

The Flying

A FORMER Oban shinty player, who refused to let his flying ambition to join the Royal Air Force (RAF) prevent him from becoming a cup winner, used training missions to fly back for games.

Donald Ferguson was part of the Oban Lorne team that won the Glasgow Celtic Society Cup final replay 2-0 against Mid Argyll in 1955 and regularly flew from Cambridge to play in that cup run.

He played for the team from the age of 16 but during the years of 1954 and '55, when Donald was serving in the RAF,

he would fly training missions to Abbotsinch (now Glasgow Airport) and Renfrew and drive to wherever the game was being played.

'I joined the RAF in September 1951 and went straight into my training so for the first couple of years I didn't have time to play shinty,' said Donald. 'But by the time I joined my first squadron I came back on a number of occasions to play and visit home in Croft Avenue. I would fly from Duxford in Cambridge on a training mission and, instead of heading straight back to base, I would make sure we went to Scotland and when we landed I would get to the game, any way I could.'

'It wasn't easy; I once had a unique shinty injury when I took a nasty knock on my knee during a game and, as I was flying home, the air in my knee expanded because my training plane wasn't pressurised.' Donald added: 'In 1956 I was posted to Germany and that's when my shinty career ended – at the age of 23 – but I had to give something up to follow the career I wanted.'

After flying jets for 25 years then commanding squadrons in the RAF Donald moved onto working in intelligence with NATO in Oslo, Norway, and upon leaving the



forces, worked with emergency services.

Donald keeps up with shinty through the Camanachd Association website and recalls his short career with fond memories, winning a number of trophies and representing the south of Scotland, aged 17. However, he believes the modern day game is not much different from his heyday in the 1950s, he thinks the game today is safer and not as rough. 'A lot of players now wear helmets, which makes it safer. I remember, as a teenager, playing a game at Mossfield and I took a swing and cracked this older guy across the face. He was big and I thought I was going to be

in trouble but he just said, 'don't worry lad, these things happen'. He was taken up to the old Cottage Hospital and had six stitches put in his head but he came back on to finish the game.

'Another time, as a junior, we also played a game in Ballachulish and faced a partisan crowd. A small number of them started throwing slates at us during the game!'

Before he played for Oban Lorne, Donald played in one of Oban High School's most successful teams in 1946-47 when they won the MacPherson Trophy, scoring nearly 200 goals and conceding just nine.

Donald's athleticism extended to representing Oban High at football and athletics. His brothers John, now living in Canada, and Alisdair, who still lives in Oban, also represented the school at shinty. John also played shinty in Glasgow. After giving up shinty Donald continued to play football and hockey in the RAF. He recalled: 'I had never played hockey before but got into my command hockey team because of my shinty background. They give you a bigger stick and a bigger ball, so hockey was much easier!'