

# THE CHINTHE



656 SQUADRON ASSOCIATION  
JOURNAL  
SUMMER 2011

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# PRESIDENT'S REPORT

I start my report by marking the efforts of the Squadron, which continues to play a major operational and life saving role in Afghanistan. Having first deployed nearly 6 years ago, this is testament to the dogged determination, professionalism and courage of all its members, including family and friends. Yet the demands on the Squadron are not only in the Afghan desert and mountains. With NATO's coalition forces proving unable to shake Gaddafi from power in Libya a new approach was needed. As the only amphibious-qualified Attack Helicopter Squadron, 656 was tasked to conduct urban/close contact operations from HMS Ocean. We applaud you all and wish you a successful and safe new operational commitment.

Since our last report, Jane and I have been fortunate to undertake a world cruise. It has reaffirmed our belief that the world is populated by friendly, welcoming and kind-hearted people. It also gave us the opportunity to pay our respects at the innumerable monuments to British and Commonwealth human sacrifice and selfless commitment. We also made a presentation with Chris Crouch and his son, Hugh, at Kota Kinabalu International Airport, which I report elsewhere in the Journal.

Thanks to the wonders of the Internet I have been able to keep in touch with our committee, who continue to work tirelessly on a range of projects.

**Work on the archives continues apace** and is now at an advanced stage. It is a tribute to the efforts of Mark, Derek, Ron and Lou.

**The collating of the history of 656 Squadron is progressing very well**, and Guy Warner has now written nearly 100,000 words, which is enough for a book of 300 pages. However, he has a few essential gaps which we are very keen to fill. Therefore if you have any knowledge of the following periods could you consider contacting us?

- **1970-74**
- **1977-79**
- **1981**
- **1983-1993**
- **Rhodesia, 1979-80**

As I have reported in the past, this is a long-term project with a planned publishing date in 2012. Therefore there is plenty of time to make your own contribution.

**This year's Reunion is in conjunction with the International Auster Club. We are combining with their Fly In at Popham Airstrip**

**over the weekend of Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> September.** Details of the hotel on the A303 and the Reunion event on the Sunday are on pages 6 and 7. This promises to be a very enjoyable event and a chance to renew our acquaintance with the Auster. There will be far fewer restrictions than at Middle Wallop two years ago, we hope that pleasure flights will be available, although they will be subject to the weather and the number of aircraft attending. Also to simplify arrangements we will hold the Saturday Reunion Dinner in the Holiday Inn, and the AGM first thing on the Sunday morning, at Popham Airfield. This year's AGM is especially important, I feel, as we will be discussing the book, the archives and early thoughts for celebrating the Squadron's 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

Looking forward to seeing you later this Summer.

*Andrew Simkins*



# SECRETARY'S REPORT

I really don't know where to start for this years report. So much has happened within the Association and in my personal life.

I will begin with thanks, on behalf of the Association, to a number of people.

Mark, Derek, Lou and Ron have invested many hours of concentrated work in sorting out our archives at the Museum of Army Flying. I understand that the end is in sight, of the initial massive sort out, but the task will be ongoing as more people send us photos and memorabilia. Please do keep sending us anything that is pertinent to the Squadron. If you do send anything, dates, names and any notes of explanation are most useful.

Ron has done a wonderful job of bringing our website into the twenty first century. He has been liaising with John Bennett, who did a sterling job of setting up the initial website. Both should be commended for their efforts. Ron is still working to improve the site and sends the committee frequent drafts and suggestions for approval. He spends many hours at his computer doing technical things that we don't pretend to understand but the net results speak for themselves.

My task has been made considerably easier by Sylvia. She takes my suggestions and, usually, runs with them. My suggestions generally involve her in a great deal of work, whilst I sit back and think of greater things and await the accolades! A good example is the purchasing and distribution of the model Austers. I merely suggested that members might like them after she had bought one for my 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. Sylvia immediately took it upon herself to ask members what they wanted, each one was to be a bespoke model, Dealing with the makers in the Philippines was quite tiresome, involving a great deal of correspondence and corrections to the individual models photographs. The machinations went on for months, hopefully, everyone received what they had ordered.

Sylvia also looks after the Association Shop, is Membership Secretary, Journal compiler and distributor and my secretary. When she isn't doing all that, she also looks after me. I call her 'Nurse Rotweiler'

Andrew and new Association member, Chris Crouch, presented a plaque to Kota Kinabalu Airport commemorating the first landing at Kota Kinabalu. See the Spring 2011 edition of the Journal for Chris Crouch's tale. Andrew was conveniently calling at KK on his world cruise and Chris flew out to meet him there. Our Association thanks must go to my friend James Ibrahim who arranged all the contacts and formalities with

the Airport authority and the Sabah Tourist Board. Without James's input, I doubt if the presentation would have been as well received as it was.

There has been some discussion as to the possibility of another tour to Malaysia. My own feeling is that we have now done a number of tours and have probably taken everyone who wants to go but I am open minded to the possibility. I would appreciate some feedback from members as to their interest in making another tour either to the Malaysian peninsula or to East Malaysia, Borneo.

Our new members are down this year, only seven. If you know of anyone who is not a member and who served with the squadron, please try to get them to join. I'd particularly like to recruit some younger members from the serving personnel, there are very few in the Association.

Next year sees the seventieth anniversary of the formation of the Squadron. We intend to mark this at the reunion which will hopefully be held at Wattisham with the Squadron. More details will be available in the Spring 2012 edition of the Journal. The committee will try for a rather grander event than the usual reunion.

I look forward to meeting you all at the reunion at the Holiday Inn, Stonehenge, and at Popham in September. Details of how to book your dinner appear elsewhere in this Journal. Our thanks to the committee members who are organising the reunion and to the International Auster Club who are hosting us at Popham.

