 18 Composer who brought Spanish language to Italy? (8)
- 19 It helps produce groovy music (6)
- 22 Required by one sitting president at meeting (5)
- 24 Topless sex on Prague television initially bothered censor (9)
- 26 One who makes good money for his employers wouldn't be welcome at Lord's, perhaps (9)
- 27 Brad returns with a climber (5)
- 28 Repeatedly speak with East European corrupt dialect (6-6)

DOWN

- 1 Bespectacled Corin somehow finds a S. American flower (7)
- 2 Brief moment for a lyricist? (5)
- 3 Give advance payment to South African province before delivery (9)
- 4 Non-Spanish speaker in America has to travel around to make a call (6)
- 5 Version of *Christe eleison* primarily for those with unorthodox creed (8)
- 6 Banish former huntsman out East (5)
- 7 Defective hearing result of putting one in the wind (8)
- 8 Worker is on the edge in Northern Ireland (6)
- 14 Reluctant Marion undressed for seducer (8)
- 16 Raised capital to support one theatre with production of Lear, among others (5,4)
- 17 Eskimo shaman finds English king in capital city, decapitated (8)
- 18 Commander in chief to the Queen has love for orator (6)
- 20 Leak incomplete cross-reference (7)
- 21 A mineral source extremely thin on the ground (6)
- 23 Dance graduate leaves cake (5)
- 25 A shortage? What a shame (5)

Answers on page 39

PINGAT JASA MALAYSIA

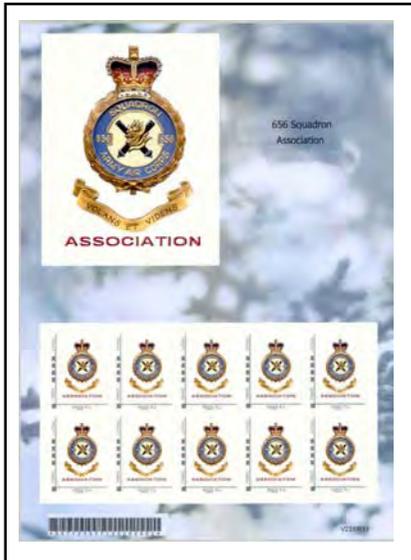
As you know, those serving in Malaya between 31st August 1957 and 12th August 1966 and in Singapore between 31st August 1957 and 9th August 1965, are entitled to the Pingat Jasa Malaysia. There are many of our members whom we think are entitled to this medal and have not yet received it. Below is a list of names of those members. If your name is on this list and you have already received your medal from another source, please let John Heyes know, *contact details on back page*. If your name is on the list and you have not applied through another source, but would like to receive your medal, again, please let John Heyes know. Due to the high cost of Recorded Delivery postage and packaging, we are obliged to ask members to accompany their application with a cheque to the value of £3.00 payable to 656 Squadron Association to cover this cost.

Rick Adamson	RA	George Macintosh	RAOC
Ron Anderson	RA	M. Mahoney	RA
K.G. Angell	RAF	Dave Mallam	AAC
Michael Badger	AAC	B. McGuinness	14 Flt
M. 'Barney' Barnikel	REME	Frank Miller	FAA
Peter Beacon	RCT	F. Milnes	RA
R.M. Begbie	RA/AAC	W. Terry Monaghan	RA
Dave Brewster	RAOC	Bill Morgan	R/Sigs
Ivan Brown	RAF	B.R. Morrall	RA
Jim Buckley	RA	Peter Murphy	REME
Keith Cawley	REME	Paul Murray-Hoodless	RA
H. Glyn Chambers	REME	R.W.G. 'Nick' Nicholls	GPR
Alan Chester	RE/AAC	Derek Oldershaw	RA
J.S. 'Nobby' Clark	REME	Barney Paradine	RA/AAC
J.C. Connor	RA	Philip Pettyfer	16 Flt
Roy Corbett	RA	Bob Platt	RAF
Bob Darell	RA	Mike Pollard	RA
J. Paul Durrant	R/Sigs	John Rimmer	REME
L.L. Edwards	RA/AAC	Bill Robson	RA
V.G. Finch	REME/AAC	Adrian Smith	AAC
Malcolm Fleming	RHF	Barry Smith	RA
Trevor Foxcroft	RA	C.R.B. Smith	RA
'Paddy' Norman Gardner	RA	G.H. Southall	RA
Ken Hamilton	RA	Brian Spink	RAF
R.C. Hayman	RAF	Bob Stanton	RAPC
Howard Heathfield	REME	Robert Staveley	RA
Brain Hill	REME	J.P. Tighe	RCT
Keith Johnson	REME	T. Tunstall	RA
L.D. Jones	REME	W.M. Waring	RA
Monty Kennealy	REME	W.H. Wastell	GPR/AAC
Dave Key	RAF	F. Wheatcroft	RA
Patrick Knight	RN	C.R.B. Richard White	RA
K. Laws	RAF	B.R. Williams	SHQ
Maurice Leppard	RA	M.S. Wilson	REME

