

the Chindit Column

The boldest measures are the safest



The Chairman's Message

It was an honour to be involved with all the events held last year to commemorate Operation Longcloth; the icing on the cake had to be eleven of our Chindit Veterans attending the Remembrance Day Parade at the Cenotaph on Sunday 11th November. I have never felt prouder than when I led 'Our' Chindits on the march-past that Sunday morning. My thanks to everyone involved. This year marks the 75th Anniversary of Operation Thursday, in which all our surviving veterans took part. We aim to make this a very special year with a number of events beginning with a memorial service and wreath laying ceremony on Sunday 3rd March at the Chindit Memorial in London. Our main celebration will take place over the weekend 22/23rd June (more details inside this newsletter) and I hope that many of you will be able to share these special moments with our veterans, their families and friends.

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Eleven Chindit veterans take part in the Whitehall Parade.

John Riggs

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A Chindit officer recalls his time in Burma during Operation Thursday.

Chindit Airgraph

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Writing home to a Chindit soldier's next of kin in 1943 & 1944.

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.



Belated Birthday Wishes

Thursday 11th October 2018 saw the 100th birthday celebrations for George Claxton, who was a member of the Reconnaissance Corps and was involved in the second Chindit expedition in 1944, Operation Thursday. Being born in 1918, you can imagine that George has seen many changes during his long life and not all for the better he told me. He believes his time during the Burma Campaign, though short in terms of years was the most significant of all. During the afternoon of his celebration with his niece Veronica, friends and neighbours, he reminisced (in between eating his birthday cake of course) about the good times and the comradeship he encountered back then, even though there had been many traumatic days in Burma.

What made the day extra special was the attendance of a reporter from the local newspaper, the Bournemouth Echo, who like all of us present was totally astonished with George's outstanding memory and eye for detail after all these years. Of course the talking point of the day was the birthday card from Her Majesty The Queen, which was just another card for George, but something that impressed the rest of us. The following Saturday the 13th October, saw the gathering of his complete family for a lunch at a local hotel comprising five full tables of family and friends to wish George all the very best. Congratulations George on your remarkable achievement from all of us at the Chindit Society and 77 Brigade.
 (Article by WO2 Kevin Carter, 77 Brigade).



George Claxton at home on his 100th birthday

Ngin Za Kap

Following on from the wonderful news about George Claxton, back in December last year we received a message from Hermon Shoute, who lives with his family in Manipur State, India. Hermon told us:

My grandfather, Corporal Ngin Za Kap served with the 2nd Battalion, the Burma Rifles from 1940 until 1948 and was part of the Chindits. We are looking forward to celebrating his 100th birthday in January 2019 and would like to learn some details about the battalion's contribution during both Chindit expeditions.

The Chindit Society was able to send the family some relevant information, along with our very best wishes to Ngin Za Kap on reaching such a fantastic milestone.

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.

Major 193864 Frank Gerald Blaker MC, att. 3/9 Gurkha Rifles, 77 Brigade.

The King has been graciously pleased to approve the posthumous award of the Victoria Cross to the above mentioned.

In Burma on the 9th July 1944, a company of the 9th Gurkha Rifles was ordered to carry out a wide encircling movement across unknown and precipitous country and through dense jungle to attack a strong enemy position on an important feature (Hill 2171) overlooking Taungni. Major Blaker carried out this movement with the utmost precision and took up a position with his C' Company on the extreme right flank of the enemy, in itself a feat of considerable military skill.

Another Company, after bitter fighting, had succeeded in taking the forward edge of the enemy position by frontal assault, but had failed to reach the main crest of the hill. At this point Major Blaker's Company came under heavy and accurate fire from a machine gun, which stopped their own advance. Blaker then advanced ahead of his men through very heavy fire, and in spite of being severely wounded in the arm by an enemy grenade, located the machine guns which were the pivot of the enemy defence and single handed charged the position.

Even after being hit by a burst of three rounds through the body, he continued to cheer on his men while lying on the ground. His fearless leadership and outstanding courage so inspired his Company that they stormed the hill and captured the objective. Major Blaker died of wounds while being evacuated from the battlefield.

Award listed in the Supplement to the London Gazette, September 22nd 1944.

Postscript: After Hill 2171 had been consolidated Major Blaker was buried alongside the other casualties from the engagement at a spot close to where he fell. His grave was marked by a three-foot bamboo cross. Nine months later the Graves Registration Unit reached Taungni, but after a three-day search no graves could be found. At dawn on that final morning, the GRU crew noticed the early morning sun glinting against a bamboo thicket; nine feet up they found Major Blaker's cross, which had taken root in the partly reclaimed jungle. (Postscript recounted by Joe Milner, 1st King's Regiment on Operation Thursday).

Family Contributions and Research



The Chindit Society warmly welcomes the contribution of new Chindit artefacts and encourages families to share what they have with a wider audience. We would be interested to receive copies of any items, such as diaries, letters, memoirs and photographs. These would then go towards supplementing our Chindit archive and hopefully expand our knowledge of the campaign and the men who served within it.

Do you have a Chindit soldier in the family? Would you like to find out more about his contribution in 1943 or 1944? One of the aims of The Chindit Society is to assist families in accessing information about the two Wingate expeditions and relating this information to their own Chindit and his experiences.