Finally, I'd like to send my personal thanks to all those who wished me well after my recent illness. Thankfully, I am now well and almost firing on all four cylinders.



# ANNUAL REUNION

## 10th/11th September 2011

The reunion dinner will be held at the Holiday Inn, Solstice Park, Stonehenge, Salisbury, on Saturday 10th September, arriving at 19.00hrs with Dinner at 19.30hrs. The Holiday Inn can be found just off the A303, one mile East of the Countess Roundabout.

There will be a Raffle on Saturday evening and if members wish to bring something to be raffled, it will be very gratefully received!

Sunday 11th September will see the AGM at 10.00am at Popham Airfield, followed by a Fly In by the International Auster Club, starting around 11.00am. We hope to have flights for members and their families. There is a cafe on site and also an ice cream van, so members are asked to provide their own lunch/picnic. Bring along your chairs if you think you may need them!

The Association shop will be open on Sunday morning only.

Details of how to book the hotel at our special rates are below. Directions to the airfield can be found on page 7.

You will find a form enclosed, for you to complete and return if you wish to join us for dinner on Saturday. No need to return it for Sunday, just turn up!

Hope to see as many of you as possible there.

## HOTEL BOOKING

For those of you that may wish to book a hotel room in advance, please see below:

We will be staying in the Holiday Inn Salisbury, Stonehenge, and the Reunion Dinner will also be held there. The Hotel have arranged an exclusive offer for us to stay there.

The offer comprises of a double room/twin room for the fantastic price of £79.00 per night on a bed and breakfast basis.

If you would like to take up this offer, please call **Claire Legge** or **Gabriel Brown** during office hours, on 0845 2413535 **before the 29th July 2011** quoting **"656 Squadron Association"** with your credit or debit card details and they will be more than happy to make your booking and assist you with any enquiries about the Hotel.

Alternatively, there is a small Premier Inn not half a mile from the Popham airstrip, on the A303/A30 slip road - it's called the Premier Inn Basingstoke South (it's part of The Wheatsheaf pub). Rooms are from £29 when booked in advance.. Tel: 0871 5278064

## DIRECTIONS TO POPHAM AIRFIELD

Popham Airfield  
Coxford Down  
Winchester  
Hampshire SO21 3BD

The airfield lies directly on the north side of the A303 dual carriageway which runs roughly east-west about ten miles south west of Basingstoke in Hampshire.

**From Basingstoke** :- Take the M3 southbound. At Junction 8, turn off on the A303 towards Andover and the South West. Climb the hill on the dual carriageway and as you pass Popham Services (Little Chef & BP on left side, Little Chef & Esso on right side) you should be able to see the big orange airfield windsock on the other side of the dual carriageway. Continue to about 1/2 mile and take the next exit left signed **Micheldever Station & Overton**. Drop down to the bottom, turn right under the A303 bridge, turn immediately right again as if rejoining the A303 towards Basingstoke. This is a two-way slip road and the airfield entrance brick and iron gates are at the top of the rise on your left just 100 meters before you rejoin the A303.

**From Andover** :- Take the A303 eastbound. Note when you cross the junction of the A34 (Bullington Cross) and stay on the A303. Discount one very small road on the left (to Norton), continue to the second main exit marked with countdown boards, signed **Micheldever Station AND Overton**. Drop down the slip road, and at the end go straight on as if rejoining the A303 towards Basingstoke (this requires a little wiggle right and left) but the slip road is now signposted Popham Airfield. You will see the **brick and iron gates of the airfield on the left, just 100 metres** before rejoining the A303.

**From Newbury** :- Travel south on the A34. Pass Whitchurch. Turn left on the A303 eastbound towards Basingstoke (Bullington Cross). Follow latter part of Andover direction as above.

**From Winchester** :- Take the A34 northbound. Turn right on the A303 eastbound towards Basingstoke (Bullington Cross). Follow latter part of Andover direction as above.



# PRESENTATION AT KOTA KINABALU AIRPORT

*by Andrew Simkins*

In the last Journal Chris Crouch reported his landing over 50 years ago on a rough strip at Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Borneo. Chris contacted me about this historic event and told me that he had a wonderful English oak plaque made locally. Along with Derek Walker, we presented the plaque to His Excellency, the Malaysian High Commissioner in London nearly two years ago. While we were royally hosted the aim was always to present the plaque to the airport authorities at Kota Kinabalu. It seemed highly unlikely there would ever be the opportunity for Chris and me to be in Borneo for such an occasion.

Last year, Jane and I then decided to go on a world cruise to mark our thirtieth Wedding Anniversary. Much to our surprise and delight we saw that the ship, MS Balmoral, would call at Kota Kinabalu in mid March. A plan evolved. I wrote to the ship, the High Commissioner and the Airport authorities to advise them that we would like to make a presentation. As Chris was very keen to join us for the presentation maybe our ambition would be realised ...

By the time Jane and I left UK in early January we still did not have confirmation from any of our contacts, but John Heyes, typically, worked away in the background, and the airport authorities eventually said they would be very happy to host us. This allowed Chris and his son, Hugh, to book flights and accommodation, for what would be a 'flying', three day visit. Again John Heyes was invaluable with his local knowledge and contacts, especially by calling into action his local friend, James Ibrahim, who was pivotal in the arrangements for us to link up with the Airport and Tourist Board Authorities.

Come the day Jane and I left the ship along with a ship's photographer and we caught a taxi to the airport, uncertain how things would unfold. Asking for direction at Airport Information, we were directed to the departure area. As there was no-one there we assumed that it was going to be a very low key event, until we saw a huge banner welcoming



the Squadron Association. Chris and Hugh then arrived with James Ibrahim.



