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# Chindit Column

The boldest measures are the safest



Chindit John Hutchin at the Tenterden War Memorial during the Remembrance 2020 period.

A belated Happy New Year to all our members. Let's hope that 2021 will free us from all the constraints we endured last year as we battled against the coronavirus pandemic. The major theme throughout this issue of the Chindit Column will be the photographic record of last year's Remembrance Day commemorations and we thank all those who sent in images of their own personal experiences from that time.

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# 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.



Squadron Leader (later Sir)
Robert Thompson. RAF Liaison
on both Chindit expeditions.

# Chairman's Message



A very warm welcome to our spring edition of Chindit Column. What a year 2020 turned out to be after such a promising start, I for one am looking forward to what 2021 has to offer. Hopefully in the not too distant future we will be able to meet up again and enjoy the company of our veterans, families and friends. It was truly wonderful that so many of you were able to attend your local memorials and commemorate Remembrance Sunday last November. Major Corden from 77<sup>th</sup> Brigade even managed to personally lay a wreath at the Cenotaph after first attending at our own Memorial on the Victoria Embankment.

As always members of the committee have been working hard behind the scenes and we are pleased to say that a number of 'specials' have been booked for the annual reunion weekend planned for the 19/20<sup>th</sup> June this year. Hopefully restrictions will have been lifted by then, if not, we will adjust things accordingly. I am pleased to say that even through lockdown our membership grows, it currently stands at 420.

We are all suffering now as a result of Covid 19, it is bad, there is no getting away from it, but spend a few minutes reflecting on what our Chindits went through in Burma, they battled on against all odds living by their motto, *the boldest measures are the safest*, we should adopt this way of thinking and I know we will reap the benefit. Please stay safe and well and I look forward to seeing you later in the year.

Best wishes, Paul Shenton.

## Please Come and Join Us

When the vagaries and restrictions of the Covid 19 period are behind 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 at any of our future Chindit Society events. This invitation is especially directed towards the widows and families of our former Chindit veterans who often frequented the reunions at Walsall and Exeter.

## A Letter from Boris



On the 27<sup>th</sup> November 2020 and printed on official Downing Street note paper, Chindit John Hutchin received the following message from Prime Minister Boris Johnson:

Dear Mr. Hutchin,

I am writing to thank you for agreeing to your images being used as part of the Then & Now project, created by the Department for Digital Culture Media and Sport, to mark the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Victory over Japan. I am grateful to you for sharing your story to raise the profile of this important milestone in our nation's history.

I attach to this letter the image of yourself that was displayed across the nation, including on the curved screen at Piccadilly Circus in London, to mark the anniversary. I hope you will agree that, despite the challenging circumstances faced by our nation this year, the commemorations were a fitting tribute to all those who served in the war in the East.

I would like to thank you again for everything that you and your Chindit comrades in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, the South Staffordshire Regiment did to secure our freedom and peace for the world, 75 years ago.

Best wishes, Boris Johnson.

# Chindit, a Bookmakers favourite



Some of you that study the form may already be aware of the racehorse by the name of Chindit. Owned by the Ireland based Michael Pescod and a product of the Wootton Bassett bloodline, the horse has had some major success over the last two years, winning eight times in twenty or so outings. In September last year, Chindit won the G2 bet365 Champagne Stakes at Doncaster and has built up winnings to date of almost £100,000. When asked to describe the colt's main qualities, his trainer stated that Chindit was an honest horse with great stamina, guile and a never say die attitude. So now we can see why he got his rather fabulous name!

## Glider 19B

From the Liverpool Evening Express dated 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1944.

#### Our Glider crashed and we marched 19 days to safety

19 days on the march in Burma, a party of eleven British soldiers eventually contacted a mixed battery of British and Indian Gunners on the Assam border. The men are now back at their base. Among the party were: L/Cpl. William Mullin and his brother Pte. J Mullin, of Melrose, Kendrick Field, Chester, Pte. Francis Moffatt, of Everton, Liverpool, Pte. William Albert Paxford, of 79 Leigh Road, Handley Green, Wigan and L/Cpl. Albert Peers, of 33 Park Side, Lower Bebbington.

Pte. Mullin, who kept a log of the journey, described the experiences of the party to a 14th Army Military Observer while his comrades were fitting themselves out with new clothing and enjoying the luxury of a shave. We were part of a special force being flown into Burma by glider on March 5th. We had flown to the other side of the Chindwin River when we made a forced landing in the undergrowth. There was one death – our Padre, who was killed instantly. We were all badly shaken and only four of the remaining eighteen were fit enough to undertake the march. We had been ordered to make our way back if we landed within a certain time of crossing the river. On the night of the 6th March, we started out and we went over the most difficult country imaginable until March 12th, when we were attacked by a party of Japs. Some of us were wounded, and we had to split into parties of five and thirteen. We made no contact with the other group of five during the rest of the march. Most of our weapons had been badly damaged when the glider came down.

We had little food and we drank swamp water until we reached the banks of the Chindwin on March 16th. That night we prepared to make the crossing with logs and rafts, but at dusk we sighted the Japs in some strength about 200 yards up the bank and we had to abandon the idea. The next plan was for the swimmers to cross and get a sampan boat for the non-swimmers. Four of us, including my brother and myself tried to make the first crossing. The current was too strong for the non-swimmers to get across. At this stage we had with us Sgt. Hugh McGee, of 26, Stafford Street, Bootle, and a medical orderly, but we lost contact with them. They have since got through to our lines. We lay up for the night and the following day searched the bank for a more suitable crossing point. The only way we could do it was under the cover of darkness, as the Japs were on both banks. We gave up that attempt and returned to our position for the night.

The next day was our last hope, so we took a chance and marched two miles along the bank until we spotted two sampans. The non-swimmers crossed safely and it was the swimmers who had the trouble when the sampan tipped up and three of us lost our boots. I dived in and rescued a pair from the river bottom, but they were both right boots, however, I still wore them for the rest of the journey. The river was about 300 yards wide at the point where we crossed. We lost our weapons in the adjacent swamps, which were the worst obstacles we encountered, even worse than the thick undergrowth found on the riverside.