If you are not sure, but have heard family stories about a possible Chindit connection, the first thing to do is attempt to access his Service Records from the MOD Offices in Glasgow. For more information about applying for Army Service Records, please use the following link: <http://www.veterans-uk.info>

Please contact the Society for more advice on Chindit research. For all enquiries please email: info@thechinditsociety.org.uk



Field of Remembrance, 8th November 2018

As part of the series of special commemorative activities for the 75th Anniversary of Operation Longcloth, a small detachment from 77 Brigade had the honour and privilege of supporting three Chindit veterans, along with some family members, at this year's Field of Remembrance ceremony at Westminster Abbey. The veterans were:

John Hutchin, 1st Bn. South Staffs
Peter Heppell, RE, attached 1st King's (Liverpool)
Flt Lt Robert Caruana, RAF Ground-Air Liaison.

For some reason, Robert Caruana was not issued with his medals during his wartime service, and he had never got round to chasing them up since. The Chindit Society therefore sourced a set, which was pinned onto his chest in a short ceremony at the Abbey, and he wore them with pride not only for the rest of that day, but also on Remembrance Sunday. Prince Harry opened the Field of Remembrance at 1100 hours in a short but moving ceremony. He then went round the Field of Remembrance to pay his respects and meet the selected representatives standing in front of each plot, this included shaking hands with our own Peter Heppell.

We then moved to the Chindit Memorial on the Victoria Embankment and laid a Chindit Society

wreath during a short Act of Remembrance there. We then went into the MOD building to have a reviving hot lunch in the cafeteria, kindly helped by Beryl MacMaster, Assistant Private Secretary to Mark Lancaster, the MP for Milton Keynes North.

Finally, we moved to Downing Street, where we were due for a photo opportunity at the front door of No.10. Coincidentally, the PC on duty outside that day, Giles Dainty, turned out to be the grandson of a Chindit. By very good fortune we were offered a short tour inside the entrance hall by a staff member, who explained several interesting historical details in relation to some of the furniture: the old night-watchman's chair with a drawer for hot coals, the Duke of Wellington's travelling cabinet and Winston Churchill's reading chair, to name but a few.

Our thanks must go to those who helped make this day happen. In particular to Major Wendy Faux for capturing so many special moments with her camera. WO2 Kevin Carter for driving us there and back, Beryl MacMaster for arranging parking at the MOD and organising lunch and last but not least, the 77 Brigade personnel who were outstanding in making this such a special day for our veterans and their families. (Article, Paul Corden).

Listen to a Chindit Memoir



The audio memoir for Harold Shippey (photographed left), a soldier with No. 20 Column, 1st Lancashire Fusiliers on Operation Thursday, can now be listened to online. 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/80011899>

An article about Chindit, Corporal Lester Hudson (South Staffs in 1944) is available to read online. Please copy and paste the link below into your Internet browser:
<https://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/17299712.shot-by-japanese-snipers-bradford-soldier-crawled-through-burma-jungle>

A West African Breeze Blew In



Captain William Thomas Dixon was born in January 1904 and was perhaps one of the oldest officers to take part on Operation Thursday.

William's son, Bob Dixon recalled that his father had been a professional soldier after joining the Royal Warwickshire Regiment in 1923, and that he was commissioned in February 1941, taking up a post with the Royal West African Frontier Force. From searching through the war diaries of the 3rd West African Brigade, it was discovered that he had served with the 12th Nigerian's on Operation Thursday, becoming the Animal Transport Officer for No. 12 Column in 1944.

After his Chindit service William moved across to the Long Range Penetration Group training and reinforcement centre in India, acting for a time as Adjutant before repatriation to the UK in July 1945.



Captain Wilfred James Noel Bidchard enlisted into the Rhodesian Defence Force at the outbreak of WW2. Once again it was discovered from reading through the war diaries, that Wilfred had also been posted over to the 12th Nigerian's and had served with the battalion during Operation Thursday in 1944.

Wilfred's grandson, Mike Collocott had not known which Chindit unit his grandfather had served with, but did know that he had severely injured his back after returning from Burma and was subsequently sent home to Rhodesia.

After the war Wilfred continued with his passion for farming for a short time up until 1947, before he decided to change career and entered the Civil Service. In 1963, his efforts in government were recognised with the award of a Long Service Certificate.

The 12th Nigerian Regiment was raised at Kano in 1940, but did not voyage to India until late in 1943. The battalion, comprising Chindit Columns nos. 12 and 43 were flown into the Aberdeen Stronghold in early April 1944. From here they marched directly to White City, where they reinforced the stronghold allowing Mike Calvert and 77 Brigade to move on to pastures new. The Nigerian's had a tough time at White City; constantly repelling Japanese attacks against the block. White City was closed down on the 9th May and the Nigerian troops moved north to a place called Indawgyi Lake.

They held this area as a sanctuary for the wounded from other Chindit columns who were withdrawing from another Chindit stronghold codenamed Blackpool. By mid-July the West African troops were slogging through knee-deep mud and attempting to clear the Japanese from the area southwest of Mogaung. They fought one particular battle at a place simply called Hill 60 near the village of Sahmaw. This location became a temporary Chindit Cemetery after all battles with the Japanese had been concluded. The West Africans were eventually evacuated from Burma in mid-August 1944.

Did You Know?



That actor Bill Travers, star of the film *Born Free*, was a Lieutenant with the 4/9th Gurkha Rifles and fought with 49 Column during Operation Thursday.

That the BBC broadcast a programme on the 30th August 1946 entitled: *Wingate of Palestine, Ethiopia and Burma*. Contributors to the discussion included: Bernard Fergusson, Walter Purcell Scott, Matron Agnes McGarey and Christopher Perwone.