Slowly the party grew by degrees as local dignitaries arrived. Eventually we made up a gathering of around 30, along with two Borneo 'warriors' and a girl in traditional costume.

*James Ibrahim who was invaluable in the arrangements for the presentation*



*Borneo 'Warriors'*

I started proceedings with a few words before Chris gave a spirited explanation of how he came to make his historic flight all those years ago. The Airport Manager thanked us warmly, as we handed over the plaque.



*Andrew Simkins' opening speech.  
followed by one from Chris Crouch*

Only afterwards, while enjoying the buffet, did we realise that we were being hosted by the Sabah 'A Team'.

There was also a healthy number of local press reporters and photographers, displaying real interest in the Squadron's association with the region, and evoking warm memories of times past.

After a very enjoyable, warming and worthwhile few hours we departed, with Jane and me leaving on the ship for Brunei, and Chris and Hugh re-exploring the region for 24 hours before their flight back to Blighty.



*Chris and Hugh Crouch with Jane and Andrew Simkins*

One of our hosts, Datuk Irene Benggon Charuruks of the Sabah Tourism Board was very keen to cement the link with photographs of the Squadron's service in Borneo, Thus if you have any photographs of your time there, which show contemporary sights, could you please consider sending copies to Irene, by email or post. (Mail bag 112, 88993 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia. Email: [irene@sabahtourism.com](mailto:irene@sabahtourism.com)) Alternatively contact John Heyes or Ron Ward for advice. Thank you.



## MEMBERS' CONTRIBUTIONS

### Snapshot Memories of A. N. Other Flying an Auster MK9 in Malaya

I do not think that my experiences were anything more special than those of other pilots at the time there who must also have tales to tell; but as one who can now hardly remember where I have left my glasses, or what I went upstairs for, I can remember quite a lot with very great clarity. Some events were quite short, some giving great pleasure and others quite alarming.

I was based at Noble Field, Squadron Headquarters, from early 1960 - November 1960. There it was early days in flying, getting to know my way about and carrying passengers when needed.

I remember shovelling out leaflets through the passenger door in various parts of the jungle. The leaflets were supposed to encourage CTs (communist terrorists) to give themselves up to the authorities.

The other event I particularly recall was the Squadron fly past over Kuala Lumpur in August for the Victory Parade. The Squadron had sixteen aircraft in diamond pattern in four groups of four- It required a lot of concentration, holding the correct position near the leading aircraft, the throttle friction nut was not tight as almost continual minute adjustments had to be made. Sadly I never saw the view of the city below which we were not allowed to fly over normally. I did not see anything of the Royal Malayan Airforce, RAF. or RAAF following us.

The weather there could be pretty bad at times. We were not allowed to fly in cloud, which was normally cumulus which frequently developed into cumulo-nimbus. We were advised that if we were trapped by cloud just over the trees and couldn't get out it was better to put the aircraft into the trees (normally 200 feet high or more) rather than get sucked up and possibly broken up in cloud. Another encouraging piece of advice was that in the event of engine failure over jungle in the mountains it was better to fly straight uphill into the trees! stalling at the last moment, rather than land going downhill towards the bottom and scattering bits of aircraft on the way.

All pilots attended a jungle survival course in Singapore. At that time I hadn't realised that Singapore was by no means all urban and was really quite jungly but with much uncultivated areas and bracken. On the course, among other things, we were shown how to make a para hammock out of one of the panels. We were given these and some spare cord. We were told to get a plastic sheet to cover the hammock. We were told about what to drink and so on. We were shown the orange

balloon we carried which was (as far as I can remember in this case) chemically inflated and in theory put up between the trees on a very long cord and hope to be spotted by a pilot looking for you. We all carried an official emergency pack, but most pilots also carried their own pack with para hammock, plastic sheet, extra food (usually rice), knife, machete, spare jungle boots and clothing etc. In the north of Malaya on many flights we carried a Sterling machine gun as up there the Emergency was still on. Later we got a Sarah beacons mounted so that it could be easily switched on before a forced landing. Also red fluorescent tape was put on the wings and fuselage.

In November 1960 I was posted to 2 Flight in Ipoh. There I have far more memories than I am going to recount. Some particularly good ones stand out.

I was flying north one day when I saw a circular rainbow with my a/c silhouetted in the middle. Another one was while on exercise, I was on the east coast on a low circuit onto an improvised landing area at 200 feet, I could see turtles in the translucent blue sea. Again, flying up to Alor Star, the visibility was so good I could see the rocky outcrop near the airfield about an hour and a half flying away. A particular pleasure, as bird watcher, was seeing a flock of rhinoceros hornbills, I flew up abeam of them and one of them looked at me rather suspiciously. Best of all, was low flying (about 10 feet up) down the river Perak on the way back to Ipoh. Well, we had to keep practising, after all at Middle Wallop we had to fly below hedge height during tactical flying practice, but there were not any hedges in Malaya that I could see.

There are memories of times when I wished I was firmly and safely on the ground. While I was flying back to base over the jungle when the engine coughed, I could feel my hair stand on end. I don't know if my bone dome lifted, but it felt like it. The worst flight was flying back from central Malaya at a suitable flight level with the cloud filling in quite quickly into solid cloud cover and then all started to increase in height. I had to keep increasing the flight level and was thinking that I would have to get to the coast and let down over the sea and hopefully be under the cloud. Ahead the cloud was building even more, I was thinking of calling up RAAF Butterworth to see if they could pick me up on radar and give me a steer. Mercifully a large round hole in the cloud opened up and I could see the ground and could recognise where I was, about two or three miles from base. I got down in very little time before the cloud closed up. Someone must have been looking after me. Another time was getting back to base one evening. The cloud was quite low around Ipoh. Ahead it looked quite bad, dark with lightning strikes. Much



