In the Spotlight – Hashing and the Military

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As the history goes, the original harrier clubs (a.k.a. Hare and Hounds or Paperchase clubs) spread from the United Kingdom to South East Asia via the expat community working abroad. There was an assortment of harrier clubs (e.g., Springett Harriers, Kinta Harriers, Kuala Lumpur Harriers, etc) in the 1920s and 1930s throughout the region. When Gispert (G) founded his Harrier club, he did not want to repeat the name Kuala Lumpur Harriers, so chose a more offbeat name of "Hash House" Harriers. In reality, the Hash House Harriers was just another harrier club at that point, but events would take place that would turn it into the worldwide phenomenon that it is today.

There has been a rumor around hashing for many years, that G and Torch, and the rest of the fellows there at the Selangor Club were British military officers, living in a military barracks . . . but that is not exactly correct. The real story is, they were businessmen of various commercial enterprises. G and Torch were accountants working for Evatt & Co. which had offices in different locations in SE Asia (e.g., Malacca and Kuala Lumpur). Others worked for the newspaper or a number of other businesses. The military rumor was construed from G being a volunteer in the Federated Malay States Volunteer Forces (F.M.S.V.F.). Capt Gispert was second in command of "A" Company (Machine Guns), and they had their weekly Volunteers Parade night (drills) on Monday. That is why when the HHH started, the runs were on Friday evenings; it was not until after the war, when the HHH restarted in 1946, that the runs were on Monday night. When Japan invaded the Malay Peninsula in 1941, G was on family leave with his wife and son in Australia. Sending his family back to the UK, he immediately returned to Singapore, and requested active service with the Argyles and was assigned as a Second Lieutenant in a mortar platoon. Unfortunately, G was killed when the Japanese invaded Singapore, and Torch was later captured and spent a fair bit of time as a POW. This is not meant to be a complete biography on their military service, just to establish that they were not in SE Asia on military assignment, but they were connected to the military. The military has, however, had a huge impact on how the HHH spread around the world.

Capt Gispert circa 1940

While researching for this article, I came across what would best be called a splinter group off Mother Hash. In 1957, Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand funded the Malaysian Army to construct a base at Terendak, located ~125 Kms south of Kuala Lumper. Bill Panton's original paper spreadsheet contains a listing for this club. Although the concept of other hash clubs had not really been established, this splinter group is listed as the Terendak H3, with a founding date in 1960. There currently is no additional information available on this splinter group, but it is plausible that some of the military

personnel on the hash in KL, could have either been involved in the construction, or more likely been transferred from KL to Terendak, and they took hashing along with them. *[Note: Looks like I have another research project.]*

The actual first descendant hash club, the second HHH club to form was HHH Singapore, and had no military connection to its founding but did have some military members that led to the third hash club to form. Colin Berwick was assigned to a British unit stationed in Singapore, that was sent over to help suppress the Brunei Revolt that began in Dec 1962. After a short time on the ground, he founded the Brunei H3 on 18 Feb 1963. In a letter he wrote to the Brunei H3 on the occasion of their 25th anniversary in 1987, he stated . . .

> *By the end of January [1963] the revolt as such was over, and with the several thousand people about, there was no recreation. I found an old Coxed Four, clinker-built boat at the Royal Brunei Yacht Club, and soon we could be seen rowing up and down the River between Brunei Town and Kampong Ayer. We were very bad at rowing, but as Cox we had the very beautiful wife of a local architect, while he rowed stroke, and so kept us at a distance from temptation.*

> *As we could only exercise four of us at a time [rowing], a more embracing sport was required. So the Brunei Hash came into being. Notices were pinned up in all the Service Messes and leaflets handed out to any expat civilians we had met, or could find. (Many were asked at a party held in our mess the Friday before, to thank those who had been so kind to us, and given the poor servicemen hospitality). Beer was easy from the NAAFI, Mr. Ang's store had large tin mugs, and I got hold of the ice from the mortuary! The first run was a good one and was on Monday 18th February 1963 - half civilians and half service people, about 20 in all. The next run a week later was much bigger and so it grew and grew into what it is today.*

