

Gentlemen,

Welcome to the Members Only section of the new Operation Crown Association website. Unlike the public section, it is here that you will be able to contact each other in confidence and post your memories and photographs to share some happy and eventful times with other members. As you should know, full Membership is open to all UK and Commonwealth servicemen who served in Thailand during the period 1963-68 and submit a completed membership form with a one-off membership fee of £10. This fee covers the issue of a lapel pin badge which, like our tie for an extra cost of £12, act as a good opener in any conversation because of the unusual, unique designs. Other clothing such as T shirts and sweatshirts can be made to order. At the time of writing, mid-October 2012, we have 93 fully paid up members with several more Associate and interested members who have completed the membership form but not yet taken the final step into this section. Albeit, they generally do so after attending one of the three reunions per year and meet chums they haven't seen for years.

Although the Association is designated Operation Crown it does of course include Post Crown because without the former the latter would not exist. Many of us were fortunate enough to serve in both and saw the considerable changes in the development of the local community that would not have happened in that North East, remote part, of Thailand, if we had not assisted the Thai Government with their infrastructure in those politically difficult times - which helped keep the creeping communist regime at bay. Fortunately, the airfield was never used for the purpose it was intended viz. to fly in the Commonwealth Brigade, under SEATO arrangements, to reinforce Thai forces in the event of an invasion by communist forces from the East. Our sheer presence and unarmed, uniformed recce's, together with social visits, provision of employment, medical aid and education assistance so close to the Mekong River border were enough to dissuade any action by those in the East during embryonic political times.

Some of you who have attended the AGMs and other UK reunions will know that I try to bring you up to date with finances and future planned events together with the one thing we continue to seek, some final, UK and/or Thai Government tangible recognition of our service in Thailand. The Australians and New Zealanders on Op and Post Crown received their respective nations GSM but UK forces received nothing. Well, for those I have not managed to meet and brief at past reunions, the audited finances of the Association together with future planned events are posted elsewhere in this secure section of the website so I will not bore you with those details. However, regarding the possibility of a UK/Thai Government award you should be aware that following communication and discussions with the Royal British Legion, the Not Forgotten Association, MoD Medals & Awards, the Foreign Office and finally the Thai Embassy, I wrote a three page proposal for the Thai Defence Attaché to present, through his Ambassador, to the appropriate Thai MoD Dept in Bangkok.

It will not surprise some of you that the process of being awarded a foreign government medal is a long and drawn out matter, just like the Pingat Jasa Malaysia (PJM) medal was, and after my proposal was submitted in May 2011 it took until November 2011 for myself, together with my wife June, to be invited to the Thai Embassy to present my case to a small assembled team. Following the brief and discussion there was a consensus that the case should go forward. In March this year, conveniently just before the AGM where I was able to inform those assembled, I heard from the Thai DA that the case had been approved by the Thai MoD and was now with the Thai Foreign Affairs office where, I have recently heard, it

still sits! This may sound like bad news but please remember that Thailand, in the same time frame as above, has had a change of Government followed by some disastrous floods which have not helped the progression of our case.

However, the good news is, the DA has now appointed a 2\* chum in the Thai MoD, Bangkok to keep a watchful eye, with an occasional kick I hope, on the progress of the proposal in the Foreign Affairs office - so do not lose hope just yet. In addition, I am hoping to meet up with the DA again in London shortly to discuss an alternative, as a fall back measure. This alternative is the approval of a Commemorative Medal and/or a Certificate to be produced under the Associations arrangements, for which members will regrettably have to pay, and have them presented by the DA at a Thai Embassy event in Kensington, London. I have floated the idea with the DA which has been provisionally accepted. We might also get the DA to sign it unofficially on the QT.

In conclusion, this has become a much longer welcoming address to Members than I initially intended but if you are still awake I hope you have found it useful and I look forward to meeting you at a future event. Regrettably, I have never attended a reunion in Thailand yet; one thing or another always seems to get in the way either on the domestic extended family front or my work with other charitable veteran associations. No sympathy or commiserations required! It keeps me active after two consecutive very bad health spells in 2006 which made me think 'make the most of life whilst you have a chance'.

Regards and best wishes

Mike Stanbridge (Lt Col RE Retired)

Email: chair.oca@btinternet.com

P.S. I was OC 2 Tp, 59 Fd Sqn RE in 1965-66, as a newly commissioned 2Lt, if anyone remembers me and very reliant, like all young officers, on the experience of others to complement all the theory pumped into me at Chatham. Thank you to all those reading this who served under my command either in Thailand, Malaysia or Singapore during those early years of my career.