to my surprise a Malayan Airways Dakota passed me at about the same height. Another time was a very short flight from Noble Field. For the benefit of non-fixed wing light a/c pilots, the stalling speed of the Auster Mk. 9 with power on and flaps was 42 knots. Flying below this speed shown on the airspeed indicator (A.S.I) was not possible. I took off getting to the attitude for climbing away. I glanced back at the A.S.I. It was showing 20 knots! Mind into overdrive. Engine instruments O.K. Can I land and stop before the fence at the end of the runway? No! So I have to go on. Call up the tower, downwind still at 20 indicated knots. The Auster 9 stalls quite suddenly dropping either wing and is not nearly as forgiving as the Auster 6/7. So I was really careful on the approach and landing. Another quick problem, not too serious, was that we had to do short landings away from the airfield so we used to pick somewhere among the bushes on the tin tailings. I did several low circuits and took off again and flew straight away into a swarm of bees that had suddenly lifted off. Splattered bees all over, a few got in through the window and luckily all too stunned to do any harm. A more memorable event was flying a passenger from Ipoh. Quite happily en route, nice day etc. I saw something like a coloured rope drop down around my ankles on the rudder pedals. 'Oh dear' I thought, some of the wiring behind the instrument panel must have dropped down. Then it moved! Its head reappeared from behind the fuse box near the passenger, then was not seen again. I did a quick 180, called up Ipoh tower and considered giving a quick lesson to my passenger on how to do a landing in case I got bitten. I landed, my passenger got out, I ran the engine down as one would. About to get out I put my hand towards the door handle and saw the snake lying right along the tubular doorframe next to me with its head by the handle. I got out on the passenger side!

We used to fly quite well into Thailand. The maps we had were the result of 3D photography by the Royal Air Force and instead of contours there were form lines, giving a very rough idea of heights. The map was just green, with one or two rivers showing and also small areas of white with 'cloud' printed on them. I layered mine to a certain extent with coloured pencils to make it easier to guess roughly where I was.

In case one gets the impression that it was all a fun thing, when I was there two aircraft from my flight did not return. One was in Thailand and the aircraft, pilot and passenger were not seen for many years. It was sobering to me as I was flying that day and could easily have had that aircraft allocated to me. The other case was when the pilot who went in and was badly injured was mercifully extracted from the jungle with much gallant effort. Another pilot missed death by inches, he hit a power

cable slap in the middle of the spinner and broke the cable. If it had been any lower that would have been it.

So, I had a good time there, always confident in efficiency of the ground crew. I am grateful to them. Now some 50 years later, the jungle forts and most of the airstrips will have gone. The helicopter now reigns supreme. As I said at the beginning there are lots of other things I could say, but that is enough from me.

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## ***Some anecdotes from Barrie Davies .....***

### **Borneo 1963 – 1966 A day to remember**

The Beaver has 3 fuel tanks underneath the pilot/passengers compartment, 2 of 28 gallons each and 1 of 20 gallons. 76 gallons of high octane petrol in total. Giving a range of 3 ½ hours at a consumption of about 20 gallons an hour or 3 minutes per gallon.

On a busy day in Borneo, 1963 – 66, I had a ‘round robin’ sortie, calling in at a number of short landing strips plus a bit of target spotting for the artillery. Not all landing strips had Avgas 100/130 octane (petrol), most only had Avtur (turbine fuel) for the Scout Helicopter’s turbine engine. So balancing fuel load with payloads, length of landing strips and availability of the correct fuel en route was a very important part the day’s planning for Beaver pilots.

Normally we worked on a 20 to 30 minute fuel safety margin to cover the chance that the end destination was closed due to weather and the need to use an alternative landing place some distance away.

There were often times when the safety factor had to be used, mostly due to bad weather but sometimes because of the actions taking place on the ground. That’s why we had a safety factor!

So, after that busy day, I arrived back in Brunei having burned 2 tanks down to the red ‘empty’ light and the other hovering on empty as indicated by the fuel gauge. Relaxing with a cup of tea in the crew room I was surprised by a mechanic coming in, standing there with his hands on his hips saying “And how, Sgt Davies, did I manage to pump just over 75 gallons of Avgas into your aircraft during re-fueling? That left you with less than 3 minutes safety margin”!

It took a while to live that one down apart from the ‘four eyes chat’ the boss had with me in his office!

In Borneo one did what one had to do!

## Meligan Airstrip

On being posted for the first time to a different climate, an Army pilot was given a month's 'additional instruction' to get him accustomed to the effects of that climate on his aircraft and in Borneo to navigate with almost useless maps. In effect that meant that when carrying passengers he would be accompanied by a QFI (qualified flying instructor) experienced in tropical flying. When carrying freight he could be on his own. My mentor was Warrant Officer 'Red' Meaton, a very experienced Beaver pilot who didn't climb into it but put it on like his favourite coat. I 'picked his brains' every minute we flew together and sometimes in the Sgts Mess. I had been posted straight from the flying school into an active service situation in the tropics and was on a steep 'learning curve' upwards! I'm sure that I am still here today due to the knowledge I gained from Red.

During the first week I was tasked into a small strip called Meligan, in a sort of 'pudding bowl' tightly made up of steep mountains, deep in central Borneo. This entailed having to make a very steep final approach, descending on to the short strip so as to touch down at the very beginning of it. I got a very fast rate of descent going (down like a stone) just over the tree tops down the side of the mountain on the approach path and was quite happy that I was in full control when suddenly Red yelled out '**Power**'. Automatically I did as I was told, giving more power, changing the angle of the descent but because of that, touching down about 20 yards into the strip and only just managing to stop before the trees at the end. I taxied back to the reception area, closed down and got out, still fairly happy that I had made a good approach and landing. Red was nowhere to be seen, looking around I found him on the other side of the aircraft, sat on a wheel, puffing away furiously on a cigarette. He looked at me with that look in his eyes and said 'Don't you **ever** do that again'. Needless to say, I never did.

