

**THE
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**656 SQUADRON ASSOCIATION
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OC'S REPORT

Major Mike Neville AAC

This past year has seen 656 Squadron once again lead the way as pioneers in combat aviation. Having gone to sea for an exercise in April 2011 we were warned off for operations over Libya just five weeks later.

With four Apaches embarked, a fifth on its way and plenty of ammunition of all natures the squadron was well prepared for its task. Launching maritime strike missions from a ship is conceptually simple – plan, take off, fly, strike, fly back, land, debrief – but it is the unique maritime components of each of these areas that require months of training and preparation. Ways of working on land had to be shaped to succeed at sea and entirely new procedures for both the squadron and the ship had to be found and ratified. New processes were endorsed and practiced to overcome the operation of what is essentially a land platform in the maritime environment. Additional 'marinisation' of the aircraft from an engineering perspective was required and soldiers had to get used to working in the confines of a ship.

The typical mission saw us fly low level across the sea and over the land to targets allocated to us by NATO for the protection of Libyan civilians. This was demanding aviation, but the squadron was well furnished with very experienced pilots (the average crew had 4560 flying hours at the controls and 310 deck landings). Add to this the professional dedication of the REME, AAC soldiers and RAF technicians who worked 12 hours on, 12 hours off for the majority of the embarkation and one can begin to appreciate the professional application required. The operationally focused and tireless Ship's Company maintained a continually ready platform.

Some commentators said it couldn't be done, that it was too risky, that we would be shot down, and that it could not contribute to the campaign. To us no problem is insurmountable and we knew we would succeed in Libya. When the day of the first mission came media from Sky, the BBC, ITN and several of the print newspapers were embarked. Attack Helicopters are menacing, they manoeuvre in and out of sight and sound at any time of day and in almost all weather. They create uncertainty and deep unease in the mind of the enemy and they are precise with their weapons. With the additional element of surprise by launching from a floating platform capable of moving hundreds of miles a day the new player in the Air Campaign was potent and presented a very difficult problem to the adversary. This was the message we wished to transmit to the Pro-Gaddafi military. Our first mission was to the west

of Brega and relatively simple. Nonetheless I shall never forget the anticipation of launch, the low level flight across the sea and the subsequent Hellfire strikes. Everything that happened that night was a new operational experience for us. We repeated it with growing complexity throughout June, July and into August a further 21 times flying deliberate strike missions across the full breadth of Libya, targeting the Regime's ability to threaten and restrict the freedom of the civilian population. The enemy was well organized, equipped with sophisticated weapons and, certainly in the first six weeks, he was very willing to take us on. However, we succeeded on every mission. Every target was struck, often in the face of significant ground fire, every pilot came home safely and no aircraft were damaged.

656 Squadron is no stranger to life at sea. It was on exercise initially aboard HMS Ocean in 2005 and then in HMS Ark Royal last year that vital lessons were learned which enabled us to adjust so rapidly to the mission over Libya. For this achievement, and our notable work in Afghanistan, it was announced recently that 656 Squadron Group has been awarded the Master's Commendation from the Guild of Air Pilots and Air Navigators, an incredible accolade that all who have served with the Squadron are proud.

The role of HMS Ocean and 656 Squadron Group in Libya was significant. The Squadron destroyed almost 110 targets with 99 Hellfire missiles and over 4,000 rounds of 30mm cannon. Several missions were flown in concert with Tornado GR4 and Typhoon, with coordinated targeting and weapons effect. Fast decisions were required from seasoned aircrew applying the Rules Of Engagement, knowing when to pull the trigger and when to stop as well as reacting to enemy fire and neutralizing the source. Rapidly switching from exercise mode to a war-fighting posture was no small undertaking in the time available, highlighting the determination of those aboard to make this happen and reinforcing the flexibility offered by a maritime platform. Yet again in our proud history the soldiers of 656 Squadron stood up to a challenge, defiant and courageous. They prevailed and I could not be more proud.



PRESIDENT'S REPORT

There is nothing more important to report this year than the sad passing away of John Heyes. We knew he was not well, but he remained stoic and hearty. Yet it was his heart that tragically let him down. He will be greatly missed by his close family, Association members and many friends. John and Sylvia were very much a close-knit team who devoted themselves to the Association. Sylvia has decided to continue her hard work for the Association, which demonstrates great fortitude and loyalty to our organisation and its members. A short tribute to John can be found on page six.

You will find a report on this year's reunion, which was hampered by the tail end of a hurricane! As a consequence, the planned Auster Fly In did not materialise. The International Auster Club worked especially hard to help us, but to no avail. Regardless, it is always a pleasure to renew friendships, spin yarns and recall times past.

656 Squadron Army Air Corps continues to be at the forefront of military operational deployments. As you will see from the outgoing Officer Commanding's report they had much success on Operation ELLAMY. Congratulations to Major Mike Neville and all the Squadron personnel. We welcome Major Piers Lewis, the new Officer Commanding, who many will remember served in the Squadron four years ago, and was our Liaison Officer.

Meanwhile there has been a small victory for commonsense. I am delighted that the Government has agreed that recipients may now wear the Pingat Jasa Malaysia medal. Wear it with pride!

656 Air Observation Post Squadron RAF was officially formed on 31st December 1942 at RAF Westley, while the aircraft started to arrive in March 1943. We have, as a consequence, been discussing with the Squadron whether to hold the Squadron's 70th Anniversary events in 2012 or 2013. There have been numerous factors to take into consideration, including the Olympics and the Queen's Jubilee events. Naturally the Squadron's operational programme must take precedent.

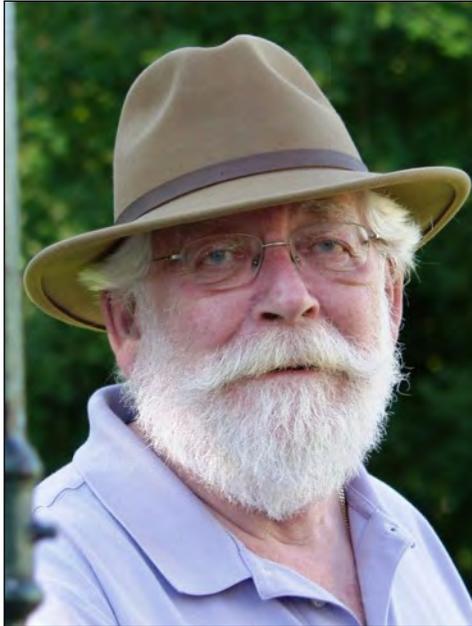
As a consequence we have jointly decided to hold the 70th Anniversary events in 2013, which should coincide with the launch of the book on The History of 656 Squadron.

This year we will hold our Reunion at the National Memorial Arboretum Alrewas, Staffordshire details of which can be found at page nine.

Andrew Simkins

Citation to our Late Secretary

by Andrew Simkins



John Heyes 20.12.40 - 20.10.11

John Heyes was born in Great Harwood, Lancashire, in December, 1940.

John served in 656 Squadron AAC, as a REME technician, in the 1960's, during the Squadron's operational service during the Malayan Emergency. He was justifiably proud of his service. John and Sylvia subsequently lived throughout South East Asia, and retained a great love and respect for the region and its peoples.

John was an active and enthusiastic member of 656 Squadron Association for over 15 years. Increasingly, he took on various responsibilities, ably assisted by Sylvia. When John and Joyce Bennett moved to France seven years ago, John immediately volunteered to take over his duties. Sylvia enthusiastically assisted, volunteering, amongst other duties, to edit the Association's Journal and run the online shop.

