



## THE CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

I would like to wish all members a Very Happy New Year. This year is the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the first Chindit expedition, Operation Longcloth and in 2019 we celebrate the same anniversary for the second expedition, Operation Thursday. The Chindit Society would like to commemorate these two special occasions. This shortened edition of the Chindit Column has been produced to give advance warning of a number of events taking place during 2018 and beyond. In addition to these more general invitations, there will also be specific events arranged exclusively for our Chindit veterans.

The committee are organising a number of events to which all Chindit veterans and Society members are invited. You will find dates and venues for these celebrations listed on page 3 of this newsletter. Full details for each event will be published once all arrangements have been finalised. In order for us to plan for each occasion, please could you confirm your wish to attend any event well in advance. I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible over the coming year.

The photograph to the left shows the NCO's from the 7<sup>th</sup> Leicester's (74 Column). The image was taken post Operation Thursday at Bangalore in December 1944.

To find out more about any of the events published in this edition of the Chindit Column, please contact our Chairman, Paul Shenton at his new address shown below, or by telephone or email.

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## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

**Page 2:** 77 Brigade and our Chindit veterans at the Field of Remembrance Ceremony, November 2017.

**Page 4:** They Fought, They Won, They Celebrated. An article from Illustrated Magazine, September 1<sup>st</sup> 1945.



## FIELD OF REMEMBRANCE CEREMONY 2017

On Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> November, four members of today's 77 Brigade: Lt-Col. Paul Corden, Major Charlie Sklenar, WO2 Kevin Carter and Dawn Singleton, met with Chindit veterans, Bill Smyly, Peter Heppell, John Hutchin and their families at Westminster Abbey; our mission, to resurrect Chindit veteran participation at the Field of Remembrance Ceremony, which had previously been carried out by the late Vic Whittingham up until 2015.

Having passed through security, our party took up its position at the Chindit Plot amidst the other 380 Regimental Plots laid out on the grass beside the Abbey. It already had a smart black cross bearing the Chindit name and two smaller black crosses with the old Chindit badge. Alongside these was a densely packed sea of wooden crosses with poppies, many with personal inscriptions. A modern 77<sup>th</sup> Brigade wreath was added, rounding off an impressive and colourful display.

Each plot has to select a representative to stand on the actual pathway, with the chance to meet the member of the Royal Family who opens the Field of Remembrance, while everyone else stands on the grass behind the crosses. We nominated Bill Smyly as our representative, in honour of him being the only surviving veteran of both Chindit operations. Bill dutifully took his place in front of the Chindit Plot, immaculate in his Gurkha hat, green Gurkha blazer and chestful of medals.

While awaiting the unknown Royal's



**THE CHINDIT CROSSES AT WESTMINSTER ABBEY**

arrival, we chatted with our neighbours, who included Phil Crawley and members of the Burma Star Association, who kindly lent us some spare tickets to enable a larger Chindit contingent. Paul Corden even had a chat with David Davis, the Brexit Minister, who happened to be talking with an officer from whom Paul took over his first platoon in 1 Queens, back in 1979.

At ten to eleven, HRH Prince Harry appeared, which created quite a stir and the opening ceremony began. After some prayers, Prince Harry laid his own cross, then Sara Jones, widow of Lt-Col. 'H' Jones VC gave the Exhortation to Remembrance. A Trumpeter from the Honourable Artillery Company then played the Last Post from the roof of St. Margaret's Church. The 2-minute silence that followed gave everyone time to think of those who had made the ultimate sacrifice for their mates and for King/Queen and country. Those of us in

today's British Army, with casualties in recent conflicts seldom reaching treble figures over several years (thank goodness), simply cannot imagine just how many fallen comrades must have been in the minds of our veterans. It was a very emotional silence.

At 11 o'clock on the dot, as Big Ben struck for the first time since being switched off for repairs, the Trumpeter blew Reveille and Prince Harry began his walk-round to review the plots. As he approached the Chindit Plot he stopped to speak to a wheelchair-bound Chelsea Pensioner right next to Bill Smyly, and it seemed inevitable that he would then cut across to the other side. But something had clearly caught his eye and he side-stepped one pace and engaged Bill in conversation, opening with "I like the hat." Prince Harry's time speaking to Bill was a special moment and filled us all with pride. (Article by Paul Corden).