Thank you Red.

## Ossies

Weathered-in in the Keningau Valley, Sabah, North Borneo.

I had to re-supply the infantry in a forward position called Sepulot, central Borneo. I had been doing the 'horizontal yoyo' between Brunei and Sepulot since morning and when it was afternoon, the usual storms were building but I had to complete the job so I had to push on to completion even if the weather closed in, which it did. With the job just

finished I was stuck in the Keningau Valley with the mountain ranges towards the coast (and my base, the only airfield still open) and the vast inland jungle area, surrounded by thunder storms. I tried known low level routes but they were all blocked, only one option, find a piece of clear flat ground to land on and sit it out for the night. Luckily there were flat clear pieces of ground in that valley.

I spotted some army looking tents alongside a stretch of mud road which would be ideal for me, so I made a bumpy landing on the road, parked up and headed on foot towards the tents. To my surprise it was an Australian Army Engineer unit building a road all the way up the valley. I asked them for a place to kip for the night and got ready to get my head down. Oh no, they said, you're coming down to the mess tent to have a drink with us. I protested that I had no money with me but to no avail. They were very hospitable, getting me quite drunk at their cost and tipping me on to the camp (stretcher) bed to sleep it off at about midnight. Next morning I was woken with a mug of tea and a sandwich and after lots of thanks to them all I strolled up the road to the Beaver.

I couldn't believe my eyes when I got to it, the Aussies had stenciled a row of 10 inch high Kangaroos all the way down one side of the aircraft in bright yellow paint ! No wonder none of them followed me up to see me off ! I took off towards them, low over their tents, and they were all cheering and giving me the V sign !

I got some rude remarks from our lads when I got back, not to mention the flight commander. But it was all taken in good humour.

It wasn't to be left there though ! Our lads' completely unrolled 3 toilet rolls, made a recognisable stencil of an Army Air Corps eagle clutching a Kangaroo in its claws and stenciled it every foot or so down the whole length of all three rolls. The next time I flew over the Aussie encampment I threw the rolls out at about 500 foot so they unrolled and fluttered down on them.

I never did visit them again, pity, I could have bought them a beer each !



*Barrie October 1963*

## **Rosie the Borneo Airways ground hostess at Jesselton airport**

During periods that I was in Brunei with the Borneo HQ of our AAC flight, I frequently had tasks which required a night stop in Jesselton (now Kota Kinabalu). I often had to work with Borneo Airways ground staff while I was there to organise onward shipment of my passengers/freight to Malaya. One particular ground hostess, who I will call Rosie for this story, was always very helpful to my passengers and I. Eventually I invited her out to an evening meal and a visit to the cinema in thanks for her efforts. This evolved into a regular happening and we spent many enjoyable evenings together over the rest of the year or so.

Then I was sent to Tawau in eastern North Borneo (now Sabah) to form a detachment supporting 3 Malay Brigade. After six months or so I was back in Brunei again and had a task to Jesselton again, also a night-stop. When I got there Rosie was nowhere to be found and I had to deal with a young (Malay) ground staff man that day. I had no complaints, he was very helpful with my passengers. That evening, in the Hotel that I had regularly used, I was stood at the bar, relaxing, talking to two Royal Military Police fellas about this and that. They asked if I was often night-stopping there so I told them of my previous experiences, including Rosie. I mentioned that Rosie and I had developed an off-duty friendship that often ended up in this Hotel. I was bemoaning the fact that after my absence of 6 months Rosie wasn't around anymore and I was missing her. They didn't go into the subject so I left it at that. After about an hour, the door to the bar opened and Rosie walked in, heading straight for us. I immediately brightened up, big grin, told them that I was going to be OK for the night now 'cause Rosie had just walked in, I was full of it !! By that time she had reached us, looking very demure, avoiding my eyes she put her arm around one of the Policemen and said "I would like to introduce you to my fiancée, Tom". I was stunned into silence. Tom looked at me, more with a look of superiority than anger and the other Policeman pointed at the ground and said to me "I bet you wish there was a big hole there for you to jump into" !

I have to take my hat off to that RMP for not causing me GBH !



# Looking back through rose tinted spectacles

*by John Heyes*

This is a story of returning to Malaysia in 1986. It has changed much since the writing of this tale

It is often said that one should not return to places that have happy memories, for fear of disappointment.. Perceptions change and memory is fickle. The magnificent buildings and the scenery seen in youth can often be very dull when revisited after the onset of middle age. Hills and mountains are smaller, vistas not as wide and colours are not as brilliant when the rose tinted spectacles are replaced by bifocals.

This is a story, which in large part belies the opening sentence. It is a story of returning, after some thirty years, to some of the places, which hold the happiest of memories for me. It is a story of revisiting places that, as a young soldier, deeply impressed in my memory the beauty, charm and culture of a country that has now radically changed but has retained its enchantment. The people are a wonderful ethnic mix of Malay, Chinese, Indian and Tamil. The Malay people are one of the most hospitable that I have ever met, nearly all Muslim with the generous hospitality and friendliness that their religion imbues. The country is Malaysia, called simply Malaya when I first visited, and well worth the effort to visit or, as in my case, revisit.

In 1959 I was a young soldier, posted to Kuala Lumpur, to maintain the Auster aircraft that the newly reformed Army Air Corps was operating. The Malayan Emergency was coming to an end and Malaya was getting to grips with her burgeoning independence granted in 1957.