Through their joint endeavour, membership has further increased and routine administration has been streamlined. The Association now has nearly 450 paying members, and an active Internet site. Given his extensive knowledge of South East Asia, John organised a veterans'

tour of the region. Over the following six years, he went on to coordinate a further three trips. These required vast amounts of liaison with travel agents, the British High Commissions and local Malaysian, Bruneian and Singaporean authorities. These popular trips were all a resounding success.

Our annual reunion is a complex affair and requires the booking of hotels, coaches, dinner menus and entertainment. On alternate years, the reunion is held at the Squadron base. All the arrangements have been efficiently and ably performed by John and Sylvia. John also formed an excellent bond with the Squadron's Sergeant Majors, thereby retaining a close working link with the current generation of soldiers. This is key to the continued success of the Association, and one for which John can take full credit. In all respects John and Sylvia performed their duties quietly, without fuss or desire for recognition or reward.

In the past three years, John battled with major medical problems. He underwent chemotherapy, and had been declared clear of cancer, only to suffer a heart attack on Boxing Day 2010. He continued to undergo treatment with regular periods in hospital. When he was unable to undertake his secretarial duties, Sylvia ably stood in. Sylvia has also made the Journal her own. It has, consequently, evolved into a professional, very readable biannual Journal which is highly regarded and eagerly anticipated by our members. In all regards they were a team, and the best of teams at that.

John was one of life's gentlemen. He believed that giving was more important than receiving, and went about his tasks with quiet efficiency and humour. His sudden passing was all the more heartfelt, given that he remained stoic and outwardly positive to the end. This is the true measure of the man.



AWARDS

The following prestigious awards were recently made to a former OC, 656 Squadron and the Squadron itself by the Guild of Pilots and Air Navigators.

The Sir Barnes Wallis Medal

Awarded in recognition of an exceptional and innovative contribution to aviation.

Awarded to: **MAJOR DAVID AMLÔT MBE AAC**

The Master's Commendation

Awarded at the discretion of the Master for commendable achievement in any sector of aviation.

Awarded to: **656 SQUADRON GROUP AAC**

The Johnston Memorial Trophy

Awarded to an individual, a complete aircraft crew, or an organisation, for an outstanding performance of airmanship, for the operation of airborne systems or for the development of air navigation techniques and equipment.

Awarded to: **ATTACK HELICOPTER FORCE ('UK TEAM APACHE')**

2012 Annual Reunion Weekend

Saturday 16th and Sunday 17th June

at the Appleby Park Hotel, Tamworth

and the National Memorial Arboretum, Alrewas

The 70th anniversary of the formation of the Squadron falls on 31st December this year, and we recently discussed with the Squadron whether a special celebration would be best held this year or next year.

It was decided to hold the 70th Anniversary celebrations next year, for several reasons. Firstly, the Squadron has many commitments this year, and would find it easier to hold an event sometime next year. This year is of course the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, as well as the Olympics in London, and the 30th Anniversary of the Falklands conflict.

Also, Guy Warner's book on the history of 656 Squadron is due for publication in April 2013, so it would seem fitting to hold the Anniversary celebrations within a few months of the book's release.

This year therefore, we will be holding a normal Annual Reunion Dinner in the Appleby Park Hotel in Tamworth, (previously known as the Aspect Hotel), on Saturday 16th June.

We will hold our AGM in the Hotel on Sunday 17th June from 9.00am to 10.00am, and then travel to the National Memorial Arboretum, Alrewas, for a guided walking tour at 11.30am, followed by a two-course lunch. The NMA is approximately ten miles from the hotel.

A form is enclosed with this journal with further details, including sample menus for the dinner, and I would be very grateful if those of you who wish to attend the events, return the completed forms to me, as soon as possible. This will help us plan and budget the weekend's events.

Thank you for your co-operation.

As you know, we have a raffle every year, so if any of you would care to bring along a gift it would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you.

Sylvia Heyes



Remembrance Day Parade at the Cenotaph 2011

by Derek Walker



L-R: Terry Williams, Roy Drummer, Alan Flint, Derek Walker, Ross Skingley, Maurice Haynes

The thirteenth of November 2011, Remembrance Sunday, was a beautiful sunny day and warm for the time of year, but most appropriate for the gathering of ex-servicemen and women for their Annual Pilgrimage to the Cenotaph in Whitehall, London. My journey started from Chiswick at eight o'clock when I left by bus, complete with the Squadron Association Wreath, for Turnham Green underground station, then onto Westminster, with a short walk to Horse Guards Parade, arriving at ten to nine. Here, the Royal British Legion assembled all parade members, 656 Lt Ac Sqn Assn, being numbered B29.

Initially I was alone and as the groups swelled I felt I might remain so! To pass the time I conversed with my usual parade group, The Beachley Old Boys Association and The Arborfield Old Boys. Later I met up with the AAC main contingent. At half past nine Ross Skingley (Maj Retd) appeared on the scene complete with marker board and lapel

identity card. As we chatted it looked very much like there would be just the two of us, but then Maurice Haynes arrived. It was then that we were approached by a Chelsea Pensioner in all his finery. He turned out to be Colin Chapman an EX-REME Technician who had served in Aden and Radfan Operations. At ten fifteen a further three members arrived, Al Flint and Roy Drummer, Ex-REME, Malaya and Terry Williams Ex-RAF, Malaya, their train had been delayed. So the contingent was complete.

Next we formed up into two ranks and fell in behind the WRAC Detachment. At ten twenty we marched onto Whitehall for the Ceremony of Remembrance, we noticed so many 'Blue Bereted' individuals amongst the other groups, some we knew and others we didn't. The ceremony and parade was very moving, especially being amongst the veterans, injured, maimed, widowed and in some cases fatherless, seeing young children wearing their fathers medals, but all with the same comradeship and determined purpose, to pay homage to the fallen.

As it became our time to march past the Cenotaph, Ross got us in good order, and gave the necessary orders. The wreath was handed to a Royal British Legion Orderly to be placed at the base of the Cenotaph. The crowds were enthusiastic, clapping and cheering all of us as we marched along the route and I'm sure each of us questioned our right to be there. This year the band was more audible and much easier to march to. Eventually we passed the dais from which HRH, Prince Charles, The Prince of Wales, was taking the salute. Then we found ourselves back on Horse Guards Parade and halted in our columns. We then had a photograph taken of the contingent to end a very superb day. The icing on the cake was on arrival home to find the contingent from 656 Sqn Assn had been captured with quite extensive coverage on BBC TV. The telephone calls never ceased! It just goes to show what could happen when you turn up next year to support the Association at the Cenotaph!



656 Squadron Association

AGM held at Popham Airfield on 11th Sept. 2011 at 1000hrs

MINUTES

There were 32 members present.

Apologies: Mark Meaton, John Bennett, VI Macleod

1. There was a welcome by the President, Andrew Simkins followed by one minutes silence for lost colleagues.
2. **Minutes of the 2010 AGM** Proposed: Reg Goodwin Seconded: Bill Morgan
3. **Secretary's Report.** John Heyes said we were maintaining membership numbers, with new members joining, although we still had difficulty recruiting those that had recently left the Squadron. Things going well; see items below on the agenda.
4. **Treasurer's Report:** This was presented by Derek Walker, Deputy Treasurer, in the absence of Mark Meaton, Treasurer. It was shown that the Association funds continue to be in good order. In March there was a donation of £1000 from Val Powley in memory of her late husband Don. Also, in June, a donation of £100 from AAC. We agreed to allocate this money solely to the book project, and since the start of the project we have spent a total of £1,223, therefore spending an additional £123 from our reserves

Acceptance of Financial Report: Proposed: Reg Goodwin
Seconded: Spencer Holtom

In favour: All present Against: None

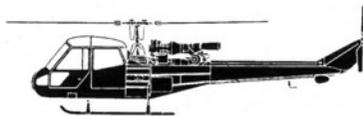
5. **Archives:** The Archives were consolidated in the main, by Derek and Lou Walker and Mark Meaton. The Association's Archives register is being transferred on to a computer system package 'MODES' which can be accessed by all. It is done on a 'Thesaurus' type method, where you type in a keyword and the computer searches our own archives and compares what we have with the museums archives, thereby showing all the information to hand. Spencer Holtom asked if we had to pay to access the files, Derek said that as we provided the package to the museum, the curator

says there is no charge to us. Ted Danton asked if the archives were on display, Derek said no, but we can get access on request.

