

Phone:
BARNET 6141
LONDON, N.14.

68 Bramley Road,
Southgate

March, 1950.

This News-Letter, our first ever, is an attempt to keep those members, at home and abroad, who cannot attend our Annual Reunion Dinner, more in the picture.

-- A few word on the history of our Reunions may be of interest. The first was held in 1947 and was attended by 83 ex-members of 656 Squadron and/or 1587 Flight. Major Coyle was in the Chair and the happily informal programme instituted on that occasion has been followed closely in subsequent years. Speeches and Toasts were cut to a minimum; the Loyal Toast, a few moments silence in memory of those we left behind in India and Burma, a warm welcome from the Chairman, and then a brief meeting at which a unanimous decision to form our Association was taken. Those present then split up into small parties to renew old friendships over pints of real beer.

In 1948 Frank McMath presided over an attendance of 71 and the following year Ian Shield took the Chair at a gathering of 62 members.

On February 11th this year Major Coyle was again in the Chair and another very enjoyable evening ensued, although for various reasons our numbers dropped to 46. Those present were:

Andrew's, Appleton, S.Batt, P.Barry, Beard Bromwich, Bescoby, Branston, Collier, Coyle, Clark, Cubbage, Day, Deacon, Disbery, Dobson, Eaton, Ecott, Ellicott, Fowler, Gronland, Hartwell, Henshaw, Humphrey, Hutt.. Jarrett, Landers, Maslen-Jones, Matthews, Maycroft, Mcbiath, MoNinch, Munro, L.O.Parker, Rees, Samways Seaman, Stevens, S.O.Taylor, Tinsley, Twohey, Venables, Webb, J.Jilliams (C Flt.Lt Wilson and D.P.A. Wright.

In addition Weaver and Bob Wright looked in later in the evening.

Nixon, one of our keenest supporters, was an unexpected absentee. It transpired that on that very morning he had been blown off a ladder and had been rushed off to hospital. Fortunately nothing worse than severe bruising was diagnosed and we trust that he has by now completely recovered.

It was a great pleasure to welcome Hutt, Landers, Matthews, L.O.Parker, Webb and Williams who were paying us their first visit.

The continued attendance of the "long-distance brigade" was very gratifying. Beard (Rotherham), Besooby E.Retford), Branston Skipton), Clark (Weston-Super-Mare), Henshaw Huddersfield), Rees Mrmarthen) and Tinsley (Spalding) are worthy examples, although Foster (Jersey), Anderson (Hetton-le-Hole, Co. Durham) and Topliss (Carlisle) hold the distance records to date.

An innovation this year was a short talk from Major Coyle on the activities of the present 656 Squadron which is still in Malaya. A word of explanation may here be necessary: After most of the members of the original Squadron had left for home the Squadron

as such ceased to exist and from the remnants No. 914 Flight was formed. Here then in Denis Coyle's own words is the story:

"The account of the Squadron that I am going to give you is based on their news-letters; it is not intended to be a detailed history of their operations, but an outline of their activities and problems.

"January 1948 found 1914 Flight at Sembawang on Singapore Island living under crude conditions in the back of their lorries with old caravans as stores. Their new Mk.VI Austers had been in crates for 1 1/2 years and after a case of engine failure drew attention to their petrol systems it was found that all the pipes and carburettors were heavily corroded.

"In April operations against bandits started and at the same time bunjee (undercarriage elastic) trouble came to a head, even the new bunjees flown out from U.K. In June were faulty. In May photography started in earnest and in the following month all pilots were carrying 8 inch hand cameras so that they could record what they had seen.

"In July 1948 656 Squadron reformed with all the chaos and unorthodox activity which has always accompanied a major upheaval on the squadron's part. Within a few days the Flights had shaken themselves out to their detached stations:

1902 Flt. to Taiping 1903
Flt. to Seremban 1907
Flt. to Kuala Lumpur 1914
Flt. to Kluang.

"They were supplied with Auster Vs which had been left over from the war and were about to be flogged to the locals at 200 dollars apiece, There were of course no spares so 8 of them had to be cannibalised straight away. Their vehicles were in no better shape for they had been standing in the open for the best part of two years. They very quickly found that the Mk.V endurance was variable but the engineering staff frowned on our old trick of thinning out on the mixture control and insisted on fitting the correct size of jet.

"The Flights have remained based at their present locations ever since, except that 1903 Flight moved off to Hong Kong in April 1949 where they have since been declared an independent Flight. Towards the end of 1949 S.H.Q. moved to Changi, also on Singapore Island.