Our first port of call was Kuala Lumpur. My wife, who had not been to Malaysia until this point, had not been married to me when I was in the Army and had only heard my monotonously repetitive stories of the wonders of the Far East. She was delighted with our first two nights accommodation. We were in the Hilton Hotel, which overlooks the city. We drove around the city, not only finding many new and impressive buildings, but also many unchanged streets of 'Shop houses' and old colonial style buildings. The railway station was just as I remembered it, magnificent in its palatial facades. The Selangor Club and Padang with its surrounding mosque and civil administration buildings seemed unchanged though I suspect that the membership criteria to the club might have changed. The Lake Gardens were just as beautiful as I remembered. Walking down Batu road, now named Jalan Tuanku Rahman, was like stepping back in time for me, most of the old drinking haunts of off duty soldiers were still there but, alas, Nanto's bar was gone, replaced by an antique shop. I spotted that the Coliseum Restaurant was

still operating and promised my wife that she would have their famous 'Sizzling Steak' there that very evening.

The Coliseum Restaurant was one of the best in town when I was first in Malaya. Soldiers could ill afford to eat there unless it was a very special occasion. It was the first port of call for the rubber planters when they came to town for a break from their isolation on the plantations. One would often find several sitting over their Tiger beer, just relaxing and chatting now that they were in a safe environment. The planters were always very appreciative of the Army and the role that it was playing in protecting them. They would inevitably ask soldiers to join them and would buy them beer in the knowledge that they, the planters, were financially far better off. Their generosity was always appreciated and almost never abused.

We duly arrived at the restaurant and were seated at a wobbly table. It was spread with a cloth that had originally been white but was now a shade of mid grey liberally spattered with assorted coloured stains. Tiger beer and sizzling steaks were duly ordered. An ancient waiter appeared with beer and what can only be described as two pinafores. He tucked the pinafores around our necks and spread them on the table before us. The reason for this strange napkin arrangement became clear when the Sizzling Steaks arrived. The ancient waiter carefully placed sizzling cast iron platters in front of us. The platters were so hot that the juice from the steaks was flying in all directions. The pinafores, tablecloth, our arms, faces and spectacles were soon covered in boiling steak juices. The whole meal was quite delicious and we sat back to enjoy the last of our Tiger beer. It was at this point that my wife chose to visit the conveniences. The ancient waiter directed her to the door through which our food had appeared. She returned aghast!! The convenience appeared to be unisex and consisted of three sheets of corrugated iron, open fronted, surrounding an Asian type toilet, on a raised dais arrangement in the corner of the kitchen. Apparently the smell was indescribable. Needless to say, she decided to wait for relief until we returned to the hotel.

On our second day we went to see Noble Field, the airstrip and camp where the squadron had had its headquarters and workshops. The old hangar was still there but the tin sheds, which were used as workshops, had gone. The airstrip had been built over but the old accommodation 'Bashas' were still there, apparently unchanged, and occupied by the Malaysian army. Memories came flooding back. I could still hear people shouting across the open square to 'Busty', the charwallah, for tea or sandwiches. The charwallah was a wonderful institution that had been transported from British India to Malaya. They travelled with the army

unit with which they had their franchise and were inevitably the first to know of any promotions, training exercises or events, which would affect them. They provided a line of credit to the soldiers and would serve delicious meals and snacks from the most basic of kitchens. The char-wallah was always open when all other facilities had closed.

Day three and we were off on our tour of the northern part of the peninsula. We drove over the old road to Bentong, through typical Malay countryside. Paddy fields and primary jungle, interspaced with plantations of rubber trees and oil palms. Malay villages and towns along the way are unchanged since the days of the Raj. The road from Bentong up to the Bentong Gap is spectacular. New roads have bypassed this old route and the narrow roads that I remembered so well are completely unchanged. The road up to the top of the gap winds through precipitous jungle clad hills. For the best part of forty miles the road has hairpin bends, which occur at the rate of forty to each mile travelled. This now peaceful road was a favourite place for the Communist Terrorists to ambush both civilian and military traffic, indeed, Sir Henry Gurney, the Governor General of Malaya, was killed here by Communist Terrorists in 1951. Trucks loaded with huge logs still hurtle down the steep hill roads to the terror of the innocent motorist. The hillsides are so steep that one can see over the tops of the two hundred feet high jungle canopy. Spectacular views of the seemingly unending, misty, serried



*Bentong Gap Resthouse entrance*



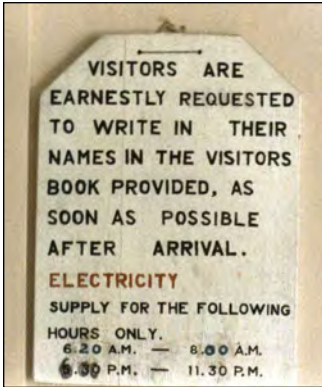


*Bentong Gap Resthouse*

hills, stretching from here to the Malacca Straights are seen through the gaps in the trees. The air is cool and clear and is filled with the sounds of the birds and insects. Small torrents of water cascade down the hills and disappear under the road and appear on the other side. Magnificently coloured butterflies abound.

We had booked to stay the night at the Gap Resthouse. The resthouses are another legacy of British India. They were spaced a days travel apart to serve as temporary accommodation for government servants. Most towns in Peninsular Malaysia still have a resthouse whose services are available to travellers at the most reasonable rates. The services in the resthouses are basic, a clean bedroom with fresh linen, limited menus in the restaurant and a pleasant ambience, usually with a good view from the verandah. The Gap Resthouse is situated at the top of the gap road, at the junction where the spur road climbs up to Fraser's Hill. Fraser's Hill is an old hill station where the weary colonial officials would retire for a couple of weeks each year to get away from the sultry heat of the city. We were shown into the huge old colonial style house, which serves as the Gap Resthouse. It had not changed one jot since my last visit thirty years before. All electricity is supplied by a generator, which shuts down at eleven thirty each night and restarts at six thirty in the morning for two hours only. The house is surrounded by primary jungle, the huge trees shooting straight up to the canopy some





two hundred feet above. It must be one of the most peaceful and relaxing places in the world. Birds and insects make their songs all day. Butterflies with startlingly iridescent coloured wings flutter everywhere. Monkeys and other animals call from the trees to let you know that you are only being tolerated on their territory. In these peaceful surroundings, it is hard to believe that from a jungle camp close by, Spencer Chapman and his men fought and harassed the Japanese Army, during their occupation of the country in the Second World

War. We spent a peaceful night at the Gap resthouse and woke refreshed for our next days travel.