6. **Subscriptions:** Subscriptions will remain at £7.50/annum
7. **Website:** Ron Ward said the website is constantly improving. There are lots of inconsistencies in AAC records as well as our own, which have to be checked out. There have been no website costs this year financially. Andrew Simkins praised the site and thanked Ron for all his time and effort.
8. **70th Anniversary proposals:** The Squadron was formed on 31st December 1942, so it was considered appropriate to make the 70th Anniversary with a reunion which marked the event in an appropriate manner. When the new OC, Piers Lewis, takes over in Oct/Nov he will give us a firm date for such a reunion. A show of hands showed that the general trend was for early in the year trailing off after August. We hope to invite all past OCs and SSMS. It will probably be in the Sergeants Mess at Wattisham. We will subsidise as usual. There will probably be a 'show' of some kind put on by the Squadron. It was noted that the event would need to be arranged such that it avoided the London Olympics and the Queen's Jubilee, while fitting in with the Squadron's programme.
9. **Cenotaph Parade:** Andrew Simkins said it would be good to have a proper contingent of as many as possible for the 70th Anniversary year. Sylvia Heyes to put out a general email to members requesting them to attend. Bob Dinsdale said he was disappointed with Armistice Day parade at the National Memorial Arboretum as he didn't feel part of it as he did at the Cenotaph. It was generally agreed that this was the case.
10. **Far East Tour:** Andrew Simkins asked if another Tour would be a good idea. John Heyes said we would need at least 20 to make it cost effective. Most agreed that 2013 would be a good year as there is a lot going on for the 70th Anniversary next year. There was a discussion as to where to go i.e. Mainland or Borneo etc. Sylvia Heyes to put out an email to members asking if they are interested, also to put it in the next journal.

- 11. Progress of Guy Warner's History of the Squadron book:** Andrew Simkins introduced Guy Warner. Guy will donate the royalties of all sales of his book, to the Association, on the proviso the Association make a donation to Headley Court. Guy is writing this book at no cost to the Association other than expenses. Guy asked for contributions of memories and anecdotes, and if accompanied by photos, that these be titled and dated with as much information as possible. The book will possibly be published in 2013.
- 12. Free membership to ex Burma/Java members:** This was proposed at the request of John Bennett in his absence. After a lively discussion, it was generally agreed that it was very laudable, but could set a possibly costly precedent. A show of hands showed a 'No' vote.
- 13. Annual wreath laying at or near the Squadron location:** This was proposed at the request of John Bennett in his absence. This was discussed and finally decided that we annually place a wreath at the Cenotaph in London and whenever we were at the Squadron Headquarters.
- 14. AOB:** Thanks to the committee followed by a round of applause.

Meeting closed @ 1115 hrs



656 SQUADRON GOES TO SEA

656 The only Squadron Qualified for Seaborne Apache Operations

Army pilots and their Apache helicopters have proved their worth at sea by firing Hellfire missiles for the first time while flying from a Royal Navy warship.

The gunships successfully fired nine radar-guided rockets, as well as 550 rounds from their 30mm cannons, at seaborne targets during a training exercise off the coast of Gibraltar.

An established asset on operations in Afghanistan, the attack helicopter achieved a 100 per cent strike rate.

Major Mike Neville, Officer Commanding 656 Squadron, 4 Regiment, Army Air Corps, said: "We showed that Apaches can operate effectively from a Royal Navy ship, transporting munitions from the vessel's magazine, aircraft upload, launch, firing and then recovering to HMS *Ocean*."

Defence Secretary Dr Liam Fox said: "This milestone in Army aviation and amphibious operations demonstrates clearly the versatility of our cutting-edge military equipment. The Apache operating to it's full capacity at sea reinforces the Government's commitment to shape and equip our armed forces to best meet the range of current and future commitments."



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REUNION 2011
10th/11th September
At The Holiday Inn, Stonehenge and Popham Airfield

We could never have anticipated that a hurricane, Hurricane Katia, which originated off the American Eastern Seaboard, would disrupt our reunion plans. Previous reunion comments that we had always been blessed with fine weather now seemed hollow. But those that assembled at the Holiday Inn, near Amesbury on Saturday 10th September had an excellent time. That is because these events are not so much about the weather, but more about comradeship. We had taken the decision to use the Hotel for our Dinner, which proved a lively affair. The atmosphere was lifted by the call to Dinner by bagpipes. What a wonderful way to start the evening, and a big thank you to Gordon Fielder.

The Burma generation continues to be represented and again, this year our talisman was Vera Deacon, widow of George Deacon, along with her son and daughter-in-law.

After an excellent Dinner Guy Warner, an accomplished aviation author, gave us an illustrated talk about his research into the book he is writing about 656 Squadron. This was a fascinating



Gordon Fielder piping everyone in to dinner



Vera Deacon and Andrew Simkins

insight and gave us a glimpse of the work he is conducting which should reach fruition in early 2013.

Afterwards Geoff Mansfield showed us 1960's video footage he took in Malaysia. This was both compelling and surreal, given it was without sound. This is a vital piece of archive material, as it records the contemporary scenes of the Squadron's service in South East Asia. Overall, the evening was a wonderful gathering of friendship and laughter, and it was all thanks to the efforts of the committee.

We knew that the weather was unlikely to be in our favour, but there was still a good turnout on the Sunday morning at Popham Airfield in time for our AGM. Important matters discussed are covered elsewhere. It should be said that the committee and members of the International Auster Club worked extremely hard to provide aircraft for the day, so it was as much their disappointment as ours. I am certain we will work alongside them in the years to come.

Strangely the weather at the airfield appeared fine; sunny with a stiff breeze, but when we saw a light aircraft take off with its wingtip nearly touching the grass, it was evidence enough that it was not a day for pleasure flights. Popham is a fascinating place, so maybe we will aim to go there another year? Yet members seemed reluctant to leave and the cafe's profits were swelled by the amount of coffee, tea and cakes consumed.

So, while this year's reunion did not fulfil all our expectations, it was a pleasure to meet up again. We now look forward to 2012.

Below, and over the page are a few photos of some of those who attended the Dinner



Bill Sanders, Val Powley and Will Harrell



Lou Walker, Ron Ward, Bill Sanders, Terry Burns



Derek and Maureen Hitcham



Margaret Fielder and John Heyes



Keith Johnson, Peter Short & Terry Burns



*Clock wise: Chris Goodwin, Keith O'Flinn, Val Powley, Will Harrell
(Bill Sanders, Mike Hall) Reg Goodwin*

MEMBERS' CONTRIBUTIONS

JOINING UP

by George Bostock

I was born in a very tiny mining village, Warsop Vale, in Nottinghamshire; you will not find it on any maps. The done thing in the village was that when boys left school they started work at the pit. I followed the fashion. What a dirty job.

After about two years, my very best mate from nappy days came up to me and said "I'm really peed off with this job, I'm thinking of joining the RAF, the 'Brylcream Boys'," "Great idea," I agreed "I'll come with you" We had to volunteer as miners were excused National Service.