Pte. Mullin's story continues on page 4.

The story of Glider 19B concludes:

Cpl. Durkin had a narrow escape in a swamp and that was where we lost the rest of our food. Heading west, we went five and a half days without food, and then ran into a Japanese supply line, where Pte. Paxford sneaked up to a sleeping Jap soldier and removed his bag of rice. We carried on for another three days through what appeared to be completely uncivilised country. We then met a patrol of two English officers and Indian soldiers, and we joined them. We had to lie up on seeing a Jap patrol of six, and just before darkness set in we spotted another Jap party complete with camouflaged ponies. During the night we heard another Jap patrol and thought it too dangerous to carry on any further, so we lay up once more in the bushes. The next day we bumped into a battery of British and Indian Gunners and that was the end of our journey.

One of our men had been shot in the back at point blank range, but he carried on marching for another thirteen days and is now recovering. Cpl. Durkin and my brother marched for five or six days with bush hats cut in two for foot wear. By the end of the trip we had one water bottle between the eleven of us and during this time our clothes were never dry. Worn down by their ordeal, the men looked surprisingly fit but very tired. They have contempt for the Jap as a soldier, particularly in regard to his weapon training. They are all rotten shots, they all agreed, even at point blank range.

# Remembrance 2020 photographs, Gallery One

In the first section of photographs from the various Remembrance Day commemorations last year, we have a second image of Chindit John Hutchin at his local War Memorial in Tenterden, Kent. The next three images shown, are all taken from the service held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2020, at the Arlington National Cemetery, located in Virginia, United States. The small ceremony was held at the memorial to Orde Wingate and all those lost in the tragic plane crash on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1944. Representing the UK was Brigadier Paul Tennant, the British Military Attaché out in Washington.









# Remembrance 2020 photographs, Gallery Two



The family of Chindit casualty Pte. 4034936 Vincent O'Neill at the Chindit Memorial, Alrewas. Photo from Major Philip Purslow.



The Cowley family at their local War Memorial, St. Andrew's Church, Wootton Rivers in Wiltshire.



Veronica Evans (niece of Chindit George Claxton) and the Mayor of Bournemouth at the town's War Memorial.



The Lavant War Memorial (near Chichester). Photograph from Society member, Trevor Haygarth.

# The Chindit Memorial on the Victoria Embankment, London



In August 2020, the Chindit Memorial in London was given Grade 2 listed status by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport on the advice of Historic England.

Heritage Minister, Nigel Huddleston remarked:

As we come together this weekend to mark 75 years

since VJ Day, we must not forget the sacrifices made by the Second World War generation. It is a fitting tribute to all who served in the Far East that we are protecting and preserving these sites so that future generations can learn about this important period of our history.

The memorial serves as permanent testament to the Chindit Special forces, which fought on the first and second expeditions into Northern Burma in 1943 and 1944. After years of Allied setbacks, the Chindits helped turn the tide of the war against the Japanese in the Far East. Named after the Chinthe, a mythical beast, which stands guard outside all Burmese temples, the Chindit Special Force came from the armed forces of the United Kingdom, Burma, Hong Kong, Nepal, India, West Africa and the United States of America.

The memorial takes the form of an ornate bronze statue of a Chinthe supported on a tall Portland Stone plinth. On the front of the plinth is a blue enamel crest for the Chindit Association, as well as a portrait of Orde Wingate and inscriptions explaining the role of the Chindits during WW2.

The overall memorial was designed by architect, David Price, with Frank Forster responsible for the sculpture of the Chinthe and was commissioned by the Chindits Old Comrades Association led at that time by Brigadier W.P. Scott DSO, MC. The memorial was unveiled on Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> October 1990 by the Duke of Edinburgh.

# **Chindit Brigade Reorganisation**

In an order dated 30<sup>th</sup> September 1944, Special Force command received the following instructions: From the present manpower figures it will only be possible to complete three brigades for operations in early 1945. These will be the 23<sup>rd</sup>, 77<sup>th</sup> and 111<sup>th</sup> Brigades, with 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> held in reserve until they can be brought up to full strength. In order to complete all these brigades, the following reallocations will take place:

23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade composition: 4<sup>th</sup> Borders, 1<sup>st</sup> Essex, 3/9 Gurkha Rifles and 12<sup>th</sup> Nigerians.

77<sup>th</sup> Brigade composition: 1<sup>st</sup> King's (Liverpool), 1<sup>st</sup> South Staffords, 3/6 Gurkha Rifles and 7<sup>th</sup> Nigerians.

111<sup>th</sup> Brigade composition: 2<sup>nd</sup> Leicesters, 3/4 and 4/9 Gurkha Rifles and 6<sup>th</sup> Nigerians.

14<sup>th</sup> Brigade composition: 2<sup>nd</sup> Queens, 1<sup>st</sup> Beds & Herts, 2<sup>nd</sup> Black Watch and 2<sup>nd</sup> Yorks & Lancs.

16<sup>th</sup> Brigade composition: 2<sup>nd</sup> King's Own, 1<sup>st</sup> Lancashire Fusiliers, 1<sup>st</sup> Cameronians and 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke of Wellingtons.

# Did You Know?



That on the 25<sup>th</sup> November 1941, just two weeks before voyaging to India, the 13<sup>th</sup> King's played a football match against the Blackburn Police Force at Ewood Park. The King's won 6-2, although it does state in the match report that the police were without their first-choice goalkeeper.

That on the 16<sup>th</sup> February 1944, four soldiers from the 1<sup>st</sup> South Staffs were killed in a glider accident whilst training for Operation Thursday. They were: Pte. Jack Strike aged 24 from Plymouth. Pte. Maurice Chase Leech aged 26 from Debach in Suffolk. Pte. Edward Manning aged 21 from Dublin and Pte. Frederick William Robinson aged 26. All four men are buried together at Gauhati War Cemetery in Assam.