UNIQUE POSTAGE STAMP AUCTION

John Bennett has commissioned a limited edition of French postage stamps bearing the Squadron badge. He has kindly donated them to the Association for auction, proceeds to go to Association funds. These stamps are unique and should prove of value to philatelists and like minded collectors. The stamps and envelopes are shown below.

There is one sheet of 10 mint stamps at a face value of €0.85 per stamp. There are also 5 envelopes with a franked stamp on each one.



We are asking for a starting bid of £12.00 for both the sheet of ten stamps AND Number 1 of 5 posted envelope, also starting bids of £1.00 for each of the other envelopes with the franked stamp.

Email bids should be sent to John Bennett at 656assn@talk21.com Postal bids should be sent to John Heyes, *contact details on back page*, who will pass on the bids to John Bennett to add to his email bids list.

The final auction will be at the 2008 reunion where any additional bids will be taken.

John Bennett will publish the latest and highest bids weekly on the website on a hidden page: www.656squadron.org/stamps.htm The bids will be shown as anonymous.

Full rules may be obtained upon request.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Below you will find a list of members who's mail has been returned to us as "Moved" or "No longer at this address" etc

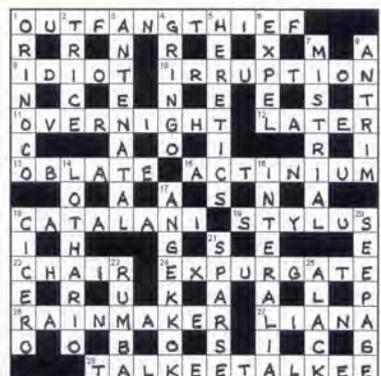
If anyone knows where they may be, would you please either let us know or ask the person concerned to let us know, in order that they may have their Journals sent to them.

Please contact either John Bennett or John Heyes. *Details on back page*

Mr. B.A. Angus
 Mr. G.L. Baldwin
 Mr. A. Birkenhead (Ginger, Austin)
 Mr. S.H. Broom
 Mr. D.A. Budden
 Mr. A. Chester
 Capt. N.J. Coveyduck
 Mr. H.L. George
 Maj. P.J. Gibbs
 WO2 R.M. Gillan
 Mr. G.J. Hall
 Mr. R.C. Hester (Reg)
 Mr. Hives-Woods
 Mr. J.M. Hudson
 Mr. K. Hughes
 Mr. G. Jones
 Maj G.J.F. Key
 Mr. F.J. Leadbetter
 Mr. M. Lord (Mick)
 Mr. M.D. McDaniel (Mac)

Mr. G. McDonald (Gary)
 Mr. S.S. McIntyre
 Mr. M.R. Mockford
 Mr. B. Needham
 Lt Col D. Nicol (David)
 Lt Col F.M. O'Connor
 S/Sgt R. Paton (Bob)
 Mr. S.M. Perry
 Mr. R. Pooley
 Mr. J. Rigg (Julian 'J')
 Mr. P.G. Samways (Philip)
 Mr. W.A. Sheahan
 Mr. B.H. Shepherd (Barry)
 Mr. J. Smith
 WO1 R. Walker (Richie)
 Mr. A. Wall
 Mr. S.C. Walter
 Mr. J. White
 Mr. S. Williams (Steve)
 Mr. G. Meek

Solution to Crossword on Page 32



ASSOCIATION SHOP



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*

Malayan Emergency Revisited Book.