We caught the bus into Mansfield and walked into the recruiting office "Yes lads, what can I do for you?" a man said, "Please Sir, we would like to enlist for the RAF." "I'm not a Sir; I'm a Sergeant, son. I will have no problem with that. Here, fill these forms in." Easy Peasy. "Right lads, let's see your forms." A short pause then; "Right Gordon, your form is perfect. We will have you in the RAF in no time. George, we cannot enlist you, you are not eighteen." Bye Bye Gordon, see you later.

I did not reach eighteen until November 1956, two months later, and decided to enlist after Christmas with the family, but I'd finish with the pit.

January 2nd 1957, back to the recruiting office. Same Sergeant. "I wish to join the RAF." "Sorry, have to go to Carrington Street, Nottingham to enlist in the RAF now." Oops, big problem. Not much money, all spent over Christmas and I'd never been to Nottingham. Colin, another mate of mine, had gone to the office with me; he was on leave from the Royal Artillery. The Sergeant said "Why not join the Artillery like your mate? You'll probably be able to meet up with him." "OK then." This from a very naive George. Colin was posted to Hong Kong, I, to Malaya.

You're in the Army now!

BASIC TRAINING

Second week in January 1957. Travel warrants at the ready, find your way to Oswestry. We could not get lost as we kept near to young men who had already been directed to the training camp and they led the way.

Second day in Oswestry, DA haircut vanished under the shears. Given sheets of brown wrapping paper and sticky labels. Send your drape coat, drain-pipe trousers, bootlace tie and 'brothel creeper' shoes back home. Then collect lots of khaki clothing. If we got the right size



Oswestry January 1957

we were very lucky. A pair of black pimple covered boots. 'We will show you how to make them shine.' Spit and polish. Learning to march and salute. Gym training all day, every day. Corporals shouting insults at you if anything went wrong.

At the end of the day I am knackered and sleep like a baby until some idiot, at six a.m. thought it was funny to enter the billet shouting and batting the iron bedstead with a pick handle.

Personnel selection. I would like to be a driver. One day later the P.S. Office wants to see me. The rest of my billet were sure it's Officer training, with my Grammar School education. Either that or they were taking the P.

The Personnel Training Officer "Right Gunner, with your qualifications, I think you merit something more than a driver. Why not be a

Signaller Driver? We will teach you signaling and you will learn to drive when you are posted to your unit."

Another two weeks of marching and drilling then on to Rhyl training camp on a hill covered in snow in the middle of winter.

You're in the army now!

TRADE TRAINING

After three weeks marching and saluting, we were deemed to move on to Trade Training in Rhyl, to become a Signaler/Radio Op. We were split into squads of about twenty men per squad. Five squads, Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta, and X-ray. See, I am a quick learner. I was in X-ray which was a motley crew of regulars, National Service and failed military police, whose kit was bulled and blanco'd to perfection, lucky buggers.

Unless we were allocated other duties, like Guard or cook house, we were allowed out of camp on weekends. What a funny place Wales is. The population have two languages, English and another. Pubs close on Sundays. During the day we had to march to everywhere we

went. Parade ground, classes, even for our meals. On this one we had to march with our eating irons and mug in our left hand behind our backs. This drill was to change after one of many injections, to move utensils to your right arm and swing your sore left arm.

Some of the squad, whose homes were not too far away, could jump camp for a couple of days to go home. Not so lucky George. To get home it was catch a train to Crewe, change at Chester for Derby, change again for Nottingham last change for Shirebrook (Derbyshire) and then a two mile walk to Warsop Vale. Busses stop running early Saturday. Reverse this for a return journey.

Lucky George, a nice little earner changing a week day guard duty for a weekend one, £3.00, ironing squaddies B.D's, 10 shillings. I did get one week's leave, (I forget, either Easter or Whitsun). Lucky George, all the girls in the village took a liking to the khaki and wanted to be in my company.

Lucky and unlucky George. I met a very nice lady in a dance hall in Rhyl. She was a 23 year old school teacher, beautiful. Only snogged her a few times and arranged a date for the following Saturday. She turned up for the date looking ace, but informed me that she could not carry on seeing me because all her mates had accused her of being a cradle snatcher of a baby faced 18 year old soldier. 'Bye, 'bye, teacher, carry on ironing George.

After six weeks, Delta and X-ray squads were no more and all failures were sent down the road to 31 Regiment RA Driver Training. I was now in Charlie squad. This is where I found a couple of friends Terry Adey, a Welshman and Alan Poyser. One night in the blanco room, I heard a dialect I had not heard in weeks.

"Which part of the country are you from?" I asked.

"Have you heard of Mansfield Woodhouse?" he replied. "Have you heard of Warsop Vale?" I asked.

That was the meeting with Alan Poyser.

After a further six weeks we were fully trained Radio Signalers. We had had many injections to ward off all infections and were ready for foreign climates. We three friends were over the moon. We were all three being posted to 656 Squadron AOP RAF Malaya. Malaya, I'm sure I put Malta as my preference, still, it wasn't Korea or Cyprus. Wait, isn't there a war in Malaya? No, it's not a war, it's an emergency.

Home again, a hero again for three weeks, then a couple of trains to Woolwich Arsenal.

After a week of pottering about in Woolwich, guarding some important building with pick axe handles, it's aboard a plane for Malaya.

What a journey for four bloody days flying. First stop, Brindisi (Italy) refuelling, Bombay, refuelling, in the hottest place on earth, I could feel the heat rising up my trouser legs and dare not touch the hand rail. Bahrain, refuelling, Baghdad, refuelling and overnight stay. Here an Indian boy offered me his sister, I wonder why? Calcutta, refuelling, Bangkok refuelling,. Here is where I ate my first banana fritter and saw my first cheongsam, both beautiful. Then on to Singapore where we will be staying in Nee Soon for a few days.

Will we ever get to Malaya?

At last, after a ten hour train journey from Singapore, we arrived at Kuala Lumpur, Malaya, (which in future I shall refer to as KL). The seats of the coaches were wooden, but a folded jacket as a cushion eased some of the pain.

I cannot remember how many bodies were in our group, it would be six or seven. The only ones I remember were Terry and Alan. A driver and a Land Rover were waiting to pick us up. It was about 8.30pm and about twenty minutes later we were at Noble Field 656 Squadron. The driver showed us to our accommodation, a basha made of attap (palm leaves or something) open to the elements all around, no door, just a gap and enough beds for our party. After we had selected a pit and dropped our kit, our driver took us to the cookhouse for a meal. Just the same as the lunch pack we had on the train, but with much better tea. Back to the billet, talk about what we had seen, kit off the pit, into bed. I slept like a baby.

Around 7am the next morning there was a crack like rifle fire. "What the was that? Has the war started already? They could have waited until we'd had breakfast!" This from one of my worried comrades.

A little later a Bombardier arrived, introduced himself as the Signals Leader and explained that Auster planes were cartridge started, much to our delight and relief. He then took us back to the cookhouse. Breakfast was fantastic. Self service, as much as you like. This looks like being a great time. Lucky George.

From the cookhouse to a bigger, better, posh basha with a door and windows. Stan the Bombardier explained about the boundaries of camp, what other buildings there were, what was expected of us and what our jobs would be and what we needed to know. It was then that we realised how small the camp was. One gunner on each stag to guard the camp. Signallers on duty would work in shifts. Morning duty started 30 minutes before first take off, to check all radios finishing at 12.30. Next shift, 12.30 until the last plane had landed.

