

A U T U M N 2 0 1 8

the
Chindit Column

The boldest measures are the safest



The Chairman's Message

A warm welcome to all our members, new and old. This June we enjoyed a fantastic anniversary event at The National Memorial Arboretum commemorating Operation Longcloth. To thank everyone individually would take too long, so I say **A Big Thank You**, to all of those involved and to all of you who attended and making the day so special. More events will follow soon so please watch this space.

This edition of the Chindit Column is dedicated to our dear friend Reg Salisbury and all the other soldiers of the 23rd British Infantry Brigade.

Our Aims and Objectives for the Society

To protect and maintain the legacy and good name of the Chindits and their great deeds during the Burma Campaign.

To carry that name forward into the public domain, through presentations and education.

To gather together and keep safe Chindit writings, memoirs and other treasures for the benefit of future generations.

To assist families and other interested parties in seeking out the history of their Chindit relative or loved one.

Wherever possible, to ensure the continued well being of all our Chindit veterans.

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Reg Salisbury

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A tribute to Reg Salisbury, who passed away on the 25th April.

Wingate Crash Site

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An expedition to the B-25 plane crash site, in which General Wingate was killed.

Bill Smyly

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A tribute to Bill Smyly who passed away in May this year.



The Forgotten Chindit Brigade

The volley burst out afresh and once more the shrieks arose to a deafening crescendo as the Japanese charged. They came, slipping from tree to tree, sunlight flashing on the bare steel bayonets, howling like a savage pack of wolves. They were a little more cautious this time and took cover from the forest as they came. Every time a khaki body showed against the foliage, a score of rifles cracked simultaneously as the cornered Chindits fought on furiously.

An hysterical wail started up behind us and our south side defenders fired into the attack which had started on that side. The Brens rippled out short staccato bursts into the frenzied mobs as they came in at the front and rear of our camp. It hardly seemed possible that our morale could face up to the double attack and as the Japanese broke cover and fell on our trenches with bayonet and grenade, I must have thought that this was the end. But men stood without a flinch and met the steel with bullet and calm courage, and again the enemy was cut down as he reached us.

We were swearing and sweating, our weapons hot in our hands. Steel for steel and bullet for bullet, the bloody contest was fought and won. As the enemy fell back the Chindits fired until there was nothing left to shoot at and the jungle was quiet once again. Amazingly, we had lost only two in the mad fight, but the enemy had lost many more. His dead could be seen all around, awkward motionless figures, grotesque in their attitude of death.

W.A. Wilcox, RAF Liaison Officer, 76 Column (Duke of Wellington Regiment).

In late March 1944, the powers that be removed one Chindit Brigade from the arms of Major-General Wingate and directed the unit away from the Burma theatre to be used in a Long Range Penetration capacity, attacking the Japanese lines of communication around the besieged and beleaguered town of Kohima.

The 23rd British Infantry Brigade, commanded by Brigadier Lancelot Edgar Connop Mervyn Perowne (photographed on page one of this newsletter), became part of the 33rd Indian Corps and consisted of nine Chindit columns, made up from the 1st Essex, 2nd Duke of Wellington, 4th Border, 60th Field Regiment, (Royal Artillery) and the 12th Field Company, Royal Engineers.

Although never forgotten by their fellow Chindit comrades, the incredibly important work carried out by 23 Brigade around Kohima in the spring of 1944, has by and large passed relatively unrecognised in books and memoirs written about the Chindits. This edition of the Chindit Column is therefore dedicated to their efforts and memory and will I hope in some small way correct this historical oversight.



Officers of 23 Brigade Head Quarters 1944

Chindit Gallantry Awards 1943-44



One of the regular features in our newsletter is the transcription of official recommendations for various Chindit awards for gallantry, of which there were many.

Lieutenant 194872 Robert D. Stevenson, 4th Border Regiment. 23rd Brigade (Special Force) attached 33 Indian Corps.

Award of the Military Cross, 10th May 1944.

Lt. Stevenson, an officer with 34 Column, led his platoon in a raid on Phakekedzuni, north of Kohima on the night of the 30th April/1st May. After a twelve-hour approach made over precipitous mountain tracks, they gained a complete surprise over the enemy.

Lt. Stevenson commanded a portion of the raiding force that accounted for over thirty Japanese killed and many more wounded. Stevenson's party became involved in hand to hand fighting, but by skillful handling he accounted for the majority of the enemy. When one of his men was hit and lying under the noses of the enemy, Lt. Stevenson twice attempted to rescue him although under constant heavy fire. He showed a high sense of leadership and courage and it was largely through his tenacity and leadership that this operation gained such success.

Recommendation of an immediate Military Cross by Brigadier L.E.C.M. Perowne, 23rd British Infantry Brigade. Award Gazetted 27th July 1944.

Photographs of Chindit soldiers

As part of the 75th Anniversary celebrations for the two Wingate expeditions, the Chindit Society are inviting all families to send us electronic or scanned photographs of their own Chindit soldier. The images sent for the Operation Longcloth commemorations were used to create a large slide show, which was exhibited during the reunion dinner at Walsall on the 9th June this year. Eventually, the collection will be placed into a Gallery on our Society website. Please send any images along with some service details of the Chindit depicted to: info@thechinditsociety.org.uk

Did You Know?