# News from 77 Brigade



Back in December, the government turned to 77 Brigade for assistance in relation to the ever-growing antivaccination propaganda that was appearing in many areas of our social media and press. The

Brigade's Defence Cultural Specialist unit was employed to monitor, analyse and in some cases counter disinformation found on line, often emanating from hostile states including Russia.

77 Brigade increased personnel levels in certain crucial areas to combat the threat against the credibility of the Pfizer BionTech vaccine, in lead up to the first injections given to the general public in December 2020. Government ministers had become alarmed at the impact of anti-vaccination propaganda on public opinion and a report that

more than one third of the population was uncertain about taking the vaccine and were concerned about possible long-term health complications. Other conspiracy theories to be countered included the claim that governments were using the injections to implant microchips into their populations for use to trace their movements in the future.

The past twelve months have been an extremely busy time for the Brigade more generally. In April last year they were instrumental in the planning and construction of the seven NHS Nightingale Hospitals and in November had a change of command. To that end, the Society would like to welcome Brigadier Alex Turner DSO (formerly of the Irish Guards) to the wider Chindit family and to thank Brigadier Dan Reeve MC for all his support over the last two years.

## **Chindit Sainthood**



John Randal Bradburne was born in June 1921 at Skirwith, Cumberland. He was educated at Gresham's Independent School in Norfolk, where he joined the Officers' Training Corps. At the outset of WW2, John volunteered for the Indian Army and was allocated to the 9<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Rifles in 1940. In February 1942, he served in Malaya and after the fall of Singapore spent four weeks evading capture in the jungle, before escaping with others by sea to Sumatra. After returning to India, he volunteered for the second Chindit expedition and served with 3/9 Gurkha Rifles in Burma. John was heavily involved with the defence of the Broadway airfield in April 1944, before moving out from the stronghold into the Kachin Hills.

After the war he returned to Malaya and became an adventurer and pilgrim. After unsuccessfully training as a Benedictine Monk, John spent the next 16 years travelling all over the world in search of his true calling. This he found in 1962, when he became a missionary in a Rhodesian Leprosy Colony at Mutoko, around 100 miles northeast of Salisbury (now Harare). Sadly, John was killed in September 1979, by members of the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army. In recognition of his devout service to God and tireless work at the Mutemwa Leprosy Settlement, John Bradburne is now being considered for canonization. To read more about John and his incredible story, please click on the following link: <a href="https://www.johnbradburne.com">https://www.johnbradburne.com</a>



# Listen to a Chindit Memoir

The audio memoir for Neville Graham Hogan, who served with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, The Burma Rifles 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/80012076

To read more about the recent Grade 2 listing of the Chindit Memorial on the Victoria Embankment as featured on page 6 of this newsletter, please click on the following link:

https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1470017

# **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.

Rifleman Hpau Wai La was a scout in No. 1 Column on Operation Longcloth. His unit, led by Major George Dunlop of the Royal Scots was part of Southern Group in 1943 and had as its main objective, to act as a decoy for Brigadier Wingate's Northern Group operating slightly further to the north. Southern Group was to march more overtly in Burma, purposely announcing their presence to Burmese villages and ultimately to Japanese spies and informants.

The action for which Hpau Wai La was awarded the Burma Gallantry Medal took place barely two days into the operation.

#### 8386 Rifleman HPAU WAI LA

Brigade-77th Indian Infantry Brigade Corps-4th Corps Unit-2nd Battalion, The Burma Rifles Action for which recommended:

On 16th February 1943, near Maingyaung in Burma, this Rifleman was returning to a forward patrol, which was ahead of No. 1 Column. While proceeding along a track he met a patrol of the enemy numbering about fifteen. He engaged the enemy alone killing three with his rifle. By this action he prevented No. 1 Column from being surprised by the enemy patrol.

Recommended By-Captain G.P.Carne, 2nd Burma Rifles. Honour or Reward-B.G.M. (Immediate)

Signed By-Brigadier O.C. Wingate. Commander 77th Indian Infantry Brigade. London Gazette: 5<sup>th</sup> August 1943.

# **Broadway**

It's just a field covered with buffalo grass, in the midst of a jungle where it has slept for countless years under the Burmese sun. Marked on no map, it was unknown and nameless until the necessities of war gave it sudden importance.

Then one night many men in gliders slipped like mammoth eagles down through the hazy moonlight, making history in aerial warfare and giving it the name Broadway. For many of these men this spot was the end of the road; but now there is little left to suggest the madness of that first night or the horror of succeeding nights and days.

A mass of twisted metal, rusting and half-covered by the jungle growth...and a deep hole, now partly healed with buffalo grass, marks accurately the spot where many died.

It's sacred now, this once worthless ground, like many other Broadways with other names. But the buffalo grass will grow, and the jungle will creep in and cover the carved panel, and the wooden cross will rot. And slowly, it will be again worthless ground, unless we remember.

Lt-Colonel Paul L. Bissell, USAAF.

# A Visit to Taukkyan War Cemetery

The graves spread their mourning lines out into the cemetery grounds like the spokes of a wheel from the rotunda of Taukkyan War Cemetery in Rangoon. They were not graves as in other cemeteries. These were bronze plaques on concrete markers. But they went out as far as you could see.

Tuan, a worker at the cemetery, had hoed round all the markers, so that they were cut clean into the grass. It was a huge task, he said, to make 6500 plots neat and tidy, so people from Britain could come and stand over these small, sad graves. They come all the time, Tuan remarked, and stand and look at the graves, some stand for hours, all the way from England.

Suddenly, the cemetery is empty and only swallow-tailed birds whisper in the cool trees. Big flowers fall from the frangipanis and parachute down to lay over servicemen buried with their terrible stories. The war in Burma was a struggle filled with horror. It was fought in places where no western man had placed a foot before. Men were put in Burma's jungles from the villages and towns of Britain and sheep farms of Australia, and they marched through the sucking swamps and monsoons, men from New Zealand and South Africa.