Money, one Malay Ringgit was equivalent to two shillings and eight pence in English money. The NAFFI was open for morning and afternoon breaks, then 6pm 'til 10pm. Beer was sold to British law 7pm to 10pm, damn! A gentleman called Chico would clean and tidy the billets in the morning for two Ringgits weekly. If you got sunburned it was looked upon as self inflicted injuries for which you would be put on a charge. We would have to parade every morning at 8.30 in our big basha.

After five days, Major Wheeler attended our posh billet and explained that now we had learned the ropes we would be posted to other flights spread around Malaya and Singapore. Gunner Adey, you will be going to Ipoh, Gunner Poyser you will be going to Seremban, Gunner Bostock you will stay here. Unlucky George. 'Bye, 'bye, Terry, 'Bye, 'bye, Alan. I next saw Terry for two days when we bumped into each other on leave in Penang. Alan was next seen working in a gang on the airstrip at Noble Field; he was in a group from MCTC (Military Corrective Training Centre) Kinara. Since then, I saw his death announced in our local paper two years ago (2009). Terry died about four years ago (2007). We met up a couple of times, but that's another story.

With my posting, I moved into proper buildings with doors and windows, made of wood. No glass in the windows, just shutters. These billets had eight beds each with a side locker. These three billets formed one side of a Square. Twenty four men made up of ground crew, signallers, drivers and clerical staff. We did have a few more that were married and lived out. Not a big army but they came together well and everything went smoothly.

The next side of the square housed QM Stores, Pay Office, CO's Office, Adjutant's Office, Orderly Room, RSM's Office, Transport Office and Signals Section. The RAF APIS (Army Photographic Interpretation Section) had one of the small bashas; the other two were used for troops in transit.

Lucky George, being keen on sport I was selected for football, rugby and cricket teams.

The football team was fairly good because our trump card was a guy from RAF APIS, 'Ginger' Rogers, who was on the books of West Bromwich Albion. Many thanks to Chunky (Derek Walker) for that bit of information. Other players remembered; me, Left half, Chunky, Left back and Ginger, Centre half. What a defence. Others remembered; John Marshall, (REME) Goal. J. Logan, (Navy), (we were a really international team) Danby, (REME) Monk, (REME) Beresford, (REME) and Tom Tunstall, (RA).

The rugby team. Most of the football team played rugby plus Davidson, (REME) Read, (REME) Johnson, (REME) Akers, (REME) North, (REME) and Shingles, (REME). I remember Tom Tunstall very well; we had many a cuddle in the second row of the scrum. Another instance was Ken Beaver missing his boat home. He went to hand off an opponent who grabbed his arm and dislocated his shoulder. As soon as I had my flight date I stopped playing rugby.

The cricket team was OK but consisted mainly of Officers and Senior NCOs. The only other OR I remember was Danby, REME, so we had to be on our best behaviour.

The hockey team. I only played one game. I was detailed to drive some of the team to the game. An officer came up to me and asked "Have you played this game, Driver?" "Not much," I replied, "Good, you're playing, we're one short". We had been playing ten minutes before I remembered not to lift the stick above shoulder height. I thought the umpire was over keen.

Four of the football team were each asked to form a seven aside team. Two semi finals and a final to be played. My team won and I still have the cup.

ACTIVE SERVICE

There were times when I felt I was doing something to help end the Emergency. I was selected to help the pilots with their 'Gubbins training'. The powers that be had fitted tracker devices to old radios and these radios were allowed to get into the 'Communist Terrorists' hands. A driver and I were given a transmitter, sent out and told to set it where ever we liked, then wait until the Auster found us. The pilot would drop a message bag to us asking us to move to another site.

In the waiting time, we would make friends with the locals, especially the kids. When we heard the Auster, we would tell the kids to run and hide, they thought it was great fun. The exercise worked in practice, but we did not get any feedback from the front line.

My favourite part of active service was detached duties on Temerloh Airstrip. The airstrip had been used in the Second World War, I would have thought by both the British and the Japanese armies. It was in central Malaya and the British were getting on top and were pushing the CT's into the middle of the country. Austers were small planes and would refuel here if they were to search this area. Our job was to keep radio contact and refuel them. Our accommodation was again wooden billets but very, very small, just two rooms. The billets were in two blocks of about ten. We had five at the furthest block. They were Signals Office, Cook House, two used as bedrooms and one for a Chinese dog



Myself (on the right) and Dick Field In Benton Gap on the way to Temerloh.

handler. The staff was made up of two signallers, two drivers and Joe, the dog handler.

The first three billets were Malay Police, our guards, not very sociable people as they spoke very little English and we spoke less Malay.

Amenities were two very deep holes in the ground with a wooden shed built on top covering both holes. If two were caught short at the same time you could hold your partners hand. These toilets were flushed by a little splash of Avgas and a match. One of these was flushed by Gnr. Pete Proost while Gnr. Bostock was using the other. This is the only time I came under fire.

Our washing facilities was a well, unfit for drinking. Drinking water was fetched in a bowser, towed by a Land Rover from a Malay Regiment camp about three miles away. This truck also brought back food for us. If it was chicken we had to kill them ourselves. The only casualties I saw.

The good part, after flying had finished, with no more messages to be received, our time was our own. Temerloh was two streets, a picture house, the long house for unmarried women and a dance hall, 'The Joggit'.

The best building was a bar where we could get beer on tick. We never knew when we would get any money; we had to depend on a pilot remembering to bring it. The other three staff, besides myself, were, Signaller, Keith Roberts, Drivers Tom Whitehead and Bill Oakley. We did five, four week, shifts in a year. We helped Joe train his dog by going into the trees and hiding, then he got the dog to find us, until one day the dog decided to cool off and dived into the river and dragged Joe with it.

After two shifts we lost Joe because his dog died. We saw him again when we went to pick up water. He said his RSM was punishing him for having a good time with us. Joe was about six feet tall and in our bar we were always surrounded by kids who did not believe he was Chinese. One of the brighter kids one night said, "Joe, you're not Chinese because you're too tall. What are you?" Joe said, "No, I'm an Eskimo." "Are all Eskimos as tall as you?" "No," replied Joe, "All Eskimos are pygmies, but this hot weather in Malaya expanded me." "When you finish in the army, are you going back to Greenland, Joe?" "No, because it's very bad when I shrink again."

The cinema sometimes had films in English, so we didn't have to dance in The Joggit every weekend.

The big changes while I was at 656 Squadron. AOP RAF changed to Army Air Corps. Merdeka came and Malaya became independent.

The Army Air Corps brought in REME and Navy mechanics and we had to move to another block of nine billets behind the Orderly Room and our old billet became offices and stores.

Medeka, the Malayan population was at last recognised as a country in its own right, no longer part of the British Empire. The powers that be were worried what the effect would be, or what to expect, so they took precautions. Our night guards were doubled in strength to two bodies on each stag. We didn't have enough bodies to do this so the Gurkhas were summoned to help us. One Gurkha and one gunner on each stag. The Gurkhas are a great bunch, very family orientated people and they loved to talk about our families as much as their own. Guard times seemed to fly by.

The practice was that the Gurkha would patrol twenty paces behind the BOR (British Other Rank). On one guard, I was walking up to the tin mine end of the airstrip and I knew that there was a large fire extinguisher shoved back into the hedge row. The Gurkha came charging past me, rifle at the ready "What's wrong John?" I asked "I thought that someone was waiting in the hedge to get you." he replied "Look,

John, you walk in front and I will follow.” I thought this would be safer for George.

There was a little rioting, not as much as England is experiencing now (August 2011). The trouble I had was in the ‘Happy Cabaret’, a dance hall we used most Saturday nights. This particular night, the last waltz was playing; it was always the same tune. The Malays were upset and a fight started. It was explained to us later that the tune was the Malay National Anthem and we had not stood up for it. My group made a dash for the front entrance, where there was a large gang waiting for us. Out of the back door and into a taxi and a dash for home. Lucky George. Others, not so lucky, spent the night in a police station, all night, for their own protection, rescued next morning by some officer, name unknown.