## Dates for your Diary

To celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the first Wingate expedition, there will be a memorial service held at the National Arboretum, Alrewas, followed by the Chindit Annual Dinner at the Village Hotel, Walsall on **Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> June 2018**. More information will follow in the next edition of the Chindit Column. If you wish to enquire about this event, or any of the other occasions mentioned in this newsletter, please contact Paul Shenton at: [info@thechinditsociety.org.uk](mailto:info@thechinditsociety.org.uk)

## The West Country Chindit Reunion

This will take place on **Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> October 2018** at the Exeter Court Hotel, Kennford, EX6 7UX. Some guests travel to the venue on the Friday evening and enjoy an informal gathering before the main event on the Saturday. For more information, please contact John or Pat Pearce on 01736 795788.



The photograph shown above is of Prince Harry and our very own Bill Smyly, meeting at the Field of Remembrance Ceremony in November 2017.

The image to the left shows a group of Chindits conversing with HRH The Duke of Kent and Viscount Slim during their recent visit to the Denison Barracks at Hermitage.

The image on page 4, from the same Royal visit, has John Hutchin explaining how it was done in his day.

## More Dates for your Diary

**The Field of Remembrance Ceremony** at Westminster Abbey will take place on **Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> November 2018**. The new 77 Brigade will look to send a delegation to man the Chindit Plot, as they did last time (see article on page 2). Any veteran who would like to attend, should contact Paul Shenton and their attendance will be tied in with 77 Brigade.

**Remembrance Sunday** falls this year on **Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> November**. As it is the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Operation Longcloth it has been suggested that a marching party of Chindit veterans could take part in the main Cenotaph parade at Whitehall, with each Chindit veteran accompanied by a member of 77 Brigade. If this does take place, we might have to delay our own ceremony at the Chindit Memorial in order to accommodate the marching Chindits return. If the march past does not happen, then we will revert to our normal arrangements at the Chindit Memorial with the short service beginning at 11am.

**Remembrance Sunday at Alrewas.** The Chindit Society is looking for members to volunteer to attend the Chindit Memorial at the National Arboretum and to lay a wreath on behalf of our veterans. If this is something you might be able to do, please contact Paul Shenton: [info@thechinditsociety.org.uk](mailto:info@thechinditsociety.org.uk)

The celebrations for the **75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Operation Thursday** will take place during the summer of 2019 and will almost certainly be held in London. Watch this space for more details.

## Photographs of your Chindit

As part of the 75<sup>th</sup> 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. These images will be used during the various events advertised in this extra edition of the Chindit Column and need not necessarily be from the World War II period. Eventually, the collection will be placed into a Gallery on our Society website. Please send these, along with some service details of the Chindit depicted to: [info@thechinditsociety.org.uk](mailto:info@thechinditsociety.org.uk)



## They Fought, They Won, They Celebrated

We owe our peace to men like these, British troops from Burma, who made the Milton Barracks in Gravesend, the scene of a very special VJ Day celebration. A party of NCO's and men just back on leave after many years service in the Far East, arrived home in time to hear the great news. This was just what they had been fighting for. After a journey which began by air when they were flown to Bombay, catching sight of the Old Country was enough to put them in high spirits. But when word came that Japan had admitted defeat and that the war was over, there could be no more jubilant men anywhere in the country.

These men from British Line Regiments will not have to return to the Far East now, although they may be called upon for service in Europe when their leave period expires. Some of them served with Wingate's Chindits. All of them are veterans of the Burma Campaign and have arduous and dangerous jungle war experience behind them. Our cameraman had no need to ask them to smile and look happy; they were just unable to do otherwise.

From left to right we have:

**Pte. Thomas Hurlock** from Hampshire, a soldier of the Queen's Regiment.

**Pte. C. Teasdale** from Yorkshire, who served for five years in the Far East, including two years in Burma.

**Company Quartermaster Sergeant J. Short** from Walton-on-Thames.

**Pte. J. Mangham** from Durham, who also served for five years in the Far East, including two years in Burma.

Article taken from Illustrated Magazine, September 1st 1945 issue and sent to the editor by Pippa Palmer, the daughter of Pte. Thomas Hurlock.