Notices, Updates and Books

Websites of Interest

The Anglo-Burmese Library. A website dedicated to the history of colonial Burma, including the years of WW2 and much more besides. <https://www.angloburmeselibrary.com>



Stop Press

In reference to the Field of Remembrance article on page 4 of this newsletter. PC Giles Dainty's Chindit grandfather was Captain Richard Thomas Barnfield, who served with the 2nd Yorks & Lancs Regiment on Operation Thursday. Richard had begun his Army career with the Royal Corps of Signals before receiving his commission and being posted to the Yorks & Lancs. He performed the roles of Intelligence and Signals Officer during his time with the battalion, before spending a period of time in Bangalore Military Hospital in November 1944.

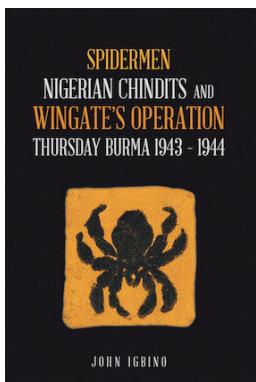
Chindit Ernest Green

In 2003, Chindit Grandson Alan Palmer was unexpectedly asked by his mother if he could uncover some information about her father, Ernest Green, who had sadly died fighting in Burma during March 1944. After a fifteen-year journey of discovery, which included tracking down and interviewing survivors of the campaign and many visits to India and Burma, he succeeded in tracing his grandfather's Chindit pathway.

Pte. 4203406 Ernest Green was a member of the 1st South Staffordshire Regiment on Operation Thursday and was sadly killed on the 22nd March 1944 whilst fighting at the White City Stronghold. Ernest was originally buried at the temporary Chindit cemetery close to the Burmese village of Sahmaw, before being re-interred at Taukkyan War Cemetery in the early 1950's. Alan gave a talk about researching his grandfather and the Chindit campaigns on March 2nd this year:

<https://globetrotters.co.uk/blog/london-meeting-saturday-march-2nd-2019.html>

New Chindit Books



Published in 2018, **Spidermen: Nigerian Chindits**, tells the story of the four thousand Nigerian troops who fought as part of Special Force during Operation Thursday in 1944. John Igbino's book is a well-written account of the Spider Brigade and their battles against the 18th Division of the Japanese Imperial Army.

This book is an important and long overdue account of the fighting qualities and contribution made by the 6th, 7th and 12th Nigerian Regiments in Burma during the second Chindit expedition.

More details about this book can be found on Amazon:
<https://www.amazon.co.uk>

Cenotaph March Past, 11th November 2018

A party of fifteen 77 Brigade personnel supported the Chindit Society at the Cenotaph parade in London on Remembrance Sunday, the final event in a series of special activities last year to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of Operation Longcloth, the first Chindit operation.

Eleven Chindit veterans took part in the parade, all proudly wearing their bush hats. Aged between 94 and 99, they were pushed in wheelchairs by the 77 Brigade party, but with four of them actually standing and marching unaided past the Cenotaph itself.

The BBC coverage of the event included a previously recorded interview with our own John Hutchin, who served on Operation Thursday with the South Staffordshire Regiment. This had alerted the crowds to the presence of the Chindit veterans, and other veterans forming up at Whitehall gave them a rousing ovation as we passed on our way to the Cenotaph. The ovation continued as they passed the thousands of spectators lining the route.

After the Cenotaph ceremony and march-past, our party made its way through the crowds around Whitehall and Trafalgar Square to the Victoria Embankment. At the Chindit Memorial we were joined by over one hundred family members and other supporters and then conducted an additional Act of Remembrance at our Memorial.

The Chindits then adjourned to the top floor of the New Scotland Yard building next door, where a buffet lunch was enjoyed by all, including a delegation from the Metropolitan Police, who had so kindly allowed us to use their wonderful premises.

This was the largest gathering of Chindit veterans in recent years and was a fitting highlight to end a year of special commemorative activities for the 75th Anniversary. The 77 Brigade's contribution to the event was enormously appreciated by the veterans and their family members and supporters in the Chindit Society, and huge thanks must go to those who helped make it happen. In particular, WO2 Kevin Carter, WO2 (RQMS) Nathan Richards and Corporal David Buchanan were outstanding with the administrative preparations and in setting everything up at New Scotland Yard; they were ably

supported by FS Nige Green and S/Sgt Neil Lesinski-Tubby on the day.

Mary Townsend and her Sodexo catering team produced a delicious buffet that was enjoyed by all. Last but not least, the members of the Marching Party themselves were outstanding in the way they each took on their allocated veteran and devoted themselves to making the whole day as special as possible for them – they were a credit not only to themselves and the Brigade, but also to the wider British Army.