"The jobs and the efforts of the various Flights have varied slightly but in the main their stories are similar. Supply of patrols is an important task, either guiding in Dakotas or dropping supplies themselves. One Auster can drop supplies for 50 men in 15 minutes, while flame throwers and fuel are among the more bulky items dropped. Communication, recon and photographic sorties are carried out and all senior officers seem to be frequent passengers. The Auster is frequently the control of the infantry wireless net using 88 sets; this overcomes the damping of ground to ground working through thick Jungle, They also guide patrols and find lost patrols, many lives having been saved by this work. There is little shooting as artillery is rarely used, but when it is in action full advantage is taken of it. Air strikes are

directed on to the target, the most unorthodox method being when an Air O.P. pilot stood behind the pilot of a Beaufighter and directed his attack.

"Flying hours seem to work out about 30 per pilot per month, which is good as it has been maintained over a period under Malayan conditions.

"Normal Air O.P. training goes on as operations allow; it includes night flying and observer training. Observers have proved necessary on a number of the operations and they are doing jolly good work.

"The problems that the Squadron have had to contend with are legion. They started with a rush when they were pitchforked into action with untrained sections, ropey equipment and no spares. They have met with red tape, obstruction and interference and overcome the lot. Their aircraft troubles are not new to most of us - bunjees, rotting, rats, rust and overheating.

"Throughout their news-letters they speak of high morale, Their record in the field of sport is remarkable for a small unit and proves that there is nothing wrong with their spirit.

"I would like to suggest that we send them a telegram in the name of all those present tonight wishing them well for the future and congratulating them on past efforts.

"Gentlemen, I give you the toast of 656 Air O.P. Squadron."

Subsequently the following cable was sent : "The Annual Reunion of ex-members of the Squadron in London send best wishes and successful hunting to all ranks of 656. "

NEWS IN BRIEF

Congratulations to the following members who have successfully completed their training:

Alan Horne, now a solicitor in Elgin.

Derek Tommis, who has joined a firm of Auctioneers and Estate Agents in Stockport.
Eric Southern, now teaching in Stamford.

Peter Carr, who now manages a new farm near Nantwich.

"Tug" Wilson proposes to retire from the Army this summer after 25 years service, and hopes to join the War Department Police. We wish him every success in his new venture,

Ken Bescoby, our erstwhile Sgt. Pay/Accounts, has now risen to the giddy heights of Flying Officer, and is at present stationed at Yeadon, near Leeds.

Tommy Talbot, tired of civilian life, is now back in the R.A.F. and was a welcome visitor to our 1949 Reunion..

"Chiefv" Mason when last heard of was travelling the country with

our old friend "Duck" Mehta wrote at Christmas as usual. He is now a G.I. in the military Training Directorate after commanding the 9th Para. Field Regt. for eighteen months. He would

welcome letters from his old colleagues. The address is: Lt-Col. F.S.B. Hehta, I.A., Army Headquarters, General Staff Branch (M.T.3), New Delhi, India.

Johnny Hill would also welcome letters. He is with the British Embassy, Jedda, Saudi Arabia, but is careful to point out that letters marked "Jedda" in the top left-hand corner and addressed c/o Foreign Office, Whitehall, S.W.1. save air-mail postage.

ADMINISTRATIVE NOTES

A donation of r3 to buy a "Jug of beer" from "Warby" was much appreciated, as were smaller donations from Derek Tommis and Tommy Seaman towards the cost of the Reunion.

Those of you who sent good wishes for another successful evening can rest assured that they were passed on and were appreciated.

A special word of thanks is due to Gordon Twohey *who*

for the third successive year has helped with the tedious business of addressing envelopes.

I have lost touch with the following ex-members of the Squadron, and would like news of their present whereabouts: W/O McCarthy, BQMS Bourne.. BQMS Smith, Sgt. Smith (Arty Clk).

Please do not fail to notify me of any change of your address. Neglect of this simple precaution caused "absenteeism" this year and more than one last-minute "flap".

Those of you who have not yet paid your current subscription are asked to do so without delay. Your humble "bob" helps to keep the wheels turning and it is a small price to pay for even indirect contact with old friends.

-..--..-----...--
I have well over 300 names on my register and shall be pleased to supply any available address on request.

Copies of this news-letter will be sent to the present Squadron with an invitation to all members to join our Association as and when they return to this country. -----

Finally, this news-letter is purely experimental and I would appreciate your comments, criticisms, and, most of all, your suggestions for its improvement, bearing in mind that it must be kept on a modest scale.

Best of luck to you all and I hope that you will cooperate to make our next Reunion, our Fifth, a real bumper success

Yours sincerely,

Arthur Eaton