There was a memorial service held at Changi POW Camp in Singapore, on the first anniversary of General Wingate's death. This was initiated by the six or seven Chindits present at the camp, who had been flown across to Changi for interrogation by the Japanese Kempai-tai in May 1943.

That six USAAF glider pilots were captured by the Japanese in March 1944, when their gliders crashed-landed away from the Broadway landing area. These included 1st Lieutenant Charles B. Liston and Corporal Julius Yackie, who both sadly perished inside Rangoon Jail.

Sergeant Thomas Moakes

Thomas Philip Moakes, from Holmewood in Derbyshire, was a typical no-nonsense NCO who had served with the Duke of Wellington's Regiment for most of the war. In early May 1944, he found himself leading a platoon from 33 Column in the capture and occupation of Chechama village, located a few miles to the north of Kohima.

His men had succeeded in removing the Japanese from the village, but were suffering greatly from the nuisance of enemy snipers, who were tied to trees in the nearby woodland. Moakes, having called in the help of the RAF to bomb and strafe the enemy positions, now moved closer himself to see the result of this aerial attack.

From the book *76 Column*, by W.A. Wilcox:

Moakes, who was a brave soldier, ignoring the diving fighters edged his way towards the now blasted enemy position, there to deal with the sniper who was firing at his platoon. The bullets from the Hurricanes splattered the ground in front of him. Undeterred, he crept ever nearer. Possibly he remembered the words of the greatest Chindit of all, General Wingate, who wrote:

The only way to take advantage of air support is to be as near to the target as you dare go. A soldier must not be afraid of the risks involved.

Sgt. Moakes was not afraid. He had site of his

quarry, lying on his now blackened platform up in the trees, rifle to his shoulder. Then the blow fell...

The diving pilot thumbed his firing-button and sent a stream of shells into the bomb-pitted earth. The sniper died under the lethal hail. He lay still on his platform, his hand still clutching his rifle trigger. A bare one hundred yards away lay Sgt. Moakes, dead from a stray shot from the now wheeling aircraft. So died a courageous Chindit fighter.



The grave plaque of Thomas Moakes at Kohima War Cemetery, showing the epitaph:

*A True Brave Heart In Safe Keeping
Duty Nobly Done.*

Listen to a Chindit Memoir



The audio memoir for Terence Gerrard Weiler, an officer with 60th Field Regiment Royal Artillery and part of 23rd Brigade HQ in 1944, can now be listened to on line. Please follow the link below to the website of the Imperial War Museum and enjoy hearing about his many wartime experiences:

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80018329>

See how your Chindit soldier's medals were made by the Royal Mint in April 1946:

<https://britishpathe.com/video/13-million-medals/query/medal>

Dates For Your Diary and Other Notices

Society Membership Forms

We have decided not to include a full-page membership form within the pages of this issue of the newsletter. If you would like a membership form, or require details of how to join the Chindit Society, please contact us at: info@thechinditsociety.org.uk

Well Worth a Visit

The National Arboretum, Alrewas. Opened in May 2001, the Arboretum was established to be the central point of remembrance for the British Armed Forces and other related organisations, away from the throng of central London. The main centre piece memorial commemorates the casualties from the three services, who have perished on active duty since WW2 and is a magnificent monument to their memory.



For the Chindit Old Comrades Association and latterly the Chindit Society, the Arboretum is a particularly special place, as it is the location of our own Chindit Memorial and Garden of Remembrance and was the focal point for this year's 75th Anniversary celebrations for Operation Longcloth. There are now over 300 memorials within the grounds of the Arboretum, honouring a multitude of Armed Forces units, regiments and other associated organisations. It is a stunningly beautiful place and well worth a visit at any time of the year.

<http://www.thenma.org.uk>

The Field of Remembrance at Westminster Abbey

On **Thursday 8th November 2018**, 77 Brigade will send a small delegation to man the Chindit plot at the Field of Remembrance, Westminster Abbey. Any veteran, who would like to attend this event, should inform our Chairman Paul Shenton, and their attendance will be tied in with that of 77 Brigade.



Help For Forgotten Allies

You may have read the announcement in the last newsletter about H4FA, or Help for Forgotten Allies. This UK registered charity provides grants and support to native veterans of the Armed Forces, who loyally and selflessly supported the British during the war in Burma, including some of the former Burma Riflemen who served with the Chindits in 1943 and 1944. Featured recently on the BBC website was an interview (link below) with former Karen Rifleman Saw Berny, who served with Force 136 in 1944 during the expulsion of the Japanese from his homeland territory:

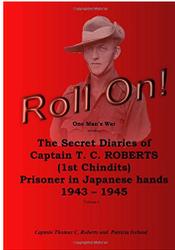
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/stories-44582731>



The West Country Chindit Reunion

Pat and John Pearce are pleased to announce this year's date for the Exeter Reunion. This will take place **on Saturday 27th October 2018 at The Exeter Court Hotel**. Some guests travel to the venue on the Friday evening and enjoy an informal gathering before the main event on Saturday. If you would like more information about this event, please contact Pat or John on 01736 795788 or email: johnpearce1988@yahoo.com

New Chindit Related Books

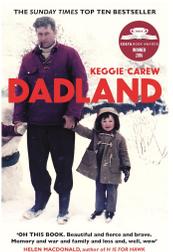


Released back in February 2018, **Roll On! The Secret Diaries of Captain T.C. Roberts** covers the wartime story of Captain Tommy Roberts of the King's Regiment. An officer and Support Platoon commander with 5 Column on Operation Longcloth, Roberts led one of the final dispersal groups from 5 Column across the Irrawaddy River. Captured by the Japanese in late April 1943, he was removed from Rangoon Jail by air a few weeks later and taken to Singapore for further interrogation by the Kempai-tai.