With the change to Army Air Corps came a change of uniform. We were all to wear the same khaki and powder blue berets. This was a long time reaching out as far as us. The first sign of it I saw was when a new recruit, an RAF Flight Lieutenant by the name of Hill, arrived. He became ‘Blueberry’ after a song popular at the time. I did not get my blue beret until much later, bought from the stores at Middle Wallop. I am very proud to wear it on Armistice Day. I get many queries about NATO and Army Air Corps.

Unlucky George. Being tall has its disadvantages.

1. Always right marker on parade.
2. Always picked for Guards of Honour.
3. Always picked for escort duty.

While waiting to fly out to Malaya, I was detailed to fetch a deserter from Wales. Handcuffs were sore and the deserter seemed to have a weak bladder, so every time he went to the loo, he had to be handcuffed to my wrist, resulting in sore wrists for both of us!

4. Always having to carry my mate Kelly to his bed drunk, coming home.

How things have advanced in two and a half years, a flight home to England in just two days with a short stop at Dubai. Into Woolwich late on Friday night. Bed and breakfast free. Cross examined as to whereabouts of uniform. One hour underground to St Pancras, train to Nottingham, train to Shirebrook, stroll to Warsop Vale, about six hours, much faster than the Rhyl trip.

Dad over the moon to see me. No verbal contact for two and a half years. Will he ever stop talking so I can get a word in? He explained that all the houses in the village were being modernised. Extension for inside toilet, no more cold trips in the night to the loo. No more tin bath filled from the copper in the corner and a kitchen with no black leaded

fireplace. Ours has not been done yet but our Charlie's, at the bottom of the street is in working order. Dad says "I will go and tell him you're coming." At last I get a word in "I'm going to see Dave to see where we are going tonight." "Mansfield Palais?" "Not with me, I'm banned for fighting last week." says Dave. Down to Charlie's for a bath, go in the wrong house, things have changed so much. This family wanted to keep me talking, so I made excuse to leave and they followed me.

Night out, lucky George. Elite Dance Hall at Shirebrook but to the Northern first, where Johnny and myself used to get a free pint for singing the Elvis Presley number 'Hound Dog'. No Johnny, no singing. Into the dance hall, had not jived for years but the steps came back rapidly. Sitting out for one of the slow dances, catching up with all the gossip. Gordon, who went in to the RAF, was married; he had never got out of England, home every weekend. We made a promise when we were younger that we would be each other's best man when we married, but he had caught a corker too good to miss.

As we were talking, a couple danced by and the girl ruffled my hair "When did you get back Curly?" "Who's that?" I asked. Dave said, "It's your cousin, ain't it?" "No, not really, her auntie married our Charlie." I grabbed her later for a dance and caught up on all the gossip from her. My first question "Have you got a boyfriend?" Her reply "No". I went for the last waltz with her, asked if I could walk her home, but we had a brother for company because she lived down the lane on a farm. That girl became my wife and Gordon was my best man, no hard feelings. We were happily married for forty four years. She died just after her sixty fifth birthday. She attended a couple of reunions and she really enjoyed the banter with comrades and their wives. None of them dropped me in it. We visited Dick Field and his wife at their home, then they visited us and we went on to a holiday camp on Yarmouth, where a sixtieth birthday party had been arranged for us both, myself and Dick. We also had a visit from Terry Adey, but he died shortly after. I'm still in touch with his wife.

I had many jobs in civvy street but was disabled from construction work due to a back injury. I ended the last twenty three years finishing at sixty five, as an Executive Officer for the Department of Employment Job Centre. It was a hard job trying to get redundant miners to take other work, but it was very rewarding.

One evening I was working late, last man out to make sure everything was switched off and doors locked. I was sitting at my desk when the 'phone rang. I answered with "George Bostock, can I help you"? the caller said "My name is Tom Whitehead." I quickly looked

through the list of interviews I had had in the day. I had to admit that “I haven’t interviewed you, Mr. Whitehead.” He asked, “If I said Tom Whitehead, 656 Squadron, would it help?” The hair on the back of my neck stood up. He had called Radio Nottingham to broadcast my name and ask for information. Now, my wife Margaret, when she was ironing, liked to watch a film, but our friend and neighbour, Margaret, liked to listen to the radio. Next door neighbour told my Margaret, who then ‘phoned Radio Nottingham and was given Tom’s Number, she then ‘phoned Tom and he ‘phoned me.

A couple of days later at home I got a call from Larry, a friend at work. He said “Have you read your Chad?” (The local paper) “No, we don’t get it until tomorrow.” “Well, someone else is trying to trace you, Terry Adey.” That’s how he found me.

Old army pals sought	
I AM trying to trace an old army mate, George Bostock from Mansfield.	like to hear from anyone who served in the 656. I have names and addresses from 1943 up until the present time, so please get in touch.
We served as signallers in the 656 Squadron Army Air Corps Malaya from 1957 to 1958. George was at HQ in Kuala Lumpur and I was at 02FLT IPOH.	TERRY ADEY 15 St John's Terrace Neath Abbey Neath
I would love to hear from him again. In fact, I would	W. Glamorgan SA10 7NE

Tom Whitehead introduced many more to me, including Jim Connor, George McKie and Bill Oakley, all drivers poached from 2nd Field Regiment RA. Through them I joined the Association.

I also had a lady friend who really enjoyed the reunions. The last one we had was in November last year, including myself and partner, Keith Roberts and partner, John Fitzpatrick and partner and George Stott from Australia who is back again for a while.

Things that will never be forgotten:

Jock Brown (Signaller) doing a Scottish reel in his best boots.

The Adjutant downing a pint in the bat of an eyelid.

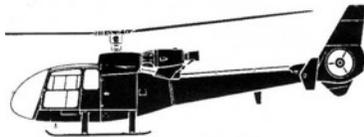
John (Hoagy) Carmichael (Pay Clerk) singing the lobster song with such gusto that the veins in his neck stuck out like drum sticks.

Len Kelly always finding me to carry him to bed.

The RA trying to march at the Gurkha pace on Admin parade.

Thanks go to many people for the help that I received in telling this tale. Especially, John and Sylvia Heyes, Chunky Walker, Bill Robson, Keith Roberts, John Fitzpatrick, Dick Field and many others who may have received a funny 'phone call.

All the best to you all, George (Very lucky).



FLYING FOR FUN? A FEW JOTTINGS – DON'T BE THE FIRST TO APPLY!

by Chris Crouch

It seems to me that in every era, there are a small number of “red tabbed” gentry, who have gained their promotion for reasons which are beyond my understanding.

So it was, in 1955 that having passed the aircrew flying aptitude selection tests at RAF Biggin Hill, I found myself being interviewed by two such very blinkered senior officers, who were to determine whether I should be allowed to undertake a flying course at the RAF Light Aircraft School at Middle Wallop.

The interview took place in the Ladies Room of the Old Bovington Mess, as dusk was setting in. On a table there was a silver tray, a whisky decanter that was about half empty, a soda water siphon that still had a white paper sleeve on the spout, and three glasses. Two of the glasses were half full of the spirit.

Having introduced myself, the thin one said “sit down and pour yourself a drink”, “No thank you sir” I said “I don't drink whisky!” “Oh, one of those, eh” said the tubby one. They both took a gulp from their glasses.

The thin one started the questioning – “what's all this about flying? What's the matter with the tank, young man?” Foolishly, I said “I expect the same question was asked about horses, when tanks arrived”. “Don't be impertinent” said the tubby one.

