

A U T U M N 2 0 1 9

the  
**Chindit Column**

*The boldest measures are the safest*



### The Chairman's Message

**As we head towards the Autumn I look back with pride at what the Society has achieved during this 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year for Operation Thursday. An anniversary very dear to me, as my father served in this campaign. The committee worked tirelessly to stage a most amazing event in June. The event brought together families, friends and most importantly Chindits. Friendships were renewed and new ones made. We were able to renew the contact with the Air Commando Association and cement a relationship with the USAF. I would like to thank 77th Brigade for their support, help and hospitality. My greatest thanks go to the Chindits themselves; these incredibly courageous and proud gentlemen were the 'Stars' of the show.**

### **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.

### Inside this issue

#### Reality TV

Pages 3 & 4

Experience the full rigours of Chindit training at home and in Burma.

#### June Reunion

Pages 10 & 11

Two wonderful days at Denison Barracks.

#### White City

Page 15

Read about the strongholds closure and eventual clearance in 1944.



**Colonel John Alison  
USAAF**

## 75th Anniversary of Operation Thursday, the Chindit Memorial

The 3rd March 2019 was a wet and blustery day. The Chindit Society membership and other guests gathered in the drizzle to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of Operation Thursday and in particular, the glider fly-in to Burma by 77th Brigade on March 5th 1944. Against the noise of London's Embankment, which included the passing overhead of several helicopters, a gathering of some 120 had congregated to listen to the service of remembrance and to pay their own private and personal respects to the brave men who took part in the second Wingate expedition during 1944.

The Chindit Society committee wishes to thank all those families who attended and also the many personnel from present day 77 Brigade, whose previous regiments had mirrored those of each Chindit battalion present in Burma during 1944. The Society would also like to thank Brigadier V.M.B. Krishnan, the Military Adviser at the Indian High Commission and Myanmar Ambassador to London, U Kyaw War Minn for their gracious attendance.

Chindit veterans, Peter Heppell and Jim Clark took up the honour of reading the Kohima Epitaph and Exhortation respectively, with other readings and contributions from the various committee members. After the service the congregation retired a matter of yards, to enjoy some light refreshments and conversation at the New Scotland Yard building opposite the Chindit Memorial. This short gathering was the first in a series of events during 2019, which will celebrate and remember the men who took part in the second Wingate expedition of 1944.



## The Loss of General Wingate, 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

As featured in last year's Autumn issue of the Chindit Column, the village of Thiulon in Assam, the location of the B-25 Mitchell Bomber crash that killed General Wingate and eight others in March 1944, has erected a memorial stone in honour of those lost on that terrible day. Chindit Society member, Yunnan Rajeshwor Singh has been the leading light in organising both the memorial and the subsequent commemorations.

Raj told us: *I have just returned home today after the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary commemorations at Thiulon, we laid poppy crosses for each casualty at the crash site, then performed a memorial service at the village where the memorial stone is now located. As the representative of the Chindit Society, it was my honour to lay the Society wreath sent out to us by Steve Fogden.*



# The Chance of a Lifetime

## In the Footsteps of the Chindits

Dear Members,

There is now a real possibility that a “reality” TV series on Chindit jungle training will be made in 2020-21. THERE WILL BE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE GREAT-GRANDCHILDREN OF CHINDITS TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROGRAMME, WHICH WILL BE FILMED IN THE UK AND ASSAM OR BURMA.

The Chindit Society has been discussing this idea with London-based 1212 Productions for the past two years. 1212 are now interested in taking this concept further and, as a result, I introduced the project at the recent annual reunion. Essentially, the plan is to tell the story of the Chindits through the experience of Chindit jungle training. This would include:

- **UK (about six weeks, in total)**

- Interviews and medical assessment.
- General fitness training.
- Elements of basic infantry training.
- Final assessment and selection of participants.

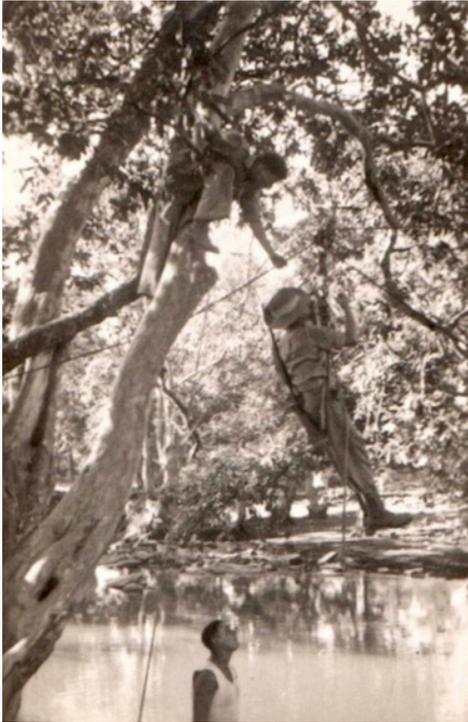
- **Assam or Burma (about six weeks away)**