This is an invaluable book full of first-hand information about the first Chindit expedition and Bernard Fergusson's 5 Column in particular. It was lovely to meet the author, Tommy Roberts' daughter, Patricia Ireland at the 75th Anniversary celebrations for Operation Longcloth in June.

To read more about Roll On! Please click on the following link to the Amazon website:

https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/1547029021/ref=rdr_ext_tmb



Another book written from a daughter's perspective is **Dadland**, by Keggie Carew. Published in 2017, the book describes the research journey taken by the author as she uncovers the wartime exploits of her father, who served with both the Jedsburghs in occupied France and Force 136 in Burma. After the war Tom Carew survived on his wits and dazzling charm, but these were not enough to sustain a family. In later life as dementia took hold of her father, Keggie Carew embarked on a quest to unravel his past glories. This book will hold the reader on two fronts; the amazing military service of an intelligent soldier and the movingly depicted family breakdown as a parent drifts away into dementia.

L/Cpl. Telfer Lewis Mead



Telfer Lewis Mead served with the 1st Battalion of the Essex Regiment before WW2 during the Arab rebellion in Palestine. He continued his service in WW2 with the same unit, fighting in North Africa with the 8th Army. As part of the 23rd British Infantry Brigade, Telfer was awarded the Military Medal for his efforts as a stretcher-bearer inside the Tobruk Fortress in November 1941.

On the 26th November, under intense enemy fire, he continuously removed the wounded from the area around base HQ. His medal recommendation reads: "In spite of intense fire this NCO, coolly and calmly continued to collect and attend to the wounded. His actions undoubtedly saved many lives and was a magnificent example to all around him."

After further service in Syria, Lance Corporal Mead continued his WW2 journey with the 1st Essex Regiment, when they travelled to India in 1943 to serve as part of 23 Brigade (Columns 44 & 56), performing a Long Range Penetration role during the ferocious battles around Imphal and Kohima.

Remembrance Sunday 11th November 2018

Being a 75th Anniversary year, it has been suggested that a marching party of Chindit veterans could take part in the official veterans' parade at the Cenotaph; based on veterans being pushed in wheelchairs by current members of today's 77 Brigade (wheelchairs for comfort/convenience/uniformity of speed etc.). This will be arranged if there are sufficient Chindits who would like to do this - any veteran who would like to participate should inform Paul Shenton on: info@thechinditsociety.org.uk

If this does happen, there will have to be a later than usual time for the annual ceremony at the Chindit Memorial, to allow the marchers time to get back. If the wheelchair march past does not happen, then we will revert to the traditional Act of Remembrance at the Chindit Memorial on the Embankment at **11pm**.

23rd Brigade, the Forgotten Brigade of the Forgotten Army

An extract taken from the history of the Duke of Wellington's Regiment 1919-1952, by C.N. Barclay:

On the successful conclusion of the phase of operations in the Imphal area I wish to convey to you, all ranks of 23 Brigade, my high appreciation of the great contribution which you have made to defeat the Japanese.

23 Brigade was given a task which was a real test of its skill and determination and toughness, but never during the one thousand mile move of your columns over some of the most difficult country in the world was any difficulty, whether provided by nature or the enemy, too great for your Commanders and men to overcome.

23 Brigade should be proud of the part it has played in the destruction of the Japanese Forces. You have more than sustained the reputation of Special Force.

The thoughts of General Slim at the end of operations in 1944:

Neglected by history, with a dearth of documentation relating to their exploits, the 23rd Brigade was trained as efficient Chindits. The men had undertaken rigorous training. River crossing, navigation, night and day exercises were standard. Training in direct air support was well practiced.

Together with their heavily loaded mules, each man had to be capable of crossing the widest rivers. Marching for miles burdened with his seventy-pound pack, ammunition and weapons. No respite was given and all but the fittest were eliminated.

The Battalions of the 23rd Brigade consisted of:

4th Border Regiment - Columns 32 and 34.

2nd Duke of Wellington's Regiment – Columns 33 and 76.

1st Essex Regiment – Columns 44 and 56.

60th Field Regiment, Royal Artillery (converted to Infantry) – Columns 60 and 88.

By early 1944, the Japanese were preparing to invade India. Having built up supplies and reserves along the Chindwin River, Imphal was now a surrounded outpost of British rule.