At this point, I should declare that both these senior interviewers were attired in hunting apparel, one sitting in his braces, and with a much muddied scarlet coat draped over an adjacent arm chair. They had clearly spent the day endeavouring to rid Bovington Heath of a few foxes, and one had clearly been dislodged from his steed, during the chase.

“I suppose you'll transfer to the Royal Artillery?” asked the thin one “no” I responded, “I have been accepted by the Glider Pilot Regiment on secondment, if I pass the flying course.”

“Does the Glider Pilot Regiment still exist?” “Yes” I said “For non Gunner Officers and for Warrant Officers and Senior NCO's including the Royal Artillery, who are pilots”. “What's this about aeroplanes?” asked the thin one. “Having been in Korea” I replied “I have seen the Americans using helicopters for casualty evacuation, and believe that they could eventually be fitted with weapons to engage enemy armour and other targets”. “Helicopters?” they cried in unison “Helicopters?” “What on earth are you thinking about?” They both then downed the

contents of their glasses, and then refilled them with the remnants in the decanter.

I said that whilst the Army had yet to have any helicopters (JEHU – The Joint Experimental Helicopter Unit, had yet to be formed) all embryo RN and RAF helicopter pilots had to have flown at least 1000 hours on fixed wing aircraft, before any rotary transition was sanctioned. (This was, of course, contrary to the American experience, whose aviators went straight on to rotary training after a basic ab-initio fixed wing course).

The tubby one said “If you want to kill yourself, why should we stand in your way?” the thin one said “You’ll fail anyway! You’re bloody stupid to try!”.

I then asked if I could go to Middle Wallop and the reply was “If you must!”. Such encouragement!

Both the interviewers were seen in uniform the following day. They both wore identical medal ribbons, Defence, Victory and the 1939/45 star. Where on earth had they been in the war! I never found out! AG17 had probably had a phone call from them, and so believing me to be mad, had sent me back to Egypt, whence I had come. Fortunately, the Glider Pilot Regiment intervened, and I was returned to the UK for my flying course.

Whilst I may have been the first RAC Officer to apply to go flying since WW2, a Lt Owen Lewis, 3 DG was the first to attend the course, as he was based in the UK at the time. Having been duly briefed by myself, he managed to avoid any appraisal by the Bovington duo.

After qualifying, I was to be found wearing a maroon beret, serving in a RAF Squadron and based on the Royal Naval Air Station at Sembawang (HMS Simbang) on Singapore Island. A very happy billet it was too!

Eventually, after about twenty months, I had clocked up 1000 hours, flying over the jungles in Malaysia and Borneo, in a single engine machine, but was in hospital for about a month with a broken foot following an engine failure on take-off.

I was then summoned to the UK for my helicopter conversion course. Whilst waiting to board the BOAC flight from Payer Labar, their station manager came to advise me that he had received a telex saying that my trip had been postponed, as the manufacturer’s helicopter instructor had crashed the machine I was destined to fly! Who knows? I might have been one of the first Army helicopter pilots!

Immediately returning to the Flight I had commanded up to the previous day, we continued our activities of annoying the Chinese

Communist Terrorists (CTs). A regular activity was the thrill of target marking a terrorist encampment, often well hidden in deep jungle. Flying at tree-top height we dropped parachute flares from our bomb racks, so that they hung in the canopy. We then “stood” away from the target whilst five Royal Australian Air Force Lincoln Bombers, each laden with 14 x 1000lb bombs, straddled the target with well practised precision! It was certainly scary to control and witness such an event, and deadly for the recipients. It took just three minutes from the flare dropping, to the first bombs going down.

Very often, a Company of Gurkhas, assisted by dogs, were flown in by RN or RAF Whirlwinds, to search the area, and we were seldom disappointed at the results.

The pilot who found the target was always the one who did the target marking, even when radar controlled marking was in use. We also used Canberras and Venoms for attacking smaller targets, and very good they were too!

Much more fun it was, than mucking about in a tank park, or getting lost on Luneberg Heide!

It goes without saying, that many years ago, the cavalry regiments changed from horses to armoured cars and tanks, with the minimum of fuss, and very quickly became professional operators.

Regrettably, the opportunity to do the same, upgrading to helicopters, was not taken up. This was despite the success of the Air Troops, with the increasing availability of RAC crews, who also manned Army Air Corps Squadrons, becoming air gunners, observers and handlers.

It is nearly fifty years later that the Apache helicopter arrived, designed as a sky-cavalry vehicle, but regrettably the Royal Armoured Corps doesn't have any.

Whilst the Army Air Corps does extremely well, several amalgamations of historic cavalry regiments could have been avoided, if they had been equipped with rotary aircraft. It is really sad isn't it.

For myself, I believe that I eventually made a worthwhile contribution to flying safety – I stopped!

I am honoured, as a non-gunner, to be a member of the Air OP Officers' Association – a great organisation, without which and the Glider Pilot Regiment, there might never have been an Army Air Corps. Their joint contribution must always be remembered.

Afternote: Does anyone know of the whereabouts of a former LCpl Clerk, Paul Twyman, who became an excellent and experienced air gunner, having ditched his typewriter in a Yemeni desert? On operations, he had a simple filing system – it was emptied once daily!

Remembrance Day – The French Way

by John Bennett

Joyce and I relocated from Burgundy to the Orne department of Lower Normandy in June of this year. We are settling in and finding our way about. Early in November we called at the Mairie (town hall) to ask about Remembrance Day celebrations in our new town. We have made a point of attending, wherever we are, on the day. In France November 11th is a public holiday and all celebrations take place on the actual day. The celebrations are organised by the local branches of “l’Association des Anciens Combattants” (anything familiar with the initials?!)

The small town we live in is Condé sur Huisne and because of its small size it combines the celebration with another village - Condeau - which is 2 kilometres away. The day started at 08:30 in Condé cemetery where a short service was done to remember the locals who had died during the year. We did not attend this as it was non-military.

At 10:15 people started to assemble at the Mairie in Condé ready for the parade. The Mayor was there, a few veterans and general public. I was approached by the mayor who wanted to know more about who we were and where we lived. He then told me he would like me to stand on the memorial by his side!!

The town band arrived in a vehicle convoy, they formed up and the march to the memorial commenced with the



Condé memorial

Banner bearing veterans, mayor and public following. The band was excellent and had very accomplished players. On arrival at the memorial they peeled off and we approached the site. I was directed to stand between the Banner bearers and the Civil Police representative. The service commenced at about 10:35 with the mayor reading a long message from President Sarkozy, which was followed



by a reading from the Disabled Veterans Association, from a veteran in a wheelchair.

Two young children then each placed a bouquet of mixed flowers and also chrysanthemums left over from All Saints day, at the foot of the memorial. They also took a Poppy Cross inscribed 'A British Soldier' which I gave them.

On the mayors command the banners were lowered and the "silence" period commenced; which must have lasted less than one minute! It concluded with a drum and trumpet solo of a short part of "Pour le Mort" (for the dead) which seems to be their equivalent of the Last Post, followed by the full band playing the Marseillaise (national anthem) to conclude the ceremony here.



Children laying flowers

The band struck up again and we marched back to the Mairie where we dispersed to our cars to drive to Condeau ready for 11:00. On the approach to the village again the band formed up and the march to the memorial commenced where the whole ceremony was repeated, word for word.