- Travel out.
- Acclimatisation.
- Introduction to jungle warfare by lead Jungle Warfare Instructor: Lieutenant Rory Bowman-Shaw, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Coldstream Guards.
- Training: living rough in the jungle.
- Briefings: “Exercise Steeple” – simulated attack on a Japanese “airfield” (involving a five-day approach march, river crossing, difficult hill climbs and an airdrop of supplies.
- Exercise Steeple – involving two competing teams of around ten participants, each led by an Instructor, reflecting – as far as possible – the experience of the original exercise.
- Participants will carry the full Chindit pack and equipment, including deactivated period weapons.

Exercise Steeple was the York and Lancaster Regiment’s final battle exercise prior to landing in Burma for Operation Thursday in 1944. The venue will be Assam (where the original Exercise Steeple took place) or Burma. The selected location will depend on several factors, but both are valid from the historical perspective.

(Continued on page 4).

IT IS IMPORTANT TO APPRECIATE THAT THIS IS NOT A PROGRAMME UNTIL IT IS ACQUIRED BY A TV CHANNEL.



However, we have cleared the first hurdle and the next step is to produce a “First Treatment” which can be presented to potential purchasers. Through this concept, it would be possible to “flashback” and tell the story of the original Chindits and individual great-grandfathers.

This project is for young people with the highest standards of fitness and with no medical issues that might be a barrier to participation. If the above could be of interest to any member of your family (and there is a direct Chindit link), please register provisional interest with me, at the email address below. Please include name(s) of potential participants; age(s) and a reference to the Chindit in the family (if possible, full name, Regiment and any other relevant details).

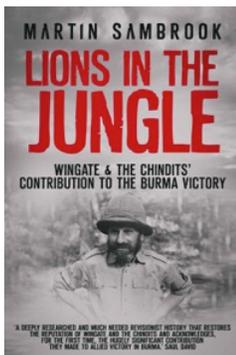
With best wishes

Tony Redding, Committee Member, The Chindit Society

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Telephone: 07768 394 699

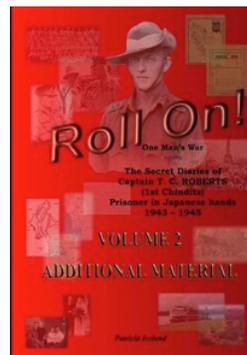
## New Chindit Books



Published just recently in April 2019, **Lions in the Jungle** is appraised by Amazon as:

*A deeply researched and much needed revisionist history that restores the reputation of Wingate and the Chindits and acknowledges, for the first time, the hugely significant contribution they made to Allied victory in Burma.*

More details about this interesting book can be found on the Amazon website.



**Roll On! The Secret Diaries of Captain T.C. Roberts, Volume 2**, continues the wartime story of Captain Tommy Roberts of the King's Regiment and his experiences with No. 5 Column during Operation Longcloth and beyond.

This second volume contains much of the author's (Patricia Ireland) research material, including some of her father's official POW documentation.

## Well Worth a Visit

**The Kohima Museum in York.** The Battle of Kohima in North East India, close to its border with Burma, took place between 4th April and 22nd June 1944 and marked the limit of the Japanese Army's advance into India. Here the enemy was stopped, defeated and forced into retreat and eventually expelled from Burma altogether. This wonderful museum, run by Bob Cook and his team can be found within the Imphal Army Barracks on the Fulford Road in York. For more information and to find out how you can visit, please click on the following link: <http://www.kohimamuseum.co.uk>

## How Men React To War



Major Charles Carfrae served with the 7<sup>th</sup> Nigerian's on Operation Thursday. As a senior officer it was duty to study his men's reaction to the stresses of war.

He recalled: I remember my most trusted African Sergeant-Major at Mawlu (White City) and his reaction to seeing his first dead body. Two Japanese had been horribly maimed by a grenade and lay contorted with their guts trailing from their stomachs.

In peace the Sergeant was the ornament of ceremonial pride and roared like a bull on the barrack square and was the terror of the private soldiers. Here, confronted with the reality of war, he stood rigid and stared, his lower lip trembled like a child and tears rolled from his large brown eyes.

He was never the same man again. Such is the powerful effect of battle on the chemistry of the human personality. The flamboyant, who are often soft underneath, collapse morally, relationships within the fighting group change, new leaders emerge and old ones, like my CSM, bred up in the false values of peace, equally and subtly abdicate.