The 77 Brigade Marchers and Admin Party were:

Major Paul Corden, (OIC)
 Major Matt Brown
 Major Dan Thompson
 Captain Jay Singh Sohal
 WO2 Kevin Carter
 WO2 Nathan Richards
 WO2 Michael Seymour
 WO2 Glenn Woolley
 C/Sergeant Joel Burnside
 Sergeant Laura Bibby
 Corporal Jennifer Allen
 Corporal Sally Raimondo
 FS Nige Green (IC Admin Party)
 S/Sgt Neil Lesinski-Tubby
 Corporal David Buchanan

Our Chindit Veteran Marchers were:

Charles Mercer-7th Nigeria Regiment
Douglas Blackwell-Royal Signals
Lester Hudson-1st South Staffordshire Regiment
Albie Gibson-1st South Staffordshire Regiment
John Hutchin-1st South Staffordshire Regiment
Jim Clark-1st King's (Liverpool)
Sid Machin-1st King's (Liverpool)
Peter Heppell-Royal Engineers att. 1st King's
Robbie Robertson-RAF Liaison att. 2nd Queen's
Robert Caruana-RAF Liaison att. 1st Beds & Herts
Thomas Parker-1st Cameronians

Sadly, Chindit Ian Niven MBE could not take part on the march due to ill health. Several photographs from the march can be seen on page 13.

RECOLLECTIONS OF AN OPERATION THURSDAY RECCE PLATOON COMMANDER**John Riggs, Recce Platoon Commander, 16 Column, 14th British Infantry Brigade**

John Riggs had fought at Tobruk and against the Vichy French in Syria. Subsequently, he arrived in India with 70th Division. When training for Operation Thursday, a large-scale incursion into Japanese-held Northern Burma, the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire officers were surprised to discover that over half their men couldn't swim – a serious impediment, given the major river crossings in prospect.

Riggs, meanwhile, concentrated on his direct responsibility – a Recce Platoon comprising three British Infantry Sections, a Burma Rifles (Burrif) Section, two Signallers and three mules carrying their lifeline – the wireless, batteries, charging engine and fuel. Their reconnaissance activities would take them days ahead of the main body of the Column. Their reports would be received by the Column Commander via relay from Rear HQ in Assam.

John Riggs' job was to stay well ahead of the Column. The Recce Platoon's task was to see but not be seen, while searching for suitable drop zones, river crossings and water when in dry country. The Column Commander also expected regular reports of enemy locations and strength.

John Riggs: "The key to everything was to train each man to be self-confident in the jungle, as parts of the Recce Platoon operated alone much of the time. This took some getting used to and, initially, we found it hard to maintain. Many men were edgy at first, especially when operating at night in the jungle."

"I can still feel my pack. Our kit was awful – nothing like today's equipment. I was about 10 stone when I went in and, after a supply drop, my pack weighed around 70 pounds. A few men were simply unable to cope with the physical demands. When in Burma, I led our two Columns out of Aberdeen airstrip, heading south towards Indaw."

Riggs' small party found supply drop sites, sending midday reports back to the Column Commander. The Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Columns, 16 and 61, were tasked to operate around Indaw. They stayed in the area for several weeks, attacking Japanese stores and fuel depots. They were then turned round to make for Michael Calvert's *White City* stronghold, prior to the establishment of *Blackpool*, a new block further north.

Riggs watched the constant swarm of aircraft landing and taking off from White City. "The planes had their landing lights on. It was just like Gatwick on a busy evening – extraordinary."

Blackpool was established on May 7, before White City closed and before the monsoon broke. However, a third key factor for success – the deployment of 14 Brigade and 3 (WA) Brigade Columns as *floater* forces, to defend the new block – was not achieved. This would prove fatal to Blackpool, held by the 111 Brigade Columns. The Japanese attacked them from the first day and kept up the pressure thereafter. Blackpool was doomed ... it was far too close to the Japanese main front. The opposition consisted of first line troops. The Block's defences were nothing like as strong as those that had protected White City during seven long weeks of hard fighting.

To make matters worse, the monsoon broke on May 15, slowing 14 Brigade's progress towards the Blackpool Block. John Riggs remembers that epic struggle: "The terrain was very difficult. We were covering only a mile a day at times. The rain came down like glass rods. The country towards Blackpool, near Indawgyi Lake, was also very steep. We had to offload the mules, get them up, then hump the loads ourselves, before reloading the mules at the top." They were operating up to a week's march ahead of the main body. "The maps were not good. Up around Indawgyi Lake, our maps had white patches labelled unsurveyed."



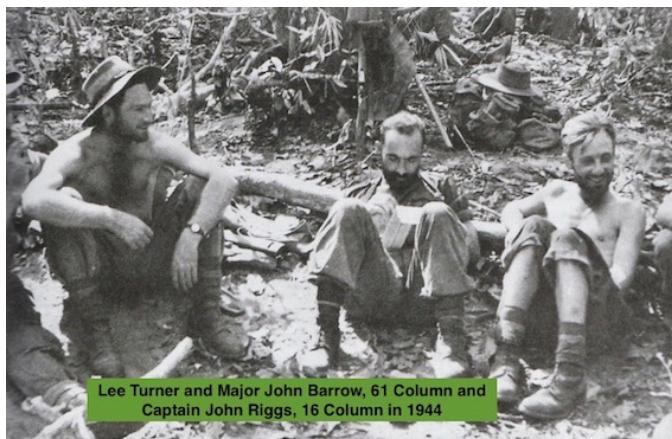
John Riggs pictured with a cup of tea and his books, April 2018. Article continues on page 9.

While 14 Brigade reached Indawgyi Lake, the monsoon-flooded country and the Japanese blocked further progress towards Blackpool. A Column of 7th Leicester's managed to occupy the strategic Kyusanlai Pass just ahead of the Japanese, and then held it against determined attacks.

John Riggs: "We lacked the strength to force our way through. The Brigade was ordered to stay in the area of the Pass and Lake. A number of attempts were made to force the pass, but without success. Then Brigadier Tom Brodie, 14 Brigade's Commander, gave me an unusual job. I was told to take the Recce Platoon and proceed along the western side of Indawgyi Lake, to survey the terrain north of the Lake and make contact with American-led Chinese forces."