D.J. Collicott, Royal Berkshire Regiment aged 19. Just a few words on a bronze plaque. A young man gone, his ending hidden and pain unknown. The dead came to Taukkyan from all over Burma. From the flooded plains of the Irrawaddy, Moulmein and Mandalay. From the roadless mountains with torrenting waterfalls and from pieces of aircraft that had vanished into the mud.

Pilot Officer J.R. Hilton of the RAF, lost on the 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1943. He was 8,000 miles from home and he died in the farthest corner of a foreign field. Other memories faint with age: Wingate's Chindits, Merrill's Marauders and the Flying Tigers. 6981889 Fusilier F. Rimmington, with no chronicle to tell of his end. R. Smith aged 24 of the Army Catering Corps. For our tomorrow he gave his today. Rows of graves had no name at all, known only unto God. Then Lt. G.A. Cairns VC, of the Somerset Light Infantry and Navigator S.G. Eden RAF, son of Anthony Eden. Aristocrats and labourers died side-by-side fighting against the Japanese.

Rainbow-coloured butterflies danced from grave to grave and settled their beauty upon a family of heroes. A small boy had travelled a long way, now he was finished wandering through the grounds. He sheltered from the heat, and then went to sign the visitor's book with its volumes of names. Mitch Coster, he wrote, from Edgware in London. He was proud to have come all this way to see his Grandad's grave.

The name of another visitor that weekend had a whole page to itself. The signature was written across the middle. It simply said, Anne, 21<sup>st</sup> November 1987. The Princess Royal had spent several hours at the cemetery, but at Taukkyan there are none as important than the 6500 men who had come all this way to die.

Article taken from the Daily Mail and written by journalist, John Edwards in November 1987.



The Rangoon Memorial at Taukkyan War Cemetery, which contains the names of almost 27,000 casualties from the Burma campaign who have no known grave.

# Remembrance 2020 photographs, Gallery Three







Top left/right: Chindit Society and 77 Brigade representatives at the Chindit Memorial.

Left: The Chindit section at the Field of Remembrance lawns, Westminster Abbey.

Bottom left: Paul, Oliver and Ronnie Shenton at the Camborne War Memorial in Cornwall.

Bottom right: The Gorran War Memorial, Cornwall. Wreath laid by Chindit Society Secretary, Mandy Walsh.





## An Interview with a Chindit Grandson



Steve Fogden, an active member of The Chindit Society Committee, edits this newsletter. He is also the Society's archivist/historian and, independently, constructed and developed an impressive website on Operation Longcloth, the

Chindits' 1943 expedition. During this campaign, his maternal grandfather was captured and later died in captivity. In this interview, fellow Committee member Tony Redding talks to Steve about his strong commitment to the Chindits.

**Tony Redding:** The Chindit Society and its members keep you very busy. You also work full time and maintain a very popular website. How do you fit it all in?

Steve Fogden: With some difficulty. I'm married with two grown-up daughters. I am the Sports Ground Manager for St Mary's University in Twickenham. I have spent my entire working life in this industry. Like many others, I knew very little about the Chindit in the family, my maternal grandfather, Arthur Leslie Howney (see photograph above). He was with No.5 Column, led by Bernard Fergusson, and he never came home. I already had a strong interest in history and military subjects but had very little information about what happened to him in 1943. My brother did a lot of research on the family tree and that strange word 'Chindit' emerged. However, our Chindit was never mentioned much and there were no photographs at home - at least, none on display. I began researching what happened to him, in memory of my Nan, Bella Howney who died in 2006. I was intrigued; it was like searching for the invisible man.

**Tony:** Why did your grandfather's loss resonate so strongly?

**Steve:** My interest was sparked after Nan's death. Grandad had been a private soldier in the 13<sup>th</sup> King's. He was captured during Operation Longcloth and held in Rangoon Gaol, where he subsequently died. In March 2008 the family went on a Royal British Legion trip to Burma and, at one point, we found ourselves in Rangoon War Cemetery, looking down on Arthur's grave.

**Tony:** At this point, your interest grew. What made you decide to build your extremely comprehensive Operation Longcloth website?

**Steve:** There was a big breakthrough, with the release of files on men missing in action in all theatres during WW2. Fortunately, I live close to the National Archives at Kew. The files were very comprehensive for the 13<sup>th</sup> King's and I soon had enough to begin to build the website, which came on line in November 2011.

**Tony:** Presumably, there were many other research leads and sources?

Steve: Certainly. Nan did have a few photographs – tucked away in a briefcase. Looking back, I can see that she took Arthur's loss very hard. I think it was too painful for her to have his photographs around. She never liked Vera Lynn and her song 'We'll meet again'. In her case, that promise never came true. She just buried these feelings and concentrated on bringing up her two children. Nan married Arthur in December 1940 and he went to the Far East in mid-1942. So, her married life was very short. She never re-married. As for me, I was never sure who my grandfather was. I did know he was one of six brothers and that he had a strong sense of duty and a great sense of adventure.

**Tony:** Is there more to learn about, your grandad, Operation Longcloth and the Chindits? Can you still be surprised?

Steve: At the beginning of 2020 I completed my last 'set piece' article for the Longcloth site – a section on the Column Commanders and their subsequent military careers. Now the emphasis is on responding to new family enquiries and adding fresh contributions from these sources. More recently, VJ Day 75 was a frantic period, for both my personal research and the work done for The Chindit Society. There was an amazing amount of online traffic. This was not unexpected – it happens on all the major anniversaries. Yet VJ 75 was unprecedented. I had over 120 family enquiries in the space of two weeks.

**Tony:** How do you go about responding to family enquiries?

**Steve:** Many families have very little information on the soldier concerned. The enquiries tend to fall into three categories: those families who believe the soldier in question may have been a Chindit, those who know he was, but know very little else as the veteran did not talk about it and, finally, those who have far more detail, including the key details such as regiment and Army Number.