## 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](mailto:info@thechinditsociety.org.uk)**

## Listen to a Chindit Memoir



The audio memoir for Arthur Baker, who served with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Leicestershire Regiment (71 Column) on Operation Thursday, 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/80012029>

An interesting narrative and video is currently available on line, which discusses the two Sunderland Flying Boats used in the casualty evacuation at Indawgyi Lake in 1944:

<https://weaponsandwarfare.com/2016/04/28/sunderland-flying-boats-chindits/>

## 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.

For his efforts on Operation Longcloth and in particular, his role during No. 3 Column's outward crossing of the Irrawaddy River on the 12th March 1943, Pte. Cyril Norman Guest was awarded the Military Medal.

4203371 **Pte. Cyril Norman Guest**, Royal Welch Fusiliers (attached 13<sup>th</sup> King's Liverpool).

Action for which recommended: Operations in Burma, February/May 1943.

On 12th March 1943, at the crossing of the Irrawaddy, the enemy opened fire with mortars and caused considerable confusion amongst the mules. On his own initiative and regardless of danger, Pte. Guest collected some twenty-five mules with their valuable loads and brought them out of danger to the river crossing area. On all occasions he showed the best qualities of the British soldier; he took on every type of task willingly and with resource; he was always cheerful and energetic under difficult and trying conditions; and during two separate engagements he took a prominent part, using a Thompson sub-machine gun with good effect.

Recommended by: Major J.M. Calvert, No. 3 Column Commander, 77th Indian Infantry Brigade.  
London Gazette, 16th December 1943.

It is not known if Cyril Guest recovered enough from his exertions on Operation Longcloth to go into Burma again the following year. However, we do know that he continued to serve with the 13<sup>th</sup> King's in India until June 1945. On the 12th June 1945, the battalion war diary recorded that L/Cpl. Guest was to be transferred to the Homeward Bound Transit Camp at Deolali, where he was to be repatriated to the United Kingdom on compassionate grounds. Many men had reached the end of their agreed service (time expired) by mid-1945 and were being sent home from India in organised drafts. The reasoning behind Cyril's departure remains unclear.

## Websites of Interest

**The Burma Campaign:** A website dedicated to the part played by the Burma Army, including the Burma Rifles in the war against Japan: <http://www.rothwell.force9.co.uk/burmaweb/index.htm>

**The Special Operations Executive in Burma 1941-1945:** A website devoted to the clandestine groups that fought the Japanese throughout the Burma Campaign, including men from the Karen, Shan and Kachin tribes: <https://soeinburma.wordpress.com/the-operations-of-soe-burma/>

## Did You Know?



**That Captain John Blaikie, Intelligence Officer for No. 71 Column, was picked up by helicopter near Manhton (Aberdeen) on the 27<sup>th</sup> April 1944. Suffering from malaria, John became the first Chindit to be flown out of Burma by helicopter during Operation Thursday.**

**That according to the War diary of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Leicestershire Regiment; the Chindit formation badge was first issued for wear on the 31<sup>st</sup> July 1944. The badge was designed to symbolise the British desire to champion both the Burmese people and their religion. Famously, the newspapers got the name wrong and reproduced it as *Chindit*. The name of course stuck.**

## Notices and Dates for Your Diary

### 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 26<sup>th</sup> October 2019 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](mailto:johnpearce1988@yahoo.com)



### Remembrance Sunday

Being a 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year, it has been arranged for a marching party of Chindit veterans to 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.

Arrangements for the day will be the same as last year, for more information please contact Paul Shenton on: [info@thechinditsociety.org.uk](mailto:info@thechinditsociety.org.uk)

With this in mind, there will be a later than usual time for our own service of Remembrance at the Chindit Memorial to allow the marchers time to get back down to the Embankment. We look forward to seeing you all on the **10<sup>th</sup> of November.**

### The Mawlu Heritage Trust

Some members may already be aware, that there is now a Chindit Memorial situated at Op Hill (White City) near the village of Henu. The memorial was unveiled back in March 2016, with a contingent from 77 Brigade present at the dedication ceremony. From more recent reports, there is now a small museum located at Mawlu, which includes exhibits directly related to the Chindits and their endeavours during 1944. The credit for the museum is attributed to local historians, Win Shwe and Nyo Ko Naing and the venue is now included on most, if not all expeditions to Burma undertaken by Chindit families.



### Barbara Smith

The Chindit Society is extremely sorry to announce the passing of Barbara Smith on the 1<sup>st</sup> May this year. Many of you will remember Barbara, who lived in New Jersey (USA) from a multitude of Chindit related events spread over the last few decades.