Blackpool fell to the Japanese on May 25. Remarkably, most of the garrison escaped with their lives, although the gravely wounded had to be shot to prevent them falling into enemy hands. They withdrew around Indawgyi Lake's southern shore, with the Brigade still holding the Pass. The wounded and sick were evacuated by flying boat from the Lake, by light aircraft operating from jungle strips and rapidly built river rafts.

Meanwhile, John Riggs faced up to a medical crisis: "One member of my platoon, a big man, developed a high fever which I assumed was malaria or scrub typhus. All officers carried syringes and phials of quinine. Intravenous quinine sorted out even a bad case of malaria very quickly. I was anxious to remain mobile because there may have been Japanese in the area; there was no time to hang around. The results of the quinine shot were quite amazing. The man was up on his feet within 20 minutes. He could march, although his pack went on a mule. I was relieved – I had never been so close to leaving someone behind."



On one occasion, whilst using a track, Riggs stepped over a booby-trap. "Someone else stepped on it but he wasn't killed. It looked like a pen and fired a bullet into your foot when you stepped on it. I reported this to the Column Commander. He told me to bring the casualty back and withdraw the Platoon. I had the misery of carrying him back through the jungle – but not on the path as I was sure there were more booby-traps around."

In due course, the Recce Platoon rejoined 16 Column. By then, Riggs had his own medical crisis – a huge abscess had developed on the small of his back, just where the bottom of his pack sat. It was the size of a tennis ball. The Column MO ordered his evacuation, ignoring all protests. "Years later, I learned that the MO had told the Column Commander that, without treatment, I would be dead from septicaemia within the week."

Getting out was no easy matter. The last Sunderland flying boat was full by the time he reached the lake: "they shut the fuselage door three ahead of me." He made the trip to safety down the Indaw Chaung, on a *Dreadnought*, one of the fleet of raft-type vessels built to evacuate sick and wounded. An American doctor successfully operated on the abscess. He recuperated in the Nilgiri Hills, above Bangalore.

John Riggs concludes: "I was too tired and too busy keeping the Platoon going to be frightened. Burma became even more difficult after the monsoon broke. There were always problems finding suitable places for the Column to cross a river or take a supply drop. The few suitable crossing places were always potential ambush sites."

John Riggs became 99 years old on March 1st this year.

Interview by Tony Redding.

Chindit Society Membership Forms

We have decided not to include a 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

The 75th Anniversary of Operation Thursday, June 22/23rd 2019

Back in early February, Society members will have received an email from our Chairman outlining the event schedule for our commemoration of the second Chindit expedition. The centrepiece and most significant event in the celebration of the 75th Anniversary of Operation Thursday, will take place on the weekend of the 22/23rd June 2019.

This weekend will be hosted by 77 Brigade at the Hermitage Barracks in Thatcham, Berkshire. We are planning a very full itinerary, starting with lunch on Saturday and with other activities going on right through to Sunday afternoon.

The intended program will include:

Saturday 22nd June-11am until 2.30pm

Lunch and bar.

An exhibition of Chindit related weapons and memorabilia (families are invited to contribute). Chindit Society merchandise table.

77 Brigade's role in today's British Army.

Meet a real life mule.

Spitfire fly-past.

2.30-3.30pm. A presentation by Tony Redding regarding Operation Thursday, followed by tea and cake.

4-6pm. Free period for guests to relax/dress for dinner, followed by a Drumhead Service with a military band and a group photograph.

7pm. The Commemorative Dinner.

Please Come and Join Us

The Society would love to see families and friends who have over the years attended the various dinners and functions previously organised by the Chindit Old Comrades Association and extends a warm welcome to any of you that would wish to join us in June, or at any future Chindit Society event. This invitation is especially directed towards the widows and families of our former Chindit veterans.



Spare a Thought for 16th Brigade

Although most books about the second Chindit expedition focus mainly on 77 Brigade's glider assault landing into Broadway as the opening of Operation Thursday, this honour actually belongs to Bernard Fergusson and 16th Brigade. This unit began their own long march into Burma on the 5th February 1944, when they cut a path into the jungle at Namyung Hka on the Ledo Road.

From the war diary of the 2nd Queen's Regiment: *Major-General Wingate addressed the columns before our departure and viewed the track. He told us to take great care of our weapons in the wet weather and warned us that the going would be hard and we must conserve our energy during the first few weeks. The Intelligence Officer then moved off down the track with Recce parties from 51 and 69 Column Commando platoons.*

Sunday 23rd June-8.30-10am

Breakfast at Hermitage.

Followed by a veteran's forum and other presentations (listen to our Chindits talk about their experiences in Burma).

1pm. Buffet lunch, accompanied by 1940's themed music.

3pm. Depart Hermitage for home.

Accommodation

There will be some overnight accommodation available at the barracks incurring a nominal charge, which can be booked on a first-come, first-serve basis. Rooms are simple and not en suite and you will need to bring your own towel and toiletries.

The Travelodge at Chieveley motorway services on the M4 is about five minutes drive away and, if you prefer to stay here, we suggest you book your room as soon as possible. The address for the Travel Lodge is: Moto Service Area, A34 Oxford Road, Chieveley, Newbury, RG18 9XX. Telephone number 0871 984 6203.