Tony Redding's interview with Steve Fogden continues:

Steve: In the first two categories, I recommend, as a start, that the family write to the MOD at Glasgow for the soldier's Army Record, with their application including the vital information – full name, date of birth and death certificate. This is a slow process. It takes 6-8 months in normal times. Unfortunately, during the current COVID emergency, it can now take over a year. At one point, in fact, the MOD Department responsible for records closed down for a period, as the personnel involved were required for other duties. On a brighter note, the rules concerning access have been relaxed to a degree and applications under the Freedom of Information Act from other than next of kin are now allowed, although some sensitive information, such as misdemeanours during service, may be redacted. As for the third category, where we begin with a certain amount of information, such as Regiment and Army Number, I am often in a position to provide more details from what is now an extensive database of digitised documents in my files, including Regimental War Diaries.

**Tony:** This work must be time-consuming? **Steve:** During the first few years of building the website, I spent about two hours a day on the project. I became, let us say, 'a little bit keen'. Now I still do around 10 hours a week, with much of the time taken up with activities for The Chindit Society and enquiries from members and others who have seen the website and copies of the *Chindit Column*. My wife, Debby and family are now used to it and claim that I can push the word *Chindit* into any conversation. Yet, they enjoy coming to events and secretly, I feel they take pride in the work I have done over the years. And yes, there are still surprises, with the occasional "golden nugget" discovered at the National Archives. Also, I am not alone in my quest. There are others who have spent years researching the Chindits. Some of their work is based on a particular regiment, with the 1st King's and South Staffs being especially prominent.

**Tony:** What do you receive when you apply for a soldier's service record?

**Steve:** Years ago, you had to be content with a one A.4 sheet summary. Now, under FOI, the family will receive photo scans of all records held on that individual. For example, in the case of my grandfather, I received eight A.3 sheets, with the

information including medal awards, postings, missing in action details and confirmation of death. Other records I discovered elsewhere including his POW Index Card, informed me that he died of malaria and malnutrition, but, of course, his constitution had been already undermined by the rigours of the expedition. No.5 Column had a reputation for ill-luck when it came to supply drops. They were in for 90 days, but during that period only 20 days' rations were actually dropped to them. Such factors help us understand why Chindit survival rates in Rangoon Gaol were so poor.

**Tony:** Are you usually successful in your research? **Steve:** In some 30-40% of cases, I am able to tell the family something new or put them on the trail of more details. In this sort of work, that's a good score. Some sources are better than others. The war diaries are often disappointing; they are especially light on information for junior NCOs and private soldiers. The South Staffs war diary however, is a hefty tome and a very good source. In contrast, the diary for the Lancashire Fusiliers is next to useless – just a long list of clipped "sitreps". However, sometimes I can get lucky and NCOs and private soldiers can appear in books and diaries.

**Tony:** Do you find some cases especially moving or distressing?

**Steve:** Yes, of course. When I began my research, it was occasionally difficult when speaking to the families. It can be disturbing to read old letters from mothers asking for more information about their sons. The truth is that it can be extremely sad and, at one point, I even considered whether I wanted to carry on with the work. Over the years, I have learnt to be careful in what I say. In some situations, I am providing the first fresh information to a family in over 70 years! However, it is important to be truthful. Nowadays, thankfully, I am usually talking to the grandchildren, who are somewhat distanced from the traumas of the past and are more open to hearing the full facts. My mother, for example, was only two when her father died but wanted to learn more about what happened to him in Burma. Nan didn't talk much about him or her own feelings of loss and even us, as grandchildren didn't ask too many questions growing up. Yet. I do remember that, when Mum visited his grave in Rangoon, I sensed a feeling of closure for her. It was a very emotional time.

Interview concludes on page 13.

**Tony Redding:** Do some cases stand out in your mind?

**Steve Fogden:** Many. Very recently, for example, I helped a family looking for Bobby Dalton, of The Queen's Regiment. However, it turned out he had been transferred to a Column of 51st/69th Field Regiment, Royal Artillery – fighting as infantry. I was able to direct them to a book containing a page devoted to the action in which he lost his life. In a personal context, I have made contact with the families of two Chindits – James Ambrose and Bob Jordan – who were part of the same dispersal party as my Grandfather in May 1943. They were all captured at the same time and all died in Rangoon Gaol. We had a very emotional correspondence over several weeks and it was a very special moment in my research. More generally, I usually get a very positive reaction to my work. This is the greatest reward and continues to fire my efforts.

**Tony:** What are your future plans for Chindit-related research?

**Steve:** Time is the issue, of course, but I do have a couple of projects on the boil. One is a collaborative project to bring together the 1<sup>st</sup> King's nominal roll for the glider landings at Broadway. The second project concerns the POWs of Rangoon Gaol during 1942-45 –which would include all prisoners held there, not just the Chindits.

**Tony:** Have you ever wondered how you would have fared in a Chindit Column?

**Steve:** We'd all like to think we could match the achievements of our forefathers. I have some of the qualities I think. I'm self-disciplined, resilient, determined and, certainly in earlier years, very fit.

Yet, at the same time, I'm not sure our generation has that essential spirit of comradeship and selflessness. Maybe we are just too soft?

**Tony:** Finally Steve, how do you see the future of the Chindit Society?

**Steve:** The Society is managed by a hardworking group of people, some of whom are still working full time. Much of the Society's recent success must be laid at the door of today's 77 Brigade, who have taken forward the Chindit heritage. Looking ahead, it will be challenging to keep the events going as our veterans take their leave. Perhaps we will evolve ultimately with more emphasis on the digital dimension. However things unfold, we should be kind to ourselves in the knowledge that we have done our best to honour the Chindits.



Steve's Nan, Bella Howney by her husband's graveside at Rangoon War Cemetery, November 1987.