She was the daughter of Pte. David Thomas Smith, who was killed in action during April 1944 whilst serving with No. 22 Column at Indaw. Barbara was determined to find out what happened to her father in Burma and her tenacious and spirited efforts to this aim have been an inspiration to many other Chindit families engaged in similar ventures. Thank you for all your efforts Barbara and God Bless.

## Wise Words When Leading Gurkhas



The following article was written in 1926, by an officer of the 7<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Rifles. The sentiments and views stated back then would have been just as apt some fifteen years later:

The first thing an officer must do on joining a Gurkha Regiment, is to study his men's language and get to know their traditions, manners and customs.

While studying the language, interest should be taken in the men's marriage ceremonies, their birth celebrations and death customs. Care should be taken to understand his religious beliefs and all the many festivals involved.

As to religion, it is a great mistake to imagine that the Gurkhas are not particular about their religion, or belittle it before them. The Gurkha is a Hindu, but in most cases his kind of Hinduism is quite peculiar to himself. He is very superstitious and like hill-men from all over the world, belief in ghosts and spirits and the evil eye is very prevalent.

In general terms, no officer can be too strict with them on parade, but they hate being nagged; however with a slack hand over them they very soon deteriorate and become slovenly. They are generally most uncomplaining, but often, instead of bringing a grievance to notice, they allow it to ramble on in their minds until they finally take the law into their own hands.

An officer should be kind, but strict in all his dealings with them. On duty, never overlooking a fault and never allowing any slackness or breach of discipline to pass unnoticed. When off duty be a friend and look after their comfort and happiness. Join in with their games and pursuits; inquire after their families and the state of affairs in their homes and villages.

No hectoring, bullying or sarcasm should ever be used towards the men by an officer, as this will result in a sulky nature and the loss of respect.

In his dealings with the men, a British officer should be most careful to do everything through his Gurkha NCOs, consulting with them in everything related to company business. The Gurkha officer's position should be upheld in every possible way and he must never be made to look small by a British Officer in front of his men. In our modern day battalion, there is a tendency for the Company Commander and Company Officer to do the work of his Platoon commander. This is a grave error, as it disheartens the Gurkha officer, depriving him of 'izzat' (honour) and is apt to cause him to lose influence over his men.

It must be remembered, that there is little or no caste system amongst Gurkhas, especially in the Limbus and Rais. These men consider themselves equal at birth, taking seniority only through military promotion and as a consequence of worth. It is true to say, if an officer behaves towards his men in exactly the same manner he would towards a British soldier, he will not go far wrong. His reward will be the affection, loyalty and confidence of his men and an outstanding battalion reflecting only honour upon his own leadership.



## Wingate's Views on Japanese Soldiers

From the Operation Longcloth debrief papers, written in June/July 1943. File **WO106/4648** at the National Archives:

The Long Penetration raid into Burma in 1943 gave the Allies a new insight into their Japanese enemy. The Japanese, wrote Wingate in his report on the campaign: thought they had found a technique of warfare in the jungles of the Far East to which the United Nations had no answer. With characteristic thoroughness and assiduity, they had not only studied the effects of jungle on all types of modern tactics, but had also trained large numbers of their best troops in the practical application of these new methods. They boasted that the self-indulgent, ignorant troops of the United Nations could never equal them, either in skill or endurance, within the conditions of warfare that prevailed throughout their co-prosperity sphere.

From Japan to India, from Manchuria to Australasia, jungle and mountain predominate and make long range penetration the premier weapon in modern warfare. However, the Japanese were mistaken. The British soldier has shown that he can not only equal the Japanese, but also surpass him in this war of penetration in the jungle. The reason is to be found in the qualities he shares with his ancestors: imagination, the ability to give of his best when the audience is smallest, self-reliance, and power of individual action. The Indian soldier, too, has shown himself fully capable of beating the Japanese in jungle fighting, where individuality and personal initiative are the qualities that count.

Believing that this was so, Field-Marshal Wavell gave me the task of raising and training a formation designed to carry out penetration of the enemy's back areas far deeper and on a far larger scale than anything the Japanese had practised against us. Essential to Wavell's plan was air power, not only superior to that of the enemy, but also capable of operating in new ways and fulfilling hitherto unheard-of demands. We had such air resources. The R.A.F. never failed us. In fact, seeing within us the ideal opportunity of driving home their own strategic attacks on the enemy, they supplied R.A.F. contingents for every column. And it was largely the presence and work of these R.A.F. elements that made the first operation a success.

The force that was to go into the heart of Japanese-occupied Burma and singe the Mikado's beard was not composed of selected troops; it consisted of ordinary British and Indian infantry, sappers, signalmen, and others. Each column also had its quota of Burmese troops; without the brave and devoted Burma Rifles the operation would have been impossible. What was it that made these ordinary troops, born and bred for the most part to factories and workshops, capable of feats that would not have disgraced Commandos? The answer is that given imagination and individuality in sufficient quantities, the necessary minimum of training will always produce junior leaders and men capable of beating the unimaginative and stereotyped soldiers of the Axis. Remember too, that all over this theatre of war human beings feel that the United Nations are fighting for something that means more than the severe and macabre ideals of the Axis.