Under orders, the 23rd Brigade began moving toward the railway in India, then toward the air base at Silchar. The plan was to join up with other Chindit forces, which were being flown by glider

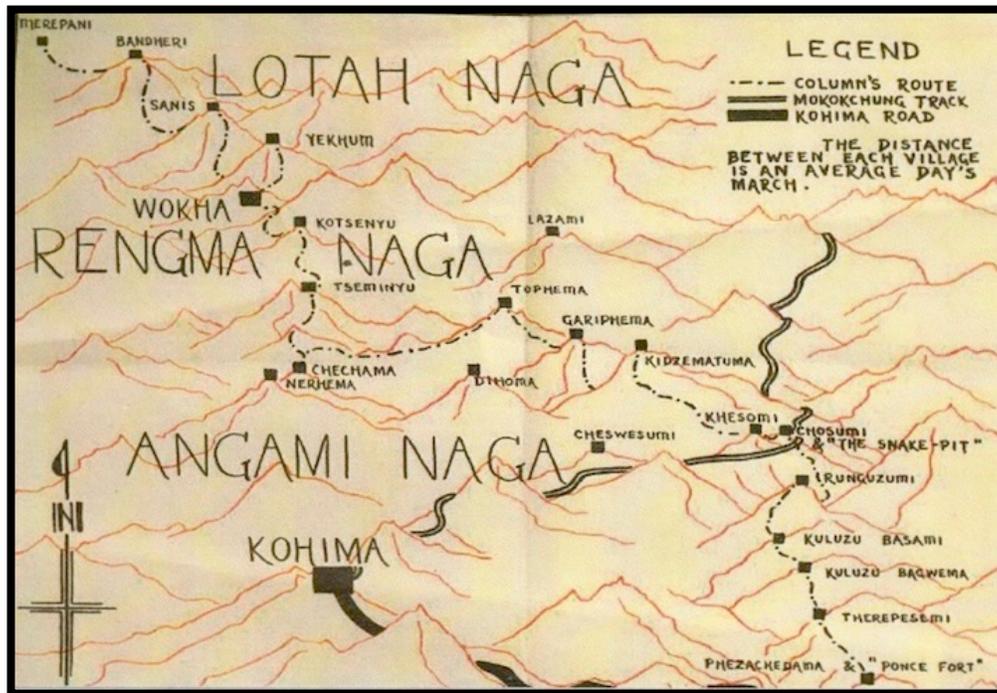
into Burma. Plans changed at the eleventh hour and the 23rd Brigade was deployed to operate in Nagaland.

Nagaland was an area of 6,401 square miles in North Eastern India. As many as sixteen disparate tribes inhabited the Naga Hills. Sharing no common dialect little was known of the Naga lifestyle by western people. As late as the 1930's, Naga warriors were known to be headhunters. Short in stature they were little muscular men, dressed in loin clothes and adorning their bodies with beads. When moving they could give the impression of bouncing as they made their way barefoot along the precarious ridges cut into the sheer cliff faces.

The Japanese had become an enemy of the Naga tribesmen. Having looted, raped and killed many in their villages, the Japanese soldiers continued the violation; destroying villages and vegetation ensured the tribes were left without food and shelter.

The Naga, treated with respect were cooperative and friendly when the 23rd Brigade arrived. The tribesmen became scouts and were used both as lookouts and porters. They would carry wounded troops long distances to receive medical treatment or occasionally evacuation. For their invaluable commitment, they were paid with silver rupees, salt and the much-coveted white silk of the parachute.

The soldiers of the 23rd Brigade became not unlike mountain goats themselves. Ascending vertical mountain ridges reaching heights of 8,000 feet to then descend toward the rotten, stinking vegetation of the daylight starved valley floor. Day in, day out, hazardous and grueling, having air superiority, as did all the Chindit Forces, 23rd Brigade was supplied continuously by air drops. Throughout the campaign the total number of parachutes used in air supply drops to the 23rd Brigade was 31,120. The all-important food rations, ammunition and mail were dropped by parachute. Many drops were retrieved, but many were lost. On several occasions poor visibility caused by mist and cloud covering the Naga Hills caused vital drops to be aborted. One battalion plagued with the problem of boot leather rotting too quickly requested a product to provide a protective layer. The product arrived in the form of a solidified fat. The boots continued to rot as the starving troops promptly ate it!



A map of the route through Nagaland taken from the book, Chindit Column 76, by W.A. Wilcox

The Forgotten Brigade continues:

The monsoon of May 1944 recorded the most rainfall for over two hundred years. Slopes down mountains became thunderous waterfalls. The 23rd Brigade continued to hassle and harry the enemy in the most deprived of conditions. Night and day saw them constantly soaked with torrential rain. Drenched clothing clung to their bodies. Men were stricken with every jungle disease, malaria, dysentery and typhus. Lice, fleas and leeches were commonplace. Still they continued to ambush and attack the enemy. Hand to hand fighting was commonplace.

The men of the 23rd Brigade carried no cameras. Evidence of their exploits is virtually non-existent and only a handful of published photographs exist. They show sunken faces beneath battered bush hats. Their dress showing the remnants of a once dark green jungle uniform.

These grainy images bear silent witness to the stories of individual heroism. At the end of operations, a much-depleted force arrived at Ukhrul, then moved onto Imphal and finally Dimapur. All those who survived were found to be suffering from malnutrition. Over half the remaining force were admitted to hospital.



The harassment by 23rd Brigade had a major impact on the Japanese Army. The advance was stopped and during the Japanese retreat towards the Chindwin River, thousands died. Starvation and demoralisation dogged the ragged soldiers as they abandoned the advance. Desperate, ridden with disease and emaciated, the spirit of the Japanese soldier was broken.

Article by A.L.V. Dales, a Chindit daughter.

The photograph above shows some men from 23rd Brigade at a Rehabilitation Centre and is taken from the book, Chindit Column 76, by W.A. Wilcox.

Reg Salisbury



An appreciation by Society Chairman, Paul Shenton.