# Enjoy it, but Remember the Real Heroes



In August 1961, Bill Slim reviewed the film, Objective Burma for Dekho magazine:

None of us who really served in Burma would claim to have played as dashing a part as the late Errol Flynn does in this film, and it may revive flickers of resentment, as it did when the film first appeared in 1944. We know of course, that it bears about as much historical relation to the Burma campaign as it does to Timbuktu. It is not a factual documentary, but a fictional adventure story. As such, those of us even now boyish enough to enjoy a bit of swashbuckling, and I hope most of us still are, need not get hot under the collar about it.

In Burma, no Errol Flynn won the campaign on his own. Victory in Burma came not from the work of any one man, or even a few men, but came from the sum of many men's efforts. Men who in danger, hardship, sickness and exhaustion gave the best that was in them and formed a comradeship that would endure through the years. And remember, that while the men in Burma were not all Errol Flynns, together they did, turn defeat into victory.

# Remembrance 2020 photographs, Gallery Four







Left: Chindit Peter Heppell at the East Grinstead War Memorial. During the day's events, Peter laid a wreath on behalf of the Chindits and was asked to recite the Kohima Epitaph, before attending the main service at the East Court Memorial Gardens. Centre: The Chindit Memorial in London on the 11<sup>th</sup> November 2020. Image taken by Society member, Phil Diamond. Right: Pat and John Pearce at the St. Ives War Memorial in Cornwall, in front of the Burma Star Association memorial stone. This photograph was taken on the 11<sup>th</sup> November, with John having conducted his own personal act of Remembrance the previous Sunday outside his own home.



Left: The Cenotaph after the Remembrance service on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> November 2020.

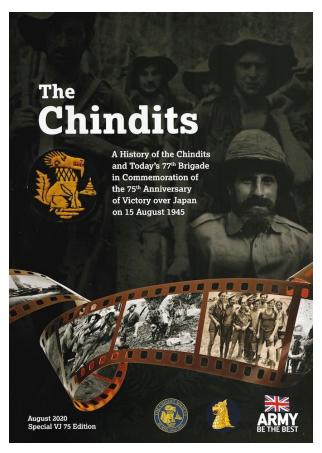


At the going down of the sun and in the morning, We Will Remember Them.

# 77th Brigade's VJ Day 75 Chindit Booklet

A message from Major Paul Corden (77th Brigade):

Hopefully by now all members of the Chindit Society will have received their personal copies of the VJ 75 Chindit booklet produced by 77th Brigade last summer. The booklet (photographed below) was also given out to a multitude of other recipients in an effort to widen and enhance the story and reputation of the Chindits.



As soon as the booklets arrived from the printers on 5th August, the top priority to receive them before VJ Day were our remaining Chindits, the families of those recently deceased, Chindit Society Committee members and the high-profile individuals who so kindly wrote the opening tributes: the Prime Minister; Dame Vera Lynn's daughter, Virginia and Joanna Lumley. Many of the recipients have sent back their thanks and appreciation, although we haven't received any formal acknowledgement from the Prime Minister, but he has had one or two more pressing matters in his in-tray, so he can probably be excused...!

I then took hundreds of booklets up to Lichfield for VJ 75, passing over the balance of the Chindit Society's copies to Paul Shenton in the hotel car park. Some copies were handed out in person to targets of opportunity at the National Memorial Arboretum itself, including Lieutenant General James Bashall (RBL National President), Bob Gamble (the RBL's Head of Commemorative Events), Mark Slim (now the third Viscount Slim) and others from the Burma Star Association and the BBC's Sophie Raworth, Fergal Keane and various producers and assistants looking after our Chindits.

Of particular note, I also seized the opportunity to give eight booklets to the Assistant Equerry to Prince Charles, for eventual distribution to the following members of the Royal Family, once covering letters had been produced: The Queen and Prince Phillip, Prince Charles, Prince William, Prince Harry, Prince Andrew, The Duke of Kent and Sophie, Countess of Wessex. I duly sent appropriate covering letters to all, emphasising that the booklet was being presented on behalf of both the Chindit Society and 77<sup>th</sup> Brigade, and with the one to Her Majesty including our loyal greetings.

The Assistant Equerry clearly kept his part of the bargain, as demonstrated by a letter, which arrived in October from the Queen's Assistant Private Secretary, thanking me for the booklet "which The Queen read with great interest. This letter comes to you, and all of 77<sup>th</sup> Brigade and the Chindit Society, with Her Majesty's warm good wishes."

Copies were also sent to senior officers across the Armed Forces, including: General Sir Nick Carter, Chief of the Defence Staff, who originally proposed the title of 77<sup>th</sup> Brigade back in 2014, and who met the Chindit veterans and descendants present at the National Memorial Arboretum on VJ Day: General Sir Mark Carleton-Smith, Chief of the General Staff; Lieutenant General Ivan Jones, Commander Field Army; Major General James Bowder, General Officer Commanding 6<sup>th</sup> (UK) Division (77<sup>th</sup> Brigade's superior HQ); the key Divisional HQ staff and all the other Brigade Commanders in 6<sup>th</sup> (UK) Division; and the three main Special Forces Commanding Officers of 22<sup>nd</sup> Special Air Service Regiment, the Special Boat Service and the Special Reconnaissance Regiment.

Continues on page 16.

Several copies were also sent to key individuals across the USAF 352<sup>nd</sup> Special Operations Wing at RAF Mildenhall, to thank them for their input to the booklet and to strengthen our connections with them with an eye to the future, including their planned participation in future Chindit heritage events. Booklets were also sent to the London-based Defence and Military Attachés for the USA, India and Nigeria.

Other selected recipients included the Metropolitan Police Assistant Commissioner Neil Basu, PC Anthony Kiddle and the Havering Volunteer Police Cadets (maintaining the special link with New Scotland Yard), Lord Ashcroft (with his interest in VCs), and several members of the 6<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Rifles Association and wider Brigade of Gurkhas Association (to strengthen our Gurkha connections).

Copies were also sent to David Rowlands, the famous military artist, in gratitude for his kind permission to use images of some of his wonderful paintings within the booklet.