It is very important that we are made aware of your intention to attend the June event. To book a place, please contact Paul Shenton via one of the following: Telephone: either 01736 711985 or 07974 688151. Email info@thechinditsociety.org.uk or write to Johns Corner House, Johns Corner, Rosudgeon, Penzance, Cornwall. TR20 9PJ.

Chindit-a poem by Steve Cossins *the son of Alf Cossins of the Royal Artillery who fought with 16th Brigade on Operation Thursday.*

How many now remember,
How many can recall
A time passed into history
Such savage bloody war.
A war full of atrocities
Where surrender was a shame
Dense impenetrable jungle
Mud thigh-high from monsoon rain.
A long forgotten army
Whose history should be told
Those young men of courage
After many years, now old.
An enemy thought invincible
The jungle superman
That had swept all before them
From the shores of Japan.
In India the 14th Army
With morale so low
Defeated and humiliated
By a far superior foe.
Then a man of destiny
Appeared upon the scene
A Pith hat on his head
Full beard and Khaki green.
From Palestine via Abyssinia
Many victories to his name
Under the command of Orde Wingate
The Chindits would earn fame.

First came operation Longcloth
Not seen as a success
But many lessons had been learned
Putting Chindits to the test.
Wingate now was ready
To test his theories out
Fill the Japanese commanders
With confusion and doubt.
Thursday, the second expedition
West African, Burmese, Brits
Fearsome little Gurkhas
To fight the hated "Nips".
In bush hats with machetes
Backpacks as big as men
In the jungle, fighting, dying
And causing such mayhem.
The Japanese learned to fear them
And a man called Wingate
But who now remembers
The Chindits and their fate.
From the humid heat of Burma
And a war fought hand to hand
Return home you heroes
But not Wingate the man.
Somewhere in the jungle
Lays a genius soldier brave
And the remnants of an aircraft
Mark Orde Wingate's grave.

RECENTLY FALLEN COMRADES

Peter Oldham, 54 Field Company R.E. 17th January 2017
 Cyril Askew, 13th King's Liverpool Regiment, 24th October 2018
 Colonel John Douglas Slim, 6th Gurkha Rifles, 12th January 2019
 William K. Soanes, from Leicester, 7th February 2019

Corporal Peter Gordon Oldham



From Society member, Robert Oldham who lives in Hamilton, Ontario:

Dear Editor, I am now receiving copies of The Chindit Column which are most interesting to read and wondered if you might be able to mention my father's Chindit story in a future issue of the magazine?

Sapper Peter Gordon Oldham, a lifetime member of the Chindit Old Comrades Association and a member of The Burma Star Association died on the 17th January 2017. He was a Corporal at the end of his war service and one of the few surviving Chindits still living in British Columbia. Born in Burton-on-Trent in Staffordshire, he then resided in the Vancouver area from 1964 until his death. He was 93 years of age, although his army records show him one year older, after he exaggerated his age from 14 to 15 when joining the Territorial Army at Bristol in 1936.

He was called up three days before war was declared on the 3rd September 1939 and became a Bren gun instructor at Brompton Barracks in Chatham, Kent. In late 1942 he was posted to India with the 54 Field Company, Royal Engineers, part of the 36th Infantry Division. He trained in jungle-warfare as a Chindit, carrying a 60 lb. pack, a rifle and sharing the load of his Bren gun. He went into Burma on his 21st birthday, the 20th April 1944.

He was attached to the 1st Beds and Herts, part of 14th Brigade under Brigadier Brodie. He and his unit were flown into Burma at night aboard a Dakota DC-3 transport plane and took part in the battle for White City. Here he got his first look at dead Japanese soldiers, tall Imperial Guardsmen lying still below his unit's hill-top position.

Later, after several weeks of arduous marching, he dropped out of his column due to malaria and beri-beri and made his own way in search of an airstrip. He joined up with another Chindit from a different column and they marched on through the jungle, at one point encountering a bear that stole a pot of jam from them both.

Eventually they were picked up by an American Stinson L-5 and flown to Indawgyi Lake. When they arrived at the medical centre the Sergeant Major seeing how unwell they looked immediately gave them a drink of rum. A Sunderland flying boat took them to an American Hospital in India where they were well treated, enjoying treats such as ice cream and screenings of films, including Walt Disney's Fantasia.

On VE Day, 8th May 1945, my father was working in Rangoon City, where he assisted in the clearance of booby-traps left behind by the Japanese. After this he remained in India for several months helping to keep order during the pre-independence riots. He arrived back home in late 1945 and was eventually demobbed at Pontefract in 1946. In 1951, he was still listed on the Z Force Reserve and was called up for training in Wales in preparation for service in Korea. Fortunately, he was not sent overseas, but seeing him in his khaki battledress and saying a fond goodbye to my mother, was one of my very first childhood memories.

Peter Oldham became an honorary member of the 1st Air Commando Association in 1996, at their anniversary reunion held in Portland, Oregon. The event included pilots landing planes from the Burma campaign such as the B-26 Mitchell Bomber and P-51 Mustang. It was a gathering of mainly American veterans, but included British and Canadian veterans representing the Chindits and the Burma Star Association from British Columbia in Canada.

Cyril Askew

It is our sad duty to inform the members of the death of Cyril Askew, formerly of the King's (Liverpool) Regiment. Cyril passed away on the 24th October last year at his care home in Southport having only recently reached the great age of 101. As a soldier he served for a time with the 13th King's in India, but did not take part on Operation Longcloth. In recent years, he became one of the great characters of the Liverpool Branch of the King's Regimental Association.