> *My last hash run was run no. 3 with the Brunei Hash and it was some 40 strong by then. I had a further run with the Singapore Hash in March 1963, and then returned to the U.K.*

The military is also credited for the first hash club in Europe. Ray Thornton had also been hashing in Singapore in 1962 with Colin Berwick, and spent some time in Malaysia assisting with the founding of the Kuching H3 in 1963, before eventually being sent to Cyprus, where he finally had the chance to start a hash club. Teaming up with his boss, Brigadier Gris Davies Scourfield CBA, MC, DL deputy Commander British forces Cyprus, he founded the Dhekelia H3 on 30 Jan 1967. A full two year before the country that spawned harrier clubs, the United Kingdom, would see its first hash club. (Note: When I visited Cyprus in 2020, the Dhekelia H3 still considered themselves the second oldest hash in Europe, until I informed them that the Bordighera H3 was actually a hoax. They now proudly claim oldest hash in Europe). And when the HQs moved on island, the Episkopi H3 was started on 13 Nov 1967 to keep hashing. According to the HHH Genealogy, Thornton would go on to found several hash clubs back in the UK, including the Commando H3 1971, the Bicester H3 in 1974, the Donnington H3 and Aldershot H3 in 1976, and the Looe & Liskeard H3 in 1982, but not the first hash club in the UK.

Richard C. A. McAllister (a.k.a. Mountain Rescue later in life), had been hashing in Brunei in 1965, and after the Brunei Revolt concluded in 1966, he was reassigned to Malaysia where he founded the Kluang H3 on 23 Feb 1967, and ran with them for two years. Looking through the collective history of the Kluang Hash, there were 10 in attendance on the first run, nine harriers and one hare. There was also a

comment . . . "founder member Richard McAllister dropped in from UK for run 63 on 27 Aug having made his farewell appearance on run 42. A model of consistency, Richard, he missed only three out of those first 42 runs." By the summer of 1970 a total of 82 hash runs had been conducted, at which point the rest of the unit would be reassigned, and the final note in the history of the Kluang hash reads . . .

Kluang H3 - March 1967

What of the future? There will certainly be a couple more runs as a combined group before the soldiers strike their tents and move on, and then the civilians intend to keep the Hash going, probably having one run a month. No matter what happens, the Kluang pack has truly fostered the spirit of the original, Hash House Harriers, and in doing so has given much pleasure and enjoyment to all besides fostering friendly links between civilians and soldiers. In conclusion, then, this brief "history" is offered as a farewell gesture to the Planters in fond and happy memory of the HASH - and the subsequent refreshment.

As mentioned above, departing Kluang after run number 42, it was only a matter of time before Mountain Rescue set up the Longmoor H3 on 12 May 1969, as the first hash club in the UK. After a couple years leading the Longmoor H3, he was subsequently transferred to Germany, and in Jun 1971 founded the Lübbecke H3, the first hash club in Germany and all of Central Europe.

In conversation with Mountain Rescue, he told me . . .

The [Longmoor] Hash was run on a Monday evening and the first meet started on 12 May 1969. On this first, there were four ex-GTR members (three instructors and one older student) who had all run with Kluang. The North Hants Hash celebrated the fifty years anniversary by running over the training areas at Longmoor. Mind you, I didn't recognise any of the area 50 years on!

Immediately before returning to UK from [Malaysia] I was Adjutant in HQ Gurkha Transport Regiment. The original pack was 12 strong but increased once the word circulated . . . Inevitably the time came for me to be posted and so I handed over to Ralph. When he was posted, I believe he handed over to some medics who were based at their school in Keogh Barracks, not far from Aldershot. I have a feeling they changed the name to Aldershot and District H3 but there are no surviving records to prove this (not even in their museum!). I have hunted for any surviving reports and records but nothing has come to light. Hash subs were two shillings which covered the beers for each event. Can't remember what the beers were called but came in a predominantly blue and gold can. It wasn't too bad...

Longmoor H3 circa 1969

Lübbecke H3 circa 1971

Eventually the trails were laid in sawdust as paper strewn around the countryside was a no no. At one stage I tried spraying lime wash from a garden spray but that proved to be useless. In Lübbecke when we thought we may cover old sawdust trails we used different coloured powder paint to differentiate adjoining trails.