Reg originally enlisted into the Royal Warwickshire Regiment and then transferred to The 1st Battalion Essex Regiment who formed part of 23rd Brigade. He was a member of 44 Column.

23rd Brigade was at first held in reserve, but very soon on the orders of General Slim they were moved to the area west of the Chindwin. From April to June 1944, they marched long distances through the Naga Hills, and contributed in large measure to the starvation of the Japanese at Kohima. Their work in cutting the enemy's lines of communication was a decisive factor in the battle.

I first met Reg at the 2001 West Country reunion. I was trying to piece together my own father's Chindit

years. He was very approachable, kind, caring and a great listener. Like a lot of Chindits they never consider themselves as special, as Reg always said **'it was just something we did, we had to, I don't think we were special.'**

Reg was very proud to be a Chindit; he was an active member of the Chindit Old Comrades Association and a great supporter of The Society. He enjoyed attending many of the reunions with his family, being a proud Dad, Grandad and Great Grandad. At these reunions Reg would always stay at the bar to the bitter end enjoying his whisky nightcaps and chatting with the other veterans.

Reg was the 'Gentle' in Gentleman. He filled our lives with happiness, calmness, stability and kindness. I know that I benefitted from knowing him and I feel that others will think the same. He was not just a Chindit; he was also a very special person.

RECENTLY FALLEN COMRADES

Norman Campbell, 1st Cameronians Regt. 12th October 2015.

Len Jenkins, 2nd Queens Regt. 7th January 2018.

John A. Walkinton, 1st Beds & Herts Regt. Spring 2018.

Joe Stretton, 51/69 Royal Artillery, 5th April 2018.

Reg Salisbury, 1st Essex Regt. 25th April 2018.

William Jocelyn Smyly, 3/2 Gurkha Rifles. 16th May 2018.

Harold Waters, 12th Nigerian Regiment. 18th May 2018.

Eric Gledhill, 1st King's Liverpool Regt. 4th June 2018.

Expedition to the Wingate Crash Site

A commemoration and wreath laying ceremony was performed at the plane crash site of General Orde Charles Wingate on 10th February 2018. The site is located near the village of Thuilon in the Tamenglong District of Manipur State, India. The crash site is around 2 km from the southwestern perimeter of the village. The coordinates measured by GPS were N 24°59'17" and E 93°23'27". The elevation read 740 meters above sea level.

The ceremony was conducted and arranged by Society member, Yumnam Rajeshwor Singh with assistance from his many associates and the village headman.

The journey to the crash site began on the 9th February and involved travelling through some extremely testing terrain. Rajeshwor had always been keen and interested to make the pilgrimage to Thuilon and now his chance had come.

After passing through Tamenglong, the road deteriorates badly and vehicles cannot go beyond a speed of 20km per hour. From the town the road immediately bends like a snake on a steep downward gradient towards the Barak River. A new hanging bridge on the Barak had recently been built, with the old broken bridge lying next to it in the river.

Raj and his party reached Thuilon later on the 9th February and were greeted by the village elders at the church. After enjoying a meal prepared by the

villagers, the exploration team bedded down for the night in the Church Office. The next morning, Raj was taken around the village and shown what seemed to be various pieces of plane debris from the ill-fated Mitchell Bomber. These included part of a radial engine and some landing gear apparatus.

The villagers then told the story of the 24th March 1944, as passed down from one generation to the next. They explained that they were having their evening prayers when they saw a ball of fire coming down from the sky. A plane had caught fire and was falling down onto the western slopes of the mountain, some 2km from the village. Just after the crash, loud explosions were heard by the villagers and pebbles and debris from the explosion rattled down upon their houses. They also remembered that several soldiers made the trip to the crash site over the coming weeks to investigate what had happened and to remove items from the scene.

Thanks to Raj's efforts and visit to the crash site, the villagers of Thuilon have agreed and wish to commemorate the anniversary of General Wingate's death, alongside the other eight casualties from 1944, each coming year on the 24th March.

A full report of this pilgrimage, together with some excellent photographs will be placed on to the Chindit Society website presently.

<http://thechinditsociety.org.uk>



Commemoration and Wreath Laying Ceremony at Thuilon, 10th February 2018. Rajeshwor can be seen on the far right of the image in the purple shirt.



Villagers from Thuilon conduct the inaugural anniversary ceremony in honour of those who perished aboard the B-25 Mitchell Bomber on the 24th March 1944.

A Fond Farewell to Bill Smyly

The funeral service for Chindit veteran Bill Smyly, who died in May this year, aged 95, took place at St. Andrew's Church, Kimbolton Road, Bedford on 25th June.

A guard of honour was formed by representatives of 77th Brigade, the Brigade of Gurkhas and the Royal British Legion, including ten RBL standard-bearers. The church was packed, with attendees including: Colonel Colin Mason OBE TD DL MPhil, the Vice Lord Lieutenant of Bedfordshire; a delegation from the Japanese Embassy in London, reflecting Bill's efforts towards reconciliation; Major (Retd) Nigel Wylie Carrick MBE, representing the Sirmoor Rifles Association (Bill's regiment was the 2nd King Edward VII's Own Gurkha Rifles, The Sirmoor Rifles); and Geordie Fergusson, the son of Bernard Fergusson, who was Bill's commander on both Chindit operations.