Cenotaph March 2018-the photographs



A Special Thank You to 77 Brigade

The Chindit Society, both the committee and our veterans would like to take this opportunity to publically thank Paul Corden, Kevin Carter and the wider team at 77 Brigade, for all their efforts in arranging and organising the many wonderful events and outings we have enjoyed over the recent period. We cannot overemphasize how much their support and expertise enhances and strengthens the Society's endeavours.



The Chindit Society would like to remind its members that our website is available on line and can be visited by using following link: <http://thechinditsociety.org.uk>

Correspondence Around Wingate's Death

28th March 1944 (Top Secret)

My Dear Prime Minister, I need not enlarge on the terrible blow, which Wingate's death has dealt to all of us in South East Asia Command. In the seven months since I have known him we became great personal friends. He always stayed with me in Faridkot House when he came to Delhi and I have visited him on many occasions. He was not popular with all his seniors, as I think you realise, but when I was at Comilla after the fly-in of his second force had been completed, Slim and Baldwin both told me how reasonable and enthusiastic they had found him.

No one but Wingate could possibly have invented such a bold scheme, devised such an orthodox technique, or trained and inspired his force to an almost fanatical degree of enthusiasm. It was a great help having such a fire-eater on his level. When he wanted to get on with a plan, all I need do was back him. It is not going to be easy to try and instill the same degree of enthusiasm from my level, though you can count on me to do what I can. I will be visiting many areas of the Burma front in the coming days and I plan to see Wingate's 14th and 23rd Brigades, which are the only two I have never visited. I explained in my recent telegram, the possibility of using Wingate's death to confuse the Japanese in some way. I believe this might buy us some time and mystify the enemy as to our plans.

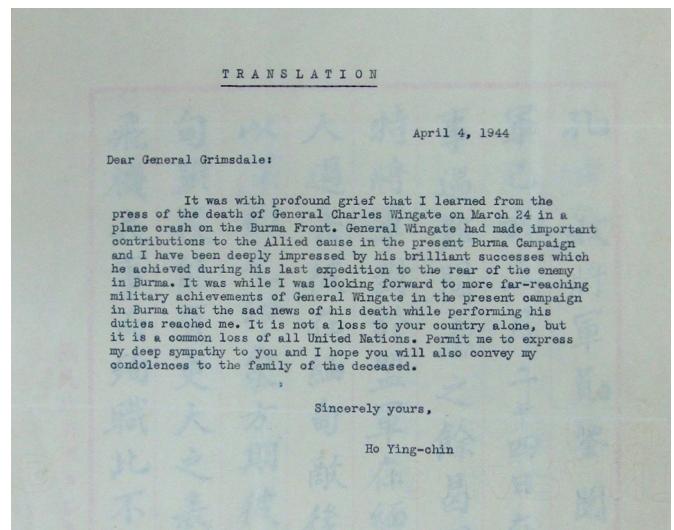
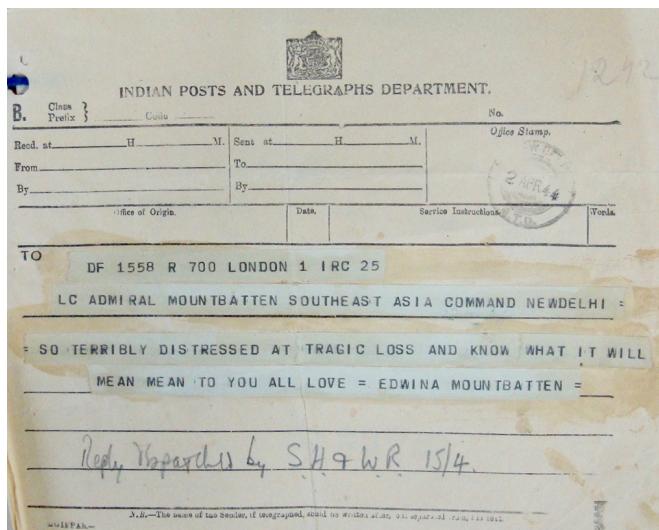
No one can say that the formation of South East Asia Command has not caused a considerable diversion of Japanese forces. When I arrived in this theatre there were just four Army Divisions, now there are eight and we believe a ninth is on its way. I am more than ever convinced that you were right to tell me to go to Kandy to form my command. We shall never learn to stand on our own legs if we remain just an offshoot of GHQ, India. **Yours sincerely, Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten.**

30th March 1944 (Immediate from London)

Following: Most Secret and Personal from Prime Minister to Admiral Mountbatten.

I am deeply grieved at the loss of this man of genius who might have been a man of destiny and send you my heartfelt sympathy. I have consulted Chiefs of Staff about your thoughts on using Wingate's death in deception of the enemy. They share my doubts whether it would be effective and may possibly lead to unnecessary and undesirable complications. We should therefore drop this idea and report this sad event on Saturday April 1st. Moreover, Mrs. Wingate has now been informed that an obituary notice will be published in the Times on Saturday. **Yours W.S.C.**

Seen below are two more communications on the same subject: a telegram from Edwina Mountbatten and a message of condolence from Ho Ying-Chin, the Chief of the Chinese General Staff in Delhi.