I also wanted to send a booklet to military historian/journalist and Chindit enthusiast Akhil Kadidal, to thank him for his kind permission to use several of his excellent maps, but as he lives in Bengaluru (formerly Bangalore), India, I approached the British Military Adviser out in New Delhi to see if he could help guarantee delivery and save on postage! Once he saw the electronic version, the MA was immediately enthused and asked for extra copies, as he could see huge influence potential with the Indian Armed Forces.

Two large bundles were duly despatched to the British High Commission by Forces Mail, and copies were distributed to the following key Indian recipients: Chief of Defence Staff; Chief of the Army Staff; Director General Infantry; Director General Assam Rifles; Inspector General Assam Rifles (North); Inspector General Assam Rifles (South); the Indian Centre for Armed Forces Historical Research; and Commander 77<sup>th</sup> Mountain Brigade (more due to the numerical connection to 77<sup>th</sup> Brigade than the terrain). The desired effect was completely achieved, earning Brownie points for the UK in key areas across the Indian Armed Forces, with their CDS himself writing a super thank you letter to the British Defence Adviser.

The booklet for Akhil Kadidal was sent down to the Deputy High Commission, Bengaluru, where it was presented in a small ceremony by Jeremy Pilmore-Bedford, the Deputy High Commissioner himself. He reported that, with COVID-19 rife in India, it was a much appreciated, rare moment of enjoyable human contact for all involved.

So, although COVID-19 sadly caused several events to be cancelled last year. The fortunate lull in August that enabled VJ Day 75 itself to be marked, with its outstanding TV and newspaper coverage, combined with the reach of the commemorative booklet, nonetheless meant that our Chindits achieved well deserved and high-profile coverage right up to the highest echelons of our nation and further afield across the world. Huge thanks again to all involved.







Images shown are: (Left): A thank you letter from Windsor Castle on behalf of Her Majesty the Queen for the VJ 75 booklet. (Centre): Akhil Kadidal receives his copy of the booklet from Jeremy Pilmore-Bedford. (Right): The thank you letter from the Indian Armed Forces Command in New Delhi.

# **Burrifs Make First Class Chindits**



The men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, The Burma Rifles have been revered over the years for their sterling work on both Chindit expeditions. We thought it was about time that their contribution was recognised in the pages of the Chindit Column.

The first appraisal of these wonderful soldiers comes from the pen of the famous

WW2 journalist, Frank Owen:

Tough cheerful little men carrying packs that seemed to be almost as big as themselves and every Chindit column had a section of them. The British Other Ranks had only a vague idea where they came from or what they were there to do. All they did know was that they faced the dangers and discomforts of the campaign with good humour and good heart. When there was any fighting to be done they did it with a ruthlessness and dash second to none.

They were the Burrifs, men of the Burma Rifles. The 'Free Burmese' if you like, for they came from the Kachin, Karen and Chin tribes of that country. When they went into Burma they were fighting for the freedom of their own country. The British Tommy, often a harsh critic, soon became a lively admirer of the Burrifs.

It was surprising how well the two sets of men got on together almost immediately after they met. This was largely due to the intelligence of the Burma Rifleman and his desire to master the English language, which he did far more easily than the British learnt Burmese. Perhaps his greatest skill was the ability to find or access food, for which the Tommy had the deepest, and quite understandable admiration.

If no other indication were available, the impressive list of decorations and awards won by the Burrifs in just over two years of warfare would tell the tale of their sterling qualities. Amongst other decorations, the officers and men of the battalion were awarded: two DSOs, one OBE, one MBE, 13 MCs and 18 Burma Gallantry Medals.

After completing his debrief narrative for the first Chindit expedition in June 1943, General Wingate described the Burma Rifles contribution thus:

I would like to record here that I have never had under my command in the field as good a body of men as the 2nd Burma Rifles. Their Commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Wheeler and myself were hopeful that the work of a reconnaissance unit for a Long Range Group would make full use of their good qualities, but we were surprised by their excellence in the face of the enemy.

As a result of the experience we gained, the following conclusions may be drawn. The Burmese Hillman is an ideal soldier for aggressive reconnaissance. He is not at all ideal in defence. He is not ideal if ordered to attack a strongly held position. But in carrying out rapid, bold and intelligent patrols in the face of the enemy, in obtaining local information, in making propaganda, in handling boats, in living off the country, and in loyal service to his officers he is without equal.

Mike Calvert in his book, Prisoners of Hope underlined Wingate's positive appraisal of the Burma Rifles:

We had all come to take these Burma Rifle officers for granted. As a commander you would say, bring me six elephants, or a paddle steamer, or a Chinese Regiment, or fifteen bullocks; and they would look at you from behind their moustaches, salute, disappear followed by a worshipful company of Kachins, Chins or Karens, and then appear again with whatever you wanted. They certainly lived up to General Wingate's tribute, that they were the finest body of men any unit ever possessed.



# Websites of Interest



The Staffordshire Regiment Museum, incorporating the archive of the Mercian Regiment. This well presented and recently updated website is full of information about the history of the aforementioned Army regiments. Although temporarily closed due to Covid-19, the museum, which is located in Lichfield, is a welcoming and interesting place to visit. For more details, please click on the following link:

#### https://staffordshireregimentmuseum.com

Well-known TV comedian Al Murray (aka the Pub Landlord) has contributed a number of WW2 related transcripts to the website, Play.acast.com. Linked to this page is a reading from

Richard Rhodes-James' book, simply entitled, Chindit. Richard Rhodes-James served with the 3/4 Gurkha Rifles on Operation Thursday:

#### https://play.acast.com/s/wehaveways/224.richardrhodesjames--chindit

The memoir of Reverend Donald Mackay, a Chaplain with the Cameronians (Scottish Rifles) on Operation Thursday. To read more, please click on the following link to the Burma Star Memorial Fund website:

https://burmastarmemorial.org/archive/stories/1405937-rev-donald-mackay?q=

# **Lance Corporal Samuel John White**



In October last year, on our favourite on line auction site, eBay, a single General Service Medal with the Palestine clasp came up for sale. The medal belonged to Lance Corporal 2038171 Samuel John White, 12<sup>th</sup> Field Company, Royal Engineers and did not at first stand out from the crowd. It was known sadly, that Samuel had been killed in action on the 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1944 in Burma, although no other medals were included in the lot, and that he is now remembered upon the Rangoon Memorial at Taukkyan War Cemetery.