The Jap is no superman. His operational schemes are the product of a third-rate brain. But the individual soldiers are fanatics. Put one of them in a hole with a hundred rounds of ammunition and tell him to die for the Emperor and he will do it. The way to deal with him is to leave him in his hole and go behind him. Jungle warfare places a great demand for resourcefulness and endurance on the individual, who may be cut off from his comrades at any time. The Jap is not resourceful. He is assiduous, hard working, courageous, and possesses tremendous energy, but he can't solve problems that he has never faced before. The city-bred Englishman, given the right kind of training, meets new and unexpected conditions with imagination and originality.

Although not given to the humourless self-immolation of the Japanese, the British soldier has a stronger, saner heroism. Most of us are waiting to renew our experience with this dull, ferocious, and poverty-stricken little enemy at the earliest possible moment. Some of us did not come back, but they have done something for their country. They have demonstrated a new kind of warfare, the combination of the oldest with the newest methods. They have not been thrown away. We have proved that we can beat the Jap on his own chosen ground. And as here, so will it be elsewhere.

## The Chindit Annual Reunion 2019

This year's Annual Reunion was held in Denison Barracks, Hermitage, the home base of 77<sup>th</sup> Brigade, over the weekend 21-23 June. It was the largest event this year in a series of special activities to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of Operation Thursday in 1944. Months of planning by the Chindit Society Committee finally came to fruition, with the help of several members of 77<sup>th</sup> Brigade and Hermitage Station military and civilian staff, all coordinated by Major Paul Corden and WO2 Kevin Carter on the ground.

In all there were around a hundred members of the Chindit Society, a party of Volunteer Police Cadets from Havering under PC Anthony Kiddle (developing our links with the Metropolitan Police and New Scotland Yard), and a few additional guests, including Colonel Clay Freeman, the Commanding Officer, and Chief Master Sergeant Jason Andrews, of the US Air Force 352nd Special Operations Wing at RAF Mildenhall (the descendants of the 1<sup>st</sup> Air Commando, who supported the Chindits on Operation Thursday).

Most importantly, seven Chindit veterans attended: Peter Heppell, RE; Sid Machin and Jim Clark, 1<sup>st</sup> King's (Liverpool); John Hutchin, Alby Gibson and Horace Howkins, 1<sup>st</sup> South Stafford's; and Robbie Robertson, RAF. Additionally, John Giddings MBE, RAF, represented the Burma Star Association, as their Chairman.

The Reunion got under way on the Friday evening, when those who had travelled early to the Hermitage area enjoyed an informal dinner in the Officers' Mess, followed by a convivial catch-up in the Ante Room, with refreshments available from the Bar. The Chindit Society Committee also held a meeting to go over the programme and address last-minute issues. In particular, after a week of awful weather, the forecast was good for the next two days, so it was decided to press ahead with the dry/outside option.

Indeed, Saturday dawned clear and sunny, and there was a flurry of activity at the WOs & Sgts' Mess as people enjoyed a delicious Full English breakfast and the various Chindit Stands were set up: Mules; Weapons and Equipment; Memorabilia (provided by several Chindit families); and Chindit Society Merchandise (Peter Hayden).

Additionally, 77<sup>th</sup> Brigade set up four stands: the Brigade Operations Centre (showing some of the operations and activities the Brigade is involved in); Information Activities Group (covering Psychological Operations and Web Operations); Task Group (covering their Information Warfare role and equipment); and Outreach

Group (covering Civil-Military Co-operation, Stabilisation, Disaster Relief, Human Security, and Security Capacity Building).

Everyone enjoyed visiting the various stands, inside and outdoors, until the early afternoon, pausing only to partake of the delicious Buffet Lunch. Every stand was full of fascinating things to see, touch and hear, but a particular favourite was the Mules, kindly set up by the Marshall family, which vividly brought to life that vital asset to Chindit operations. Thanks to Steve Fogden (sadly absent due to a family illness), there was also a running sequence of Chindit photos projected onto a screen inside the Mess, which caught everyone's attention, especially when a loved one's face appeared.

To launch the afternoon's events, Major Paul Corden gave a presentation on today's 77<sup>th</sup> Brigade and its Chindit heritage. There was then a break for tea and a fly-past by a Spitfire from the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight, flown by Sqn Ldr "Disco" Discombe AFC RAF. It made three low passes over the assembled masses on the edge of the Sports Pitches, the evocative sound of its Merlin engine making the hairs stand up on people's necks. "Disco" gave a cheerful wave on his third pass and then dipped his wings in salute to the Chindit veterans as he departed – a poignant gesture to round off a very special part of the day.