The Revd. James Reveley gave a wonderful tribute, covering Bill's life from his birth in China in 1922, where his parents were missionary doctors, through his wartime service as a 2nd Gurkha Rifles officer with the Chindits (he took part in both Operation Longcloth and Operation Thursday), to his amazingly varied and well-travelled post-war life as a journalist, first in the UK and then in Hong Kong (driving out there overland in a Standard 8 car!), then as a teacher in Hong Kong (where he met his wife, Diana), then, after further study, working for the British Council in Thailand and Saudi Arabia, then a spell in the UK as Education Officer at Bedford Prison (until their daughter, Eleanor, finished school and went up to university), then another stint with the British Council in China, before finally returning to the UK and retiring – although he was anything but idle in his retirement, with his interests including music, art, drama and ballet. A committed Christian, he also devoted considerable time to the church. He was also a keen participant in the many Chindit veteran activities of recent years, including attending several events with 77th Brigade at Hermitage and at the Field of Remembrance and other ceremonies in London and elsewhere.

Bill's Chindit service was extraordinary, even by Chindit standards. On Operation Longcloth in 1943 he was Animal Transport Officer in charge of the mules for No. 5 Column, 77th Brigade, under the command of the then Major Bernard Fergusson.

After a long march into Burma, crossing the Chindwin and Irrawaddy rivers along the way, they blew up bridges and railway lines on the Japanese supply routes until they were cornered by the Japanese Imperial Army in the Shweli bag. When they dispersed and tried to make their way back to India, Bill, suffering from beriberi, got separated from his comrades. Living off the land and helped by local Burmese villagers, Bill hobbled on alone for three months, covering hundreds of miles to Fort Hertz, an intelligence post and airstrip in northern Burma, from where he was eventually flown back to India.

He missed the start of Operation Thursday in 1944, but was eventually flown out to join 16th Brigade, under command of the now Brigadier Bernard Fergusson, thereby being fortunate to miss marching into Burma for the second time. When the exhausted 16th Brigade was then evacuated by air, Bill, still fresh, had himself transferred to 3/9 Gurkha Rifles, part of 77th Brigade guarding Broadway. When Broadway was closed, 3/9 GR were then ordered to join 111th Brigade at their precarious Blackpool blocking position near Hopin, under the command of Jack Masters.

(Article continues on page 12).



Bill was involved in heavy fighting as the Blackpool position was inexorably worn down by heavily armed front-line Japanese troops. With the monsoon rains preventing air resupply, close air support and casualty evacuation, the position became untenable and was abandoned on the night of 25/26th May, with the Japanese in close pursuit. The most severely wounded, who would not have survived evacuation by stretcher anyway, were shot to avoid them falling alive into Japanese hands, with Bill himself having to shoot one horribly wounded man during the retreat. Bill always wondered how they managed to, but most of 111th Brigade did get away that awful night. Bill was subsequently awarded a Mention in Despatches for his heroic actions at Blackpool.

After being resupplied near Lake Indawgyi, Bill and his Gurkhas were involved in more heavy fighting around Point 2171 between Mokso Sakan and Mogaung. With Operation Thursday coming to an end, 111th Brigade was finally evacuated by air from Myitkyina on 30th July. After some well-deserved leave, Bill rejoined the Chindits, ostensibly as Assault Company Commander in Brigadier Mike Calvert's 77th Brigade, but then the Chindits were disbanded in early 1945 and he joined 5/1 Gurkha Rifles on the Northwest Frontier until he was demobbed in late 1945.

Rest in peace, Bill. Our sincere condolences go to his wife, Diana, and their daughter, Eleanor. (Article by Paul Corden, 77 Brigade).



The 75th Anniversary of Operation Longcloth

This year's Chindit Annual Reunion over the weekend 8-10th June was a key event commemorating the 75th Anniversary of Operation Longcloth, the first Chindit operation, in 1943. The first wave of participants established a stronghold at the Village Hotel, Walsall on Friday 8 June. After a relaxed and informal evening, and fortified by a hearty breakfast, they gathered on the Saturday morning to hear Tony Redding interviewing three Chindit veterans: Jim Clark, John Hutchin and Peter Heppell. Tony skillfully probed the veterans to draw out some special, personal reminiscences of their time as Chindits. Their answers were fascinating, moving and full of wonderful insights, and all present felt privileged just to be there listening in.

The focus then switched to the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas, near Lichfield. Over a hundred people gathered there over lunchtime, with the RV sensibly being the cafeteria – much simpler than a supply drop! Veterans and their families and supporters mixed with uniformed members of today's 77th Brigade in a happy throng, until at 2.20pm a smart Gurkha piper summoned everyone to the Memorial Chapel with the skirl of bagpipes. The Chapel quickly filled up with families and supporters, then the veterans proudly entered, accompanied by the 77th Brigade contingent, and filled the front pew with an impressive row of uniforms, medals and Chindit badges. The Revd. Alex Battey, 77th Brigade's Padre, then conducted a wonderfully moving memorial service, with hymns and prayers interspersed with Wingate's Order of the Day (Steve Fogden), Orde Wingate's favourite reading from Ecclesiastes (Paul Shenton), the Chindit Prayer (Mandy Walsh), the Chindits' Sonnet (Sally Lockhart), the 77th Brigade Collect (Lt Col (Retd) Paul Corden) and a fascinating and very personal address by Tony Redding.