Mountain Rescue would go on to found the Dharan H3 in East Nepal in 1983, and the Buller & Aldershot H3 also in the UK in 1985.

That is not the end of the story for the Longmoor H3 though, as one of the early hashers there would also be the founder of the first hash club in North America. Maj Frank Arnold had been hashing in Longmoor and learning from Mountain Rescue, so when his eventual reassignment took him to the USA, he took hashing with him to Virginia. Working with the US Army, he introduced them to hashing when

he established the Fort Eustis H3 on 8 Nov 1971. Frank captured the events in the hash trash of the first trail of the Fort Eustis H3.

From the first run of the Fort Eustis H3 on 8 Nov 1971. Hash attire had not yet reached its full potential.

Roger Forrest was another member of the military, that upon departure from the Brunei H3 was keen to keep hashing at his new post. When he arrived though, there was no club available. So military like was his effort to get this new hash club started, that he actually drafted up the announcement as a military document, using the letterhead of the Base Ordnance Depot, Sultan's Armed Forces, Muaskar Al Murtafa'a', Oman. It is no stretch of imagination that he distributed it via the base distro list. We might suppose that the pack was all standing tall at attention, as they waited for the first trail of Hash House Harriers – Oman in Muscat to begin, precisely at 5 p.m. on 25 Oct 1976.

Although a civilian on assignment from Jakarta, Ron "The Penguin" Strachan just happened to be in Oman at the time, and was able to provide me with the details. Ron would drive 120 kms from Izki to Muscat every week to hash with this new club. He even volunteered to hare trail number 2. After attending the first 7 trails, Ron's duties were complete and his company provided him his ticket for departure. The hash trash for trail number 7 stated that "he discovered to his horror, that his firm had booked his flight out on a Monday" so he immediately had it changed so as to not miss the hash.

Hashing continued to spread throughout Oman, and by 1989, there were as many as 10 new clubs. As the popularity grew, the HHH-Oman changed their name to Muscat H3. Unfortunately, as we have seen in other locations, the frivolity began to fade after the 90s, and by late 2018, the remaining two clubs (Muscat H3 and Jebel H3) merged into one club and renamed themselves the Oman H3. They are still running every Saturday afternoon, in and around Muscat.

The records are often not detailed enough to know for sure, but there certainly many more accounts of military involvement with hash clubs being founded throughout the world. Sometimes to new duty

station overseas, as well as taking the hash back to their homeland (the list is extensive), but not always in one place. There were at least 11 Royal Navy ships of the UK with hash clubs, founded between 1986 and 1993. The US and Australian Navies had hash clubs associated with some of their ships as well. Runs could be staged at any number of different locations as liberty was sounded in foreign ports. There are literally hundreds of hash clubs around military bases all over the world. There have also been numerous clubs formed in combat zones and other military deployments, but as you might expect they were temporary and ended when the operations concluded. Two examples of this are the UNTAC (United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia) H3 and the UNOSOM (United Nations Operation in Somalia) H3 both of which ran trails in 1993. Hash clubs around military bases are very fluid with numbers rising and falling around the annual rotation cycle, as change of duty station orders are executed. This is especially dramatic for locations were there is minimal non-military involvement, or during major deployments for combat operations.

Running trail in Mogadishu, Somalia during UNOSOM operation RESTORE HOPE in 1993.

During my own military career of 31 years (1981-2012), I was introduced to the hash in 1984 on my first overseas assignment, by some of my fellow Marines. As I moved around the world, there were often established clubs near each military installation that I was assigned to, and I started a few as well . . . including 2 clubs in the US (Hawaii in 1991, Virginia in 1994), one in Korea (1999), Japan (2002), and Germany (2009). I may even be the only young jarhead ever to be given a personal award specifically for haring hash trails.

Our international pack, after a hash trail in Mogadishu in 1993.

There are many examples of how the concept of hashing moved from continent to continent, and country to country. Diplomats and business professionals on international assignment probably played a much larger part, but that is a topic for another day. As far as this one is concerned, military members of many different countries have made significant contributions to the spread, as well as participating in hashing in general around military installations worldwide.

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