The veterans then gathered around the beautifully iced 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary cake brought up from the West Country by John Pearce, and ceremoniously cut it, with everyone enjoying a delicious slice with more tea. Tony Redding rounded off the afternoon's events with a wonderful presentation on Operation Thursday, enriched by lots of individual, personal details gleaned from his father and from the research for his excellent book "War in the Wilderness."

Everybody then dispersed to freshen up and change for the evening's events, this time gathering back at the Officers' Mess. Over an early evening drink, everyone enjoyed some incidental music played by the Waterloo Band and Bugles of the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion, The Rifles in the Mess garden, bathed in glorious evening sunshine. The 77<sup>th</sup> Brigade Padre then conducted a very moving outdoor Service of Thanksgiving, Remembrance and Re-commitment, with readings and prayers from various veterans and Chindit Society members, and musical support from the Waterloo Band and Bugles. As well as "The Last Post" and "Reveille", the haunting bugle notes of "High on a Hill" were particularly poignant, not to mention apt.

(Continued on the next page).

Everyone then moved back inside the Mess for the Reunion Dinner. Ninety-nine people sat down at ten tables, based around family groups as much as possible. For quite a few it was their first formal dinner in an Officers' Mess, and the setting was impressively spectacular: surrounded by large, framed photos of Chindit veterans, such as Peter Heppell and John Hutchin, and key Chindit figures such as Orde Wingate, Mike Calvert and Scotty Scott, each table was adorned with silver candelabra with blue and yellow candles, silver statuettes and other military ornaments, glassware, napkins, menu booklets, commemorative slate coasters, and beautiful flowers arranged by Jo Cowley.

After Grace, said by the Padre, everyone enjoyed a delicious three-course dinner, with well-chosen Chindit readings before each course, and the Waterloo Band playing lovely background music throughout. After the meal, toasts were made, and then the Waterloo Band played the regimental marches of all the veterans and key guests, including the March of the US Air Force.

Everyone then adjourned to the Ante Room for coffee and post-dinner drinks, with the convivial revelry lasting until well after midnight – the time the last diner departed is protected under the Official Secrets Act! While those hardy souls who had opted for military accommodation for the weekend only had to make a short walk back to the barrack block and the joys of an Army bed, the remainder were shuttled back to the dubious comfort of the Chieveley Travelodge!

Sunday morning started with another delicious breakfast in the WOs & Sgts' Mess (a much-needed pick-me-up for some!), while the Ante Room was set up for the Veterans' Forum. John Hutchin, Peter Heppell, Robbie Robertson, Sid Machin and Alby Gibson sat in front of everyone and were asked questions on their Chindit experiences by Tony Redding and Paul Corden. Over the next hour and a half everyone was treated to some very special and moving personal anecdotes, vignettes and other glimpses into life as a Chindit, which nobody present will ever forget.

After a break for coffee, Tony Redding gave a presentation on a possible reality TV show concept based on Chindit descendants undergoing Chindit training and then conducting a Chindit march in Southeast Asia (ideally in Burma). This provoked some passionate discussion, but it was eventually agreed that the concept would be pursued further – more details are contained elsewhere in this edition. (See pages 3&4).

The Reunion was rounded off by a delicious Curry Lunch outside on the patio, with musical entertainment from "Champagne at the Blitz", organised by Sally Lockhart. These three lovely ladies in 1940s dresses sang a wonderfully evocative medley of wartime songs.

Amazingly, a random Spitfire flew overhead during their performance! Sadly, it was then time for the remaining attendees to disperse, but everyone left having had the most wonderful and memorable weekend. Huge thanks must go to everyone who helped make it all happen, from the Chindit Society, under the leadership and guidance of Chairman Paul Shenton, from 77<sup>th</sup> Brigade, and from external contributors such as the Marshall family who provided the mules.

Perhaps the last word should go to John Hutchin, who fought at White City and Mogaung with 1<sup>st</sup> South Stafford's, who commented that it was the best Chindit Reunion he had been to in 75 years – you can't say fairer than that!

Article written by Major Paul Corden. More photographs can be seen on page 13.



Champagne at the Blitz and the three Chindit Tennessees.

## Membership Details and Renewal

After some considerable thought and discussion, the Chindit Society committee feels that in order to continue the good work in supporting our Chindits and their families and to continue to organise events, such as this year's fantastic reunion at 77 Brigade's Denison Barracks, there will now be an annual membership subscription of £25 per family or £15 for an individual.