Communication Home, the Chindit Standard Airgraph

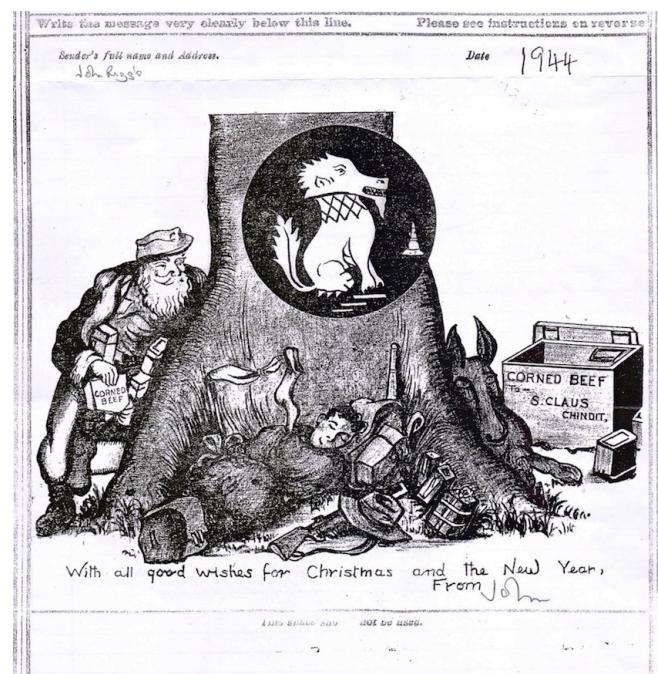
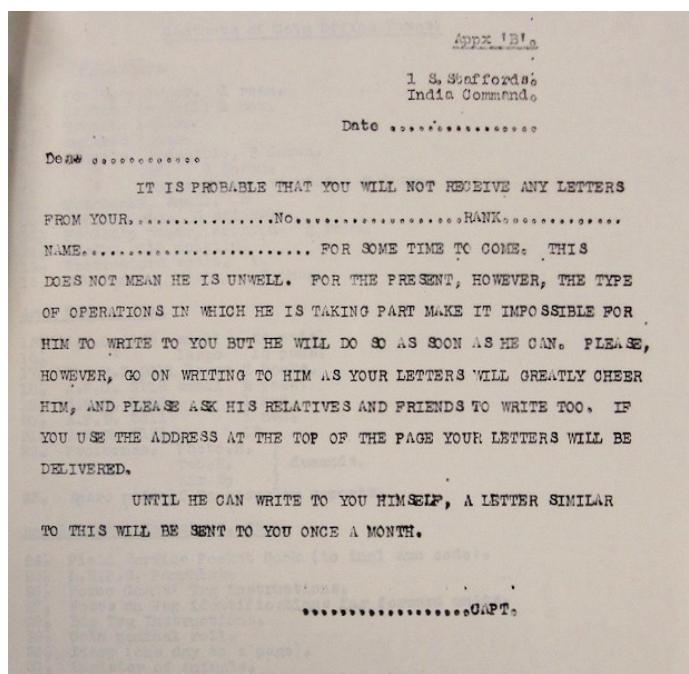
The receiving of mail from home was always a special event for all service personnel during WW2 and never more so than in the Burma theatre. Wingate and his senior staff in 1943, realising the importance of mail to the morale of the British soldier in the field, devised a standard communication template, which was sent back to the soldier's next of kin once a month during the timespan of Operation Longcloth. This came in form of a single sheet airgraph, constructed in the first instance by Staff Captain Horace James Lord, who later commanded the Chindit Rear Base at Agartala during the 1943 expedition.

The same airgraph was employed during Operation Thursday in 1944 and read:

Dear Sir/Madam,

It is probable that you will not receive any letters from your son/husband, for some time to come. This does not mean he is unwell. For the present however, the type of operation in which he is taking part makes it impossible for him to write to you, but he will do so as soon as he can. Please however, go on writing to him, as your letters will greatly cheer him, and please ask his relatives and friends to write too. If you use the address at the top of the page your letters will be delivered. Until he can write to you himself, a letter similar to this will be sent to you once a month.

Shown below are two images of Airgraph messages. One is an example of the above standard template in this case prepared for soldiers of the South Staffordshire Regiment in 1944. Also shown is a rather delightful Christmas Airgraph sent home to his family by John Riggs in December 1944.



Well Worth a Listen

In early 2013, our own Media Officer, Tony Redding gave a rather wonderful talk about the two Chindit campaigns to an audience at the National Army Museum in London. Tony's father, Pte. Jack Redding (pictured) fought with the 2nd King's Own Royal Regiment as part of 111th Brigade on Operation Thursday. To listen to Tony's informative talk, please click on the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SeO_EWVdR_U

The Chindit Society Team



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Chindit Society Merchandise

After strong sales during 2018, the Chindit Society continues to offer a range of merchandise to its members. The following items are available for mail order:

1. A metal/enamel pin badge, with the Chindit Society logo in gold on a navy background. Price £3
2. An embroidered heat press/sew-on patch. Price £5
3. 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
4. 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 committee member Peter Hayden for all his hard work in making these items available to our membership.



The 2nd Viscount Slim OBE, DL, FRGS

The Chindit Society was greatly saddened to learn of the death of Colonel John Douglas Slim, who passed away on the 12th January this year. The son of 1st Viscount Slim, commander of the 14th Army in India and Burma during WW2, John Slim began his Army service with the 6th Gurkha Rifles in 1944. He will of course be remembered primarily as the President and driving force behind the Burma Star Association and will be sadly missed by all of us with an interest in the Burma campaign.