Some members saw a copy of the coffee table photographic book, *Malayan Emergency Revisited*, when on our tour to Malaysia in 2006. We have now found a source of supply for the books. The cost of the book delivered to us is £40.00. In addition members would have to pay £8.24 UK postage for delivery in UK. We need a minimum order of six books to get them at this price. We will make a once off order for books for members if required. If you wish to purchase this book, please send your order to John Heyes by e-mail or letter by 31st March 2008. Anticipated delivery would be June 2008. **Do not** send payment until you receive an invoice for the book from us.

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 back page*

NOTICES

BELATED CONGRATULATIONS

Our belated congratulations go to Russell Matthews and his wife Jill née Beith, who celebrated their Diamond Wedding on 6th December 2007, they were married sixty years ago in St Mary's Church, Kuala Lumpur. We hope you had a wonderful day!

E-mail addresses

Would all members who have e-mail, please send an e-mail to John Bennett our Membership Secretary on 656assn@talk21.com so that he may verify and/or amend the membership list. Your co-operation in this matter would be greatly appreciated. Thank you.

Can you help?

I am trying to make contact with any ex or serving 656 personnel who would be willing to talk to me (however briefly) either in person or by e-mail/letter, about their experiences in the lead up to, during or after the Falklands Conflict.

I am hoping to begin writing a book about the role of the helicopter during the conflict. Whilst countless books and articles have been written about all aspects of the war, to my knowledge, nothing has been published which specifically focuses on the importance and role of helicopters, and the experiences of pilots, aircrew and ground/support personnel during the war.

Any help would be greatly appreciated.

Kind regards

Alex Elton-Wall alexeltonwall@yahoo.co.uk

If you would like to help but do not have e-mail, contact John Heyes, details on back page, and he will pass on your information.

Also ...

Roy Follows, not a member, is writing a book on the Malayan jungle forts and is asking if anyone can help him with photographs or any other information. He has already had one book published, 'The Jungle Beat', which was about his experiences at Fort Brooke. Roy can be contacted at: royfollows@dsl.pipex.com or at: 9 The Beeches, Newcastle Under Lyme, ST5 8RX.

Membership Lists

Don't forget, if you have lost your membership list or would like a more up to date one, please contact either John or Sylvia Heyes, *contact details on back page*, and we'll get one to you poste haste!

NEW MEMBERS

Mr. P.Pile	RAEME	Joined Oct 2007
Mr. J. Wright	REME	Joined Oct 2007
Mr. G. Munro	REME	Joined Nov 2007
Mr. A. Lintott	REME	Joined Nov 2007
Mr.T.D. Rix	RA/AAC	Joined Nov 2007
Mrs. M. Newall	Associate	Joined Nov 2007
WO1 M. Rutherford MC	AAC	Joined Nov 2007
Mr. S. Parker	AAC	Joined Nov 2007
WO2 M. Pattinson	AAC	Joined Nov 2007
Mr. R. Thompson	AAC	Joined Dec 2007
Mr. E. Breatcliffe	REME	Joined Dec 2007
Mr. J. Rickman	REME	Joined Dec 2007
Mr. P. Kibblewhite	REME	Joined Jan 2008
Mr.R.K. Burnand	RA	Joined Jan 2008
Mr. P.A. Bennett	Associate	Joined Jan 2008
Mr. T. Jones	REME	Joined Jan 2008

DEATHS

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

Lt Col T Lacey
Capt JA Newby

RA
AAC

Died July 2007
Died May 2005

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