We would like to thank those members who attended the June event for their welcome contributions. Payment renewals can be made by the usual means; either by cheque, bank transfer or cash at any event.

Thank you.

## The Chindwin Dinner 2019

77<sup>th</sup> Brigade hosted this year's Chindwin Dinner at the Denison Barracks Officers' Mess on Saturday 23 March.

The guests of honour were Chindit veterans Colonel Charles Mercer, Peter Heppell and Sid Machin, along with John Giddings MBE, Chairman of the Burma Star Association. In addition, several Chindit Society Committee members attended: Alice Wingate-Pearce, Vice President; Paul Shenton, Chairman; Sally Lockhart, Vice Chairman; Tony Redding, Media; and Jo Cowley, Welfare.

Other guests included Geordie Fergusson (son of Bernard Fergusson, Commander No. 5 Column on Operation Longcloth, and Commander 16<sup>th</sup> Brigade on Operation Thursday), Lt Col (Retd) Tony Groves (ex 6<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Rifles, and whose mother's cousin and fiancé was an RAF Spitfire pilot who was operating from Broadway when he was shot down and killed on 17th March 1944) and Pippa Redding (Tony Redding's wife).

Brigadier Dan Reeve MC, Commander 77<sup>th</sup> Brigade since November, welcomed everyone to the Mess and posed for formal photos with the veterans before inviting everyone to gather for an impromptu group photo.

Thanks to some precarious balancing on various items of furniture and a wide-angle setting on the camera, the assembled group was duly captured for posterity!

Everyone then took their places for dinner, with Chindit veterans and descendants carefully placed on each table so they could interact with today's 77<sup>th</sup> Brigade officers and give them personal insights into their Chindit heritage.

With the various colours of the Mess Kit uniforms, the tables laid up with silver, glassware and flowers, and medals and silver ornaments glistening in the candlelight, it was a splendid setting for the convivial dinner that then ensued.

At midnight, while several people were still enjoying after-dinner drinks, a toast was made to the memory of Orde Wingate to mark the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of his tragic death on 24 March 1944. Eventually the remaining revellers dwindled away, and yet another memorable Chindit event with 77<sup>th</sup> Brigade finally drew to a close.

Article by Major Paul Corden.



### Stop Press!

This Autumn, the Society is planning to send five Chindit veterans to the Field of Remembrance ceremony, held at Westminster Abbey on the 7<sup>th</sup> November. One of the veterans will be chosen to stand at the front of our particular plot to meet whichever Royal has been organised to open proceedings. Then on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> November, no fewer than nine Chindit veterans will take part in the Royal British Legion's, Festival of Remembrance at the Albert Hall.

**Ode to a Soya Link**

**Whence thou? Persistent vision I perceive  
These thrice times daily with mine eyes.  
How did strange alchemies conceive?  
Thy content's formula or thy size?  
What witches cauldron, den of vices,  
Devil's kitchen, Orient spices,  
Serpent's fangs and poisonous potions,  
What magic spell of mystic motions  
Blended in unearthly brew,  
Produce a Rissolle such as you?**



## RECENTLY FALLEN COMRADES

William Cannings, 1<sup>st</sup> King's Regiment, 17<sup>th</sup> March 2019  
 Arthur Baker, 2<sup>nd</sup> Leicestershire Regiment, 27<sup>th</sup> March 2019  
 Douglas Blackwell, HQ Signals, 9<sup>th</sup> April 2019  
 John David Robbins, 4<sup>th</sup> Border Regiment, 10<sup>th</sup> April 2019  
 Malcolm G. D. Rees, 51/69 Royal Artillery, 14<sup>th</sup> April 2019  
 Dennis Haworth, 1<sup>st</sup> South Staffordshire's, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2019  
 Patrick Feeney, No. 5 Column, 13<sup>th</sup> King's Regiment

## New Members and their Chindit Soldiers

### Tom Watson Bale



This Chindit soldier began his Army service with the Sherwood Forester's before being posted to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Queen's Royal Regiment and serving with 16<sup>th</sup> Brigade on Operation Thursday.

Nephew, Martin Bale told us:

Tom was suffering from malaria in Burma and had to be left on the trackside with just his rifle and some food. He was picked up by some local villagers and managed to survive. Back home after the war, any strange noise would have him up on his feet and looking for danger.

### Maurice Jenkins



This Chindit enlisted into the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, before being posted to the 45 Recce Regiment in time for Operation Thursday. Son, Michael told us:

My father's Army number was 5439335 and he served with both the DCLI and the South Staffs during the war. He spoke very little about his time in Burma, but I know he joined the Airborne Regiment after the Chindits finished. He was also demoted from Sergeant at some point after a disagreement with another NCO.