Day four and we descended from the Gap onto the new road to the north. Paddy fields stretched out to the horizon on our left and the hills of the peninsula's central spine rose up on our right, reaching up the Cameron Highlands, another hill station. Our first stop was at Ipoh. The pillars of limestone 'Karsts' sticking up straight out of the fields make a superb backdrop to the town. Huge colourful Indian religious statues recline in the low caves in the limestone outcrops beside the road. The town had grown but remained unspoiled by the changes. We stopped for lunch at a splendid new hotel then pressed on to our destination for our next night stop.

I had been stationed at Taiping for a large part of my first tour in Malaya. Taiping is a few miles to the east of the main road from Kuala Lumpur to Penang. In the hills above the small town is the oldest of the hill stations, Maxwell Hill. Thirty years before it had been administered by the government and was a beautiful place to spend a peaceful week end in the cool of the hills. The hill station consisted of a number of bungalows, a restaurant and beautiful gardens. As soldiers we could not afford to stay there for the weekend but would often go up for the day. I wanted to spend a night there. We had made our bookings, secure in the knowledge that, if the Rest Houses were anything to go by, we would have clean and comfortable accommodation for the night.

On arrival at the bottom of Maxwell Hill, the heavens opened and we were deluged in a tropical rainstorm. Being an old hand, I told my wife that the rain would soon stop and not to worry. Private cars are not allowed up Maxwell Hill, the road is too steep and tortuous. Transport is provided by the hill station, in Land Rovers. We duly climbed into the back of a Land Rover. The canvas 'Tilt' over the back leaked everywhere

and great sheets of rain blew in through the open rear. If we had not been wet before we started up the hill, we certainly were now. I told my wife not to worry about being wet and cold as we would be able to get a hot shower and change once we got to our bungalow.

It takes about twenty minutes to get to the hill station and by the time that we got there we were thoroughly miserable. We were dropped off at our bungalow and went in to meet the staff. It was at this point that I realised that there had been a significant change in the way that this hill station was administered. The bungalow in which we found ourselves was in a sad state of repair. The curtains were tatty and hanging in great sagging loops. The lounge furniture was dirty and sagging. It transpired that the restaurant was now closed and had been converted into a large bungalow. All of the other bungalows had been sold off to independent entrepreneurs to rent out.



We then went to our bedroom to shower and change into dry clothes. Our bedroom was a revelation!! A grubby room, furnished with two sagging steel framed single beds on which were thin mattresses and one paper thin blanket for each bed. No sheets or pillowcases. The dirty window was partially covered with thin curtains hanging in swathes from a total of five hooks.



*The 'kitchen'*

No water came forth from either the filthy shower or the filthy sink taps. The disgusting toilet would not flush.

I went in search of mine host and found him and his wife in the lean-to arrangement that served as a kitchen. They told me that the water was not

working as the pump had broken down, meanwhile, the rain was still coming down in a deluge. We were now very tired, cold, wet and hungry. We decided that it would be better to forgo the night in the hills and return to Taiping or Ipoh to find an hotel. Not possible, advised our host, the last Landrover down the hill was the one in which we had arrived and it would not return until tomorrow morning. We dried ourselves and changed into the warmest, driest clothing that we had. We had left most of our clothes in the car at the bottom of the hill as we were only to be here for one night. Most of the clothing in our overnight bags was either very damp or soaking wet.

We returned to the lounge and asked for tea. Our host returned some minutes later with a huge kettle in which was strong lukewarm tea already blended with sugar and condensed milk. When asked what we could have for our evening meal, mine host looked totally nonplussed. Under the new arrangements, visitors were expected to bring their own food and cooking utensils then prepare their own meals. I explained that we were unaware of this arrangement and that perhaps he could arrange a meal for us for which we would gladly pay. He disappeared into the lean-to kitchen and an altercation in Chinese could be heard. We assumed it to be an altercation but, with the Chinese one can never be sure, they seem to conduct all conversations at the maximum human decibel level. The shrieking subsided and mine host returned to say that he could manage to produce a meal of eggs and chips. By this time we



*Our bathroom. No running water for the whole time we were there!*

were not only very cold but also desperately hungry. The meal arrived. Two cold and rubbery fried eggs and some large hard chips, all cold. We ate and decided to forgo the tea in favour of beer, which seemed to be available in quantity. Thus fed and watered we retired to bed.

The rain continued to pour and the temperature seemed to drop even further. We both lay shivering in our beds under the single blankets. After about an hour we decided that the best course of action would be for both of us to occupy one bed, thereby deriving the benefit of both blankets and shared body heat. At this point, it is worth noting that neither of us is either slim nor sylph like. Another hour passed and we were both still cold so we donned all of the driest clothing that we could find and spent the rest of the night jammed together in the bottom of the steep sided valley that the sagging bed formed. Morning came as a blessed relief.

After cleaning our teeth with a mixture of beer and toothpaste, an interesting combination, we looked out to find that the rain had stopped and the spectacular views had returned. If the accommodation and food had been disappointing, the beauty and softness of the morning more than made up for it. We were soon warm again and happily jumped into the Landrover to get back down the hill.