From the Chapel, everyone was then called by the Gurkha piper to a nearby marquee for tea and cake, rounded off by the veterans ceremonially cutting a magnificent commemorative cake exquisitely decorated with the Chindit badge. Huge thanks to John and Pat Pearce for organising the cake and to Amanda of Cakes by Design, St Ives, for her excellent baking. (Article continues on page 13).

From the marquee, everyone then moved to the Chindit Memorial, passing through the beautifully tended grounds of the Arboretum, with everything in full bloom and looking wonderful in the glorious sunshine that we were blessed with. A couple of large golf-buggies carried those who needed a lift, including some of those who had marched hundreds of miles back in the war and didn't need to prove themselves again! Once more, the Gurkha piper played as everyone gathered. Testament to the large attendance, there were not enough chairs and several people had to stand. Alex Battey then conducted a short but moving ceremony at the Chindit Memorial. After an opening prayer, veteran John Hutchin gave the Exhortation. The Gurkha bugler, who had silently accompanied the piper throughout, then finally had his moment, playing the Last Post and Reveille either side of the 2-minute silence, his haunting bugle notes mixing beautifully with the background birdsong. Peter Heppell then gave the Kohima Epitaph, and the Gurkha piper then played a lament as wreaths were laid.

At the end of the ceremony Paul Shenton addressed the gathering, then the veterans were seated in front of the Chindit Memorial for a series of photos with various groups added to them, such as the Chindit Society Committee, families and 77th Brigade, flanked by the Gurkha piper and bugler, whose presence added so much to the day, reflecting the large part that Gurkhas played in both Chindit operations. After the photographs people reluctantly started to disperse from the Arboretum, after what had been a wonderful event. Some had to return home, but the majority headed to the Village Hotel stronghold for the next phase of the operation: the Reunion Dinner. After some much-needed rehydration in the bar, seventy-three sat down for the dinner in a private room, with the veterans sprinkled around, carefully rationed at one per table: Peter Heppell, John Hutchin, Ian Niven, Jim Clark, Robbie Robertson and Horace Howkins. A delicious meal was enjoyed by all, amidst loud and convivial conversation. Throughout, a fascinating sequence of photos of Chindits was projected onto large screens in the background – several showing veterans present in the room, or relatives of others present, which clearly struck a chord whenever a familiar face appeared. There were a number of toasts and speeches, with the keynote address being given by Geordie Fergusson, until recently the Governor of Bermuda but, more importantly, the son of Bernard Fergusson, who commanded No. 5 Column, 77th Brigade on Operation Longcloth and then 16th Brigade on Operation Thursday – a real privilege to hear him, mainly using the words of his father.

With raffle prizes distributed, the formal dinner proceedings drew to a close, and tables broke down into dispersal groups to make their way back to the bar. Several veterans fought valiant rearguard actions in the bar, supported by family and friends, before eventually retiring to their rooms, with quite a few keeping going until well after midnight – no names, no pack-drill, but we know who we are! The following morning there was another 'interview with a veteran' session, this one conducted by Lt Col (Retd) Paul Corden of 77th Brigade. Two of the veterans were the same – Peter Heppell and Jim Clark – but the third was new and added a different dimension: Squadron Leader (Retd) Robbie Robertson, who was in the RAF Liaison Team with No 22 Column, 16th Brigade, and who helped call in air resupply and close air support for them on the ground. Paul's questions were different to Tony Redding's the day before, so everyone present heard some completely new personal insights and vignettes from the veterans – another memorable privilege. This was the final event of a very full and enjoyable weekend, and the remaining participants then dispersed.

In closing, congratulations and a huge 'thank you' have to go to all those involved in organising the various elements of the whole weekend, but especially to Paul Shenton, who masterminded the overall organisation and did so much to make it the resounding success that it was. Despite having to deal with a variety of crises and problems throughout the weekend, he maintained his composure like the proverbial swan (all serene on the surface, but with the legs paddling madly below!) and ensured that everyone had the most wonderful time, especially our magnificent veterans, to whom we all owe so much.

(Article by Paul Corden).



Commemoration Dinner for Operation Thursday

With the huge success of the 77th Brigade Officers' Mess Chindwin Dinner to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the start of Operation Longcloth, which occurred in January 2018, and was attended by some very distinguished guests, Holly and Alice Wingate, not to mention George Fergusson (son of Bernard Fergusson who commanded No. 5 Column on Operation Longcloth), the Warrant Officers' & Sergeants' Mess held a dinner on Friday 20th April, to commemorate Operation Thursday which began so many years ago on the 5th March 1944.

The 75th Anniversary to celebrate the start of Operation Thursday will be 2019 next year, and so the Mess could not achieve such a array of guests to support our evening, however we were honoured with the attendance of John Hutchin and Peter Heppell, sadly with the unhappy news of Bill Smyly succumbing to illness and so unable to be with us for the evening. The Station Commander (Lt Col Humphreys) along with the Brigade Commander (Brigadier Bell) graced the top table along with our Chindit veterans. Also invited was an Officer from the 1st Battalion, the Mercian Regiment, which has been formed through the amalgamation of what was the 'South Stafford's', including many other regiments that fought so gallantly throughout the Burma Campaign.