## Congratulations to Alf Cossins



Alfred Cossins, who served with 16<sup>th</sup> Brigade (51/69 Royal Artillery) on Operation Thursday celebrated his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday on the 8<sup>th</sup> July this year. His son Steve, kindly sent us the following message from their home in British Columbia, Canada:

My father had a wonderful birthday party with many friends and family there to share it at his old golf club, where he had played right up until his 95<sup>th</sup> year. He received many birthday cards and messages of good will, including cards from Queen Elizabeth, the Governor-General of Canada, the Prime Minister of Canada and the Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia. However, it was the letters from the Chindit Society, the handwritten letter from Geordie Fergusson and the card from Alice Wingate that had the biggest emotional impact on my father. In his own words, *this is almost too much*. Our local newspaper featured him on the front page a few days later, but that honour did not affect him nearly as much as the tributes from his new Chindit family. From all our family here in Canada, please accept our eternal gratitude for your efforts in arranging those wonderful messages.

## The Dismantling of White City

After the battle of Pagoda Hill on the 13<sup>th</sup> March 1944, 77 Brigade had won the right and space to build White City. Mike Calvert, always the engineer, kept his troops hard at work on the defences. The whole area became a rabbit warren of slit trenches and burrows roofed over with logs as proof against anything smaller than a direct hit from a heavy artillery shell. The perimeter wire was deepened into an obstacle sown with booby-traps and further protected by outlying minefields, and this was covered by the inter-locking fire of machine-guns and mortars centrally controlled through an intricate web of buried telephone cables radiating from Calvert's command post.

With the railway now blocked by the fortress and with three major bridges cut, the only way the Japanese could by-pass White City, was with small convoys of supply vehicles and parties of infantry reinforcements using the forest tracks. Accordingly, Chindit patrols roamed freely to the south mining the roads, ambushing the convoys and interfering with any attempted repair work.

One month later, on the 9<sup>th</sup> May, orders had been given to close the stronghold and for all personnel, equipment and supplies to be removed. Brigadier Ricketts of the 3<sup>rd</sup> West African Brigade was given the task of implementing the closure of White City and after USAAF fighters had softened up the Japanese positions, the evacuation began. At dusk on the 9<sup>th</sup> May, the stronghold runway had been marked out with new landing lights. The BOFOR artillery guns were dismantled and stowed aboard Dakota transport planes, whilst the columns of the Beds & Herts had been sent out to enact a feint attack on the village of Mawlu as an extra distraction.



By midnight, **Operation Holiday**, as it had been code-named, was complete. Forty aircraft had flown in, thirty-seven loaded with stores, and three redirected to Broadway to assist the fly-out there.

The cargoes from the White City had been one load of engineer stores, four of ammunition and one of heavy weapons, two of signal equipment, two aircraft full of wounded, three of sick men and mules, one jeep, one No. 33 Radio Station and thirteen pieces of artillery with their crews. Abdy Ricketts was, of course quite correct, the effort and risk had far exceeded the material gain, but nevertheless it had confused the Japanese and was an unrivalled piece of Chindit panache. In the end, all that awaited the Japanese on inspecting White City the next day, was one destroyed BOFOR's gun and a whole host of mines and booby-traps.

(Some quotes taken from Shelford Bidwell's, **The Chindit War**).

The photograph to the left shows a Sapper from 236 Field Company, RE, working in the Mawlu area of Burma later in the war. As part of the 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, it was the Royal Engineers job to unpick and make safe, all of the Chindits and especially Mike Calvert's handiwork around White City. This included the detection and removal of several hundred anti-tank mines on the extended perimeter around the railway line.

Photo courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.  
Reference IWM SE411.

## The Chindit Society Team



**President - Holly Wingate**

**Vice President - Alice Wingate**

**Chairman - Paul Shenton JP.  
info@thechinditsociety.org.uk**

**Vice Chairman - Sally Lockhart**

**Secretary - Mandy Walsh  
email: alcwalsh@gmail.com**

**Treasurer - Position Vacant**

**Media - Tony Redding  
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**Archivist & Editor - Steve Fogden  
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**Chaplain - Position Vacant**

**Welfare - Joanna Cowley**

**Exeter Event Manager - John  
Pearce**

## 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 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary tie in navy polyester, including the 75<sup>th</sup> 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](mailto: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.

## 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 this year. 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>

## Chindit Bibliography

There is now a Chindit related bibliography available for members of the Society. This document, comprising over 100 titles comes in pdf form and is available via email on request. Many of the books will be well known to our members, but hopefully, some of the others included in the listing may not be. The information relayed is basic; consisting of title, author and where known, the year first published. Please contact us if you would like a copy at: [info@thechinditsociety.org.uk](mailto:info@thechinditsociety.org.uk)