After this, far from dispersing as we expected, the band played and we marched off again along a side street for about 300 metres where we stopped outside a house. On the house wall was a plaque with the Tricolor flying at each side, this plaque bore the names of two young men of the Maquis who were murdered by the S.S. The mayor read out their names and said a few words about it before once more the trumpeter sounded the Pour le Mort. The band then started to march back again to the memorial, to the tune of "When the Saints go marching in". As we all dispersed we stood a while and a French gentleman approached and introduced himself to us in perfect English, and he invited to join all the other attendees for an aperitif in the Mairie, funded by the commune (town hall) how civilised! With the band members, mayor and attendees there must have been about fifty in the hall. There was red and white wine and Kir Royal which is small measure of blackcurrant liqueur and the glass topped up with champagne! Helpers brought round small selections of cocktail snacks and refilled the glasses!

This was not the end of it. I had seen on the itinerary that there was a pre-bookable luncheon, but we had learned about it too late to attend this, however during drinks, our new friend suggested we could join in the luncheon if we paid for it, as there were spare places. We accepted the invitation and just after mid-day moved into the hall which was laid out for the luncheon.



Luncheon Room

There were sixty eight people for the lunch whose ages ranged from late teens to into the 90's, but the majority of them were retired folk. Sitting nearest to me was the man and his wife who invited us and alongside them was four ladies and gents, all over 90.

The meal was eight courses, starting with a champagne aperitif and three different wines to accompany the appropriate splendid dishes. We

had a thoroughly good time and finally left fully replete at 16:45 !!

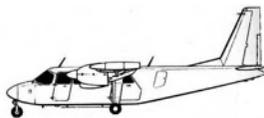
We now have a new friend and his wife, and met some very nice inhabitants of the two villages.



Men at Work

Below are some of the 'team' hard at work at the Museum of Army Flying, Middle Wallop.

From left to right:
Guy Warner and Ron Ward discussing the ongoing History of 656 Squadron book that Guy is writing, and Derek Walker and Mark Meaton working on the 656 Squadron Association Archives.



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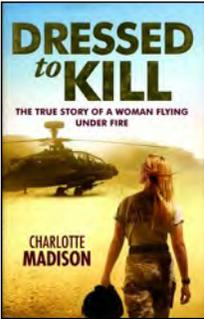


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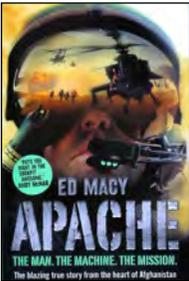


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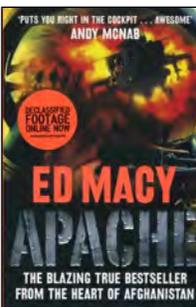
Charlotte Madison is a typical twenty-six year-old woman. Britain's first ever female Apache pilot, Charlotte knows exactly what it is like to be at the controls of the Army's deadliest frontline weapons platform. During the legendary Jugroom Fort rescue, she became the only British pilot since WW2 to use all her ammunition in one mission. She has mastered the complex skills required to fly and shoot from the air, and earned the respect and admiration of her male co-pilots. Whatever they can do, she can do just as well. From her intensive training through to her three tumultuous tours of duty in Afghanistan, Charlotte shares the adrenaline rush of lethal, full-scale mid-air assault, the exhaustion of confinement in an airless cockpit for up to eleven hours at a time, and what it is like to kill - or be killed - in the name of duty. Dressed to Kill is the extraordinary, gritty, exhilarating and often heartbreaking story of life at the heart of the action - from the unique perspective of a woman in what was - until recently - an exclusively male world.



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Macy unleashes the first Hellfire missile and the rules are rewritten!

May 2006. Ed Macy and 656 Squadron arrive in Afghanistan along with the Apache AH Mk 1 on its first operational tour. It's an unfamiliar combat zone with a limited role for the Apache and Ed's time is spent escorting Chinooks. But one month later, during Operation Mutay, with 3 Para pinned down in Helmand, the arguments about the Apache's potential are thrown out and Ed deploys the first Hellfire missile in combat. That squeeze of the trigger changed the war for the British and the Taliban alike. The £4.2bn Apache programme was dramatically redirected to fighting the enemy head-on and turned Ed and his squadron into one of the British Army's greatest assets.

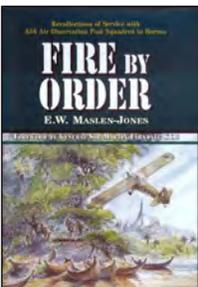
Ed recounts the intense months that followed Mutay: the steep learning curve, the new missions, the evolving enemy and the changing Rules of Engagement. He also sheds light on his early career as a young paratrooper, his operational baptism as a pilot and how both shaped his ability to fly, fight and survive during that fateful first Afghanistan tour against a cunning and ruthless enemy.

It was here, in the dusty wastes of Helmand that Ed, his colleagues in 656 Sqn and the Apache found themselves on trial for their lives and for the reputation of a machine on which the British Government had staked a fortune.



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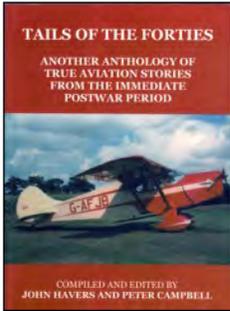


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NOTICES

Thanks

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has supported me since John sadly died. I have been extremely touched by your comments and offers of help. So many of you attended his funeral, including four of our serving soldiers, thank you so much. I know he would have been so chuffed! It's wonderful to know how well thought of John was. He is greatly missed. *Sylvia Heyes*

Addresses

Whenever we have anything we think may be of interest to you, between Journals, I like to send out emails to keep you up to date.

If you have an email address but do not get emails from me it could be that I have an old address or indeed no address at all. If you would like to receive emails from me, could I ask that you please let me know your current email address so that I can bring the list up to date?

Maybe, if you do not have an email address, you have a relative who could take the messages for you? If so, please let me know. The same applies to telephone numbers if they have been changed relatively recently.

I can assure you, I will not send out 'jokes' and the like!

My details can be found on the Committee page.

Thank you for your co-operation. *Sylvia Heyes*

Auster WZ721 Can you Help?

Does anyone have any information and/or photo's of WZ721, in the Museum of Army Flying? As, in the future, a display board will be produced listing her history, and any information would be gratefully received. We know she was with 7 Flt 1961-63 (Red Spinner of course) and flew to Brunei via Singapore - Kuching with a long-range tank fitted (4.5+ hours) (1 of 3, 7 Flt aircraft) on or about 12/13th December 1962 and is believed to be the last Auster in service in Far ELF with the Life Guards/4 RTR 1967/68.

We would like to hear any associated stories from ground crew and pilot's that worked on and/or flew her.

Could you please forward any photo's and stories to Ron Ward, *contact details can be found on the Committee page.*

Thank you.

Proposed Far East Tour

At the AGM in September this year, it was suggested that we have another tour to the Far East in 2013. If you think you would be interested in going on such a tour, where would be your preference? The mainland Singapore/Malaya or Borneo?

Please let Sylvia Heyes know if you would be interested in joining a tour of this kind or if indeed you have any suggestions on where would be the best places to visit. *Contact details can be found on the Committee page.*

NEW MEMBERS

Adrian Faulkner	RAOC	Joined July 2011
Chris Howard	REME	Joined Aug 2011
Pat Davall	RE/AAC	Joined Oct 2011
Mike Nelson	RA	Joined Nov 2011
David (Chico) Jones	RA	Joined Dec 2011
Brian Tombs	RAF	Joined Jan 2012
Andrew(Jock) Gracie	RAF	Joined Jan 2012

DEATHS

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

J.A.T. Brown	RA	Died Feb 2011
Howard Heathfield	REME	Died May 2011
Clive Howe	RAF	Died 2011
Robert (Bob) Johnston	RAF	Died Sep 2011
Alex Rogers	RA	Died Oct 2011
John Heyes	REME	Died Oct 2011
Wilf Knowles	RA	Died Oct 2011

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