The evening started with the younger members of the Mess, meeting and sharing their present day exploits with both John and his wife Ann and Peter, with his daughter Sally (see photographs below), on the patio over a glass or two of wine before the obligatory Mess photo, which because of the superb spring weather on the evening came out exceptionally well. It was decided that because of the constant influx of new and ever younger members to 77 Brigade, the evening should be run along the lines of personal 'bio-pics' of our Chindit veterans and their experiences through this particular phase of the Second Chindit expedition.

The call to dinner was played by a member of the Rifles Regiment Band, who very kindly supported the evening with other members of the regiment that made up the quartet. With the first course completed, this was the signal to concentrate on our guests with a series of presentations enhanced by both audio and large screen visual aids. With both John and Peter's acceptance, selected members of the Mess set the scene of what they had both endured during the first few hours, in the deliverance of this historic Chindit operation so many years ago. It was a privilege to understand the hardships that they both endured through this period, which impacted on them and their families.

Bringing the evening to a close we asked John Hutchin to remember those nearest and dearest currently away from us on operations from within 77th Brigade and to our fallen comrades, but the evening didn't finish there. As you would expect a dinner night would never be a dinner night without the sound of regimental music that covers the Brigade's numerous cap badges from all the different regiments and services such as the Royal Air Force and the Royal Marines that we have serving with us.

Retiring into the bar gave us all a chance to get better acquainted and to reflect on what we had learnt about what John and Peter had gone through whilst in the jungle in 1944. The younger members of the Mess took it upon themselves to really interact and make our distinguished veterans feel welcomed.

This was a memorable occasion for all those that attended and we as a Mess were honoured to be in the presence of such humble and exceptional men. We look forward to 2019, which will enable us to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of Operation Thursday to the fullest.

(Article by WO2 Kevin Carter, 77 Brigade).



The Fate of Glider B-20

The fleet of gliders lined up on the runway at Lalaghat on the evening of 5th March 1944. The weather was clear and bright and there was the predicted full moon. The gamble of double-tow for each Dakota seemed to have paid off, as each straining aircraft disappeared over the horizon.

However, once over the border into Burma there was an increase in air turbulence and visibility became limited due to the strong haze forming in the lower atmosphere. These conditions were not unexpected, but resulted in many gliders being released early from their tows and with few natural landing areas available, several craft began to crash-land in the jungle below.



The following information is taken from a witness statement given on the 13th August 1945 by Pte. Thomas Victor Faulkner of the 1st King's.

Glider B-20 contained soldiers of C' Company from No. 82 Column on Operation Thursday. Due to extreme turbulence on the night of the 5th March, the aircraft was released early at 9000 feet shortly after we had crossed the Chindwin River. It crash landed in the jungle and struck a large tree head-on.

Everyone was thrown from the glider and some fifteen men, mostly from the King's Regiment perished at the scene.

The three survivors of the crash; myself, Lt. S.F. Holyfield and USAAF Pilot, Flight Officer O. Johnson, made our way to the nearest Burmese village. Here we left Flight Officer Johnson who had suffered a badly injured leg in the crash. I cannot tell you anything about his subsequent death, only that he was unable to walk and that we had to leave him.

A few days later, Lt. Holyfield and I were ambushed by a Japanese patrol. Lt. Holyfield was killed and I was taken prisoner. I ended up being held in Rangoon Jail for just over a year, before being liberated near Pegu on the 29th April 1945. I found to my surprise at least 30 other soldiers from the 1st King's at Rangoon, all of whom were captured after their gliders had come down away from the designated landing area in Burma.

This story is written in memory of **Lt. Stanford Frank Holyfield** of the South Lancashire Regiment, who was killed in action on the 10th March 1944 and whose body was never recovered after the war.

A Special Thank You

As newsletter editor, but perhaps more poignantly as a Longcloth Chindit grandson, I would like to thank everyone who contributed to making our 75th Anniversary celebrations at Alrewas and Walsall on 9th June this year, such a fantastic success. The Society committee worked extremely hard to set out such wonderful events at both venues, which were well attended and enjoyed by all.

I would like to thank in particular, Lt- Colonel Paul Corden of 77 Brigade, for all his efforts, not just for the above-mentioned commemorations at the National Arboretum and Walsall, but for his continual expertise in arranging many of the more recent events so enjoyed by our Chindit veterans and associated guests.

Chindit Society Merchandise

After strong sales at the Operation Longcloth 75th Anniversary weekend, the Chindit Society is excited to announce a brand new range of merchandise to its members. The following items are available for mail order:

A metal/enamel pin badge, with the Chindit Society logo in gold on a navy background. Price £3

An embroidered heat press/sew-on patch. Price £5

A stormproof two-colour fabric umbrella in blue and white. With a pistol-grip handle and extra strong fiberglass stem and ribs. The CS logo is printed on the alternative blue panels. Price £20

A 75th Anniversary tie in navy polyester, including the 75th Anniversary logo. Price £12.



All orders are subject to postage and packaging charges; these will be agreed before any order is sent out.

Please send any orders or enquiries to: chinditmerchandise@hotmail.com

With any order, please include the address you wish your goods to be delivered to and a contact telephone number. Payment can be made either by cheque (payable to the Chindit Society) or by Bank transfer (details on request). Many thanks must go to Peter Hayden for all his hard work in making these items available to our membership.



NCO's from 60th Field Regiment RA (Columns 60 & 68), during training in India.