## WEBSITE PICTURE GALLERY

As I'm sure you are aware, Ron Ward, our Webmaster, is continuing to update our website.

At the moment he is concentrating on the picture gallery and you will find it is already vastly improved. It is a lot easier to find what you're looking for and the quality of the photos is also much improved.

Ron is looking for more photos all the time, so if you have any you'd like to let us copy and put on the website, please let Ron know. *Contact details on page 36.* We are looking for all eras, of course, but particularly need any you may have after 1964. We have very few of Rhodesia and the Falklands, so please have a good rummage around.

To view the pictures so far, go [www.656squadron.org](http://www.656squadron.org) Click on 'Gallery' click on a link to view the relevant gallery.

**\*\*New galleries (large Multi thumbnails per page):** You can view the images in 'zoom mode' by 'left clicking' on the selected image and to return to the page (un-zoom) select the 'Start Page' tab which also doubles as the return to 'first page' when displaying a page of thumbnails where there is more than one page in the gallery. Close the Browser 'Tab' to return to this page.

*Please note the Gallery is being redesigned and some of the images initially will not be in the correct Gallery.*

To paraphrase Morcambe and Wise "All the images are there, but not necessarily in the right order"!

### YOU CAN EMAIL YOUR LARGE FILES TO RON USING

'YOU SEND IT' *Details below:*

This facility is available for members to send in batches of photos, large text files etc. that are too large for an email attachment and you do not need to have the programme YouSendIt.

Copy or click on the link to open your browser and follow the instructions. Please complete the boxes even though they are listed as 'Optional' including the name of the person who you want to receive this 'upload' and a short message. Thank you.

<https://www.yousendit.com/dropbox?dropbox=ronward>

To send a single file click on the 'select file', navigate to the file and select.

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If the files are ALL in the same folder and in order, select first file and holding down the 'up shift 'key move to the last and select.(All files between the two selection's will be selected)

*Note: That when you select the files they will be 'highlighted' and will appear in the box. If you make a mistake files can be deleted before you send.*

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You may use this service to send files easily and securely to Ron Ward

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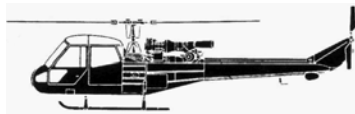
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Subject:

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If you have any problems or need assistance please email Ron on: [ronald.ward1@ntlworld.com](mailto:ronald.ward1@ntlworld.com) or phone 01276 504907 and he will do his best to assist you.





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## BOOKS



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and click on 'SHOP' on the home page.

# NOTICES

## Apologies

My apologies go to Pete Biggadike, Geoffrey Simpson and also to Chris Crouch, as I misspelled their names in the Spring Journal! Sorry Gentlemen. Sylvia

## Congratulations

Congratulations to Diane and Maurice Haynes on their Golden Wedding Anniversary in August this year. We hope you have many, many more!

## Can you help?



Ron Ward would like to know if anyone remembers this AT Arm Badge, 1961 era. Does it still exist? If you know anything about it, could you please let Ron know, his details can be found on page 36. Thank you.

## This was in response to the Kluang Story on page 6 of the Spring Journal...

I was delighted to read about Kluang and was the last CO of the Workshop before we moved it to Singapore for the last year within the boundaries of 40 Base Workshop on the Ayer Rajah road ( just behind the Gap Club).

However, I ought to let you know that I was Major G B Simpson and not Major O B Slimpson and recorded in the Spring 2011 Journal !

In fact Brigadier Reading who wrote the Craftsman article was DEME Farelf in 1970 and he accompanied Major General Girling ( The DEME) on his tour of the Far East early that year. They flew in to Kluang from Seremban (where General Girling had gone through the Station Workshop like a hot knife through butter) to be confronted by Captain John Compton's Quarter Guard before he could enter my office to drink fresh lime juice before "doing" our workshop.

It should be remembered that John Compton had been the Corps RSM before Commissioning and the DEME was very impressed by the the bearing of the guard and the turnout ( in white No 3's) The Quarter Guard got us off to a good start and my workshop Officer, Don Moore

and my Tech Admin officer, Joe Denton (who sadly died in December 2010) completed the job of handling the General brilliantly.

General Girling, who could well be described as "A very heavy fish on a very light line" was very pleased with the visit and the next week he came to sail GP14's in Singapore and my wife, Eileen, crewed for him in the Sunday morning race.

Happy Days! *Geoffrey Simpson*

### **Donation**

Our grateful thanks go to Val Powley, widow of Don Powley, who has passed on a bequest to the Association, of £1,000, from Don. Val said Don especially wished to leave something to enable the Association to function and move on. The time spent with 656 Sqn was the highlight of his army career. He would have been delighted with all the work that is being done to assemble the records of the Squadron. Many thanks.

### **Museum of Army Flying Offer**

The MAFO have just launched a special offer for four to forty pensioners who can now get a two course lunch and admission to the Museum for just £9.50 each. To take advantage of this offer, contact Alison Brierly at the Museum on 01264 78441121 or email :

[administrator@flying-museum.org.uk](mailto:administrator@flying-museum.org.uk)

## **NEW MEMBERS**

Vi Macleod	Associate	Joined Jan 2011
Dave Maund	REME	Joined Jan 2011
Andrea Jones	WRAC	Joined Feb 2011
Chris Crouch	RTR/GPR/AAC	Joined Mar 2011
Gordon Fielder	RN/REME	Joined Apr 2011
Reg Blackborow	RAF	Joined Apr 2011
Gus Gutteridge	RAF	Joined May 2011

## **DEATHS**

*Sadly, we announce the death of the following member and offer our sincere condolences to his relatives and friends.*

Robert I. Wright	RA	Died Jan 2011
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