In the last few hours of the auction, the medal price went from just under £100, to an incredible £411 by the end of the sale. This was most unusual and on the face of it, made little sense. However, after further investigation by our Society archivist, it was discovered that Samuel had taken part on Operation Thursday and had been part of the 633<sup>rd</sup> Field Company, R.E. when he joined the Chindits. His name appears on a list of Royal Engineers, which includes our very own Peter Heppell, amongst other men who served on the second Wingate Expedition in 1944. So, it would seem that Samuel's Chindit credentials were the reason for his single medal reaching such a high price.





# A Sign of the Times

On March 5<sup>th</sup> last year, Chindit Peter Heppell celebrated his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday at a specially organised dinner, hosted by 77 Brigade at their Denison Barracks in Thatcham. A little under eleven months later, on the 14<sup>th</sup> January 2021, Peter sat for his first dose of the Covid-19 vaccine.

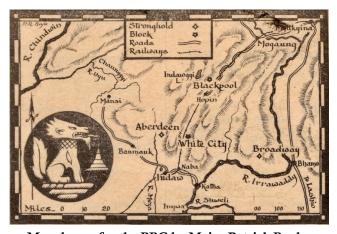
In view of 77 Brigade's heavy involvement in combatting anti-vaccination propaganda (see article on page 7), we thought you would like to see Peter, smartly dressed as always and wearing his Chindit tie, receiving his vaccination and in doing so setting an example for all of us to follow.

# From Way Back When

From the Radio Times magazine, dated 9<sup>th</sup> December 1949:

At 8pm tonight: The Chindits.

A programme based on personal experience, narratives and official reports. This is the story of some 15,000 officers and men of British, Gurkha, Burmese and West African regiments, who marched, fought and existed for many weeks, 150 miles behind Japanese lines in Burma. Apart from supplies flown in or dropped by the RAF and United States Army Air Force, these men depended for their survival on their own initiative and endurance. They were the green ghosts that haunted the Japanese; they were General Wingate's Chindits.



Map drawn for the BBC by Major Patrick Boyle, co-author of Jungle, Jungle, Little Chindit

Taken from the pages of Dekho magazine, one of the very first adverts for Mike Calvert's book, **Prisoners of Hope**, published in 1952:

# Prisoners of Hope

by

Michael Calvert, D.S.O.

This is the story of 77 Indian Infantry Brigade (1 South Staffords, 1 Lancashire Fusilier, 1 Kings (Liverpool), 3/6 Gurkhas, 3/9 Gurkhas) landing and fighting in Central Burma, and the capture of Mogaung, key point of Jap communications there.

But it also discusses forthrightly the strategic and tactical methods and results of the operation with an appendix interesting to all Burma fighters on what the Japanese Commanders in their own words thought of the Chindits and their operations. This is the Book Society choice and has been well-reviewed in 30 papers and periodicals.

The Air support and supply side should be of especial interest to RAF and USAAF.

The account is interspersed with typical Burma Star humour and anecdotes.

Mike Calvert, who returned injured to Europe in 1944, later commanded the Special Air Service operating all over Europe, where he put into practice many ideas learnt in Burma. He finished up the war with D.S.O. and bar, American Silver Star, Legion of Honour and Croix de Guerre avec palme (for courage) France; Order of Leopold II and Croix de Guerre avec palme (for courage) Belgium; and Norwegian Liberty Cross.

First editions nearly sold out, so please place orders with your bookshop.

JONATHAN CAPE 16/-

## **RECENTLY FALLEN COMRADES**

Philip B. Beddows, Royal Signals (1st King's)
Anthony Boon, 54th Field Company R.E.
Edward William Davis, 1st Essex Regiment
H. Ellam, Chindit HQ (Dekho)
William Francis Hull, 1st King's Regiment
George Main, 2nd Yorks & Lancs Regiment
Ronald Heathcock, RAF Liaison 16th Brigade
Thomas Parker, 1st Cameronians (Scottish Rifles)



# 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 email: tonyr@mulberryr.co.uk

Archivist & Editor - Steve Fogden email: steve.1943@hotmail.com

Chaplain - Position Vacant

Welfare - Joanna Cowley

Exeter Event Manager - John Pearce

# **Notices and Dates for Your Diary**

The Chindit Society would like to announce the proposed dates for this year's Annual Reunion. This will be on the weekend, 19/20<sup>th</sup> June 2021 and will be held at Denison Barracks the home of today's 77<sup>th</sup> Brigade. Obviously, the event will be dependent on any Government guidelines applicable at that time. Further information will follow presently.

## 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 planned reunion at 77 Brigade's Denison Barracks, there will now be an annual membership subscription of £30 per family or £15 for an individual. All renewals will be due on the 1<sup>st</sup> June and can be made by the usual means; either by cheque, bank transfer or cash at any event. Many thanks in advance for your continued support.

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

## **News From Myanmar**

Following a spate of minor vandalism in war cemeteries located in Burma, the government of Myanmar has announced new laws and regulations for the use of these spaces by the general public. A spokesman said:

Military cemeteries in Yangon will now prohibit picnickers, merrymakers and revelers and legal action will be taken against those who do not follow the rules for visiting military cemetery areas. Relatives of the fallen soldiers of the Second World War visit these cemeteries to pay their respects to their loved ones. This being so, we will not allow people to date, sing, play the guitar and make noises within the cemetery, as this can affect the national image of our country. New warning signs have been erected and legal action will be taken against those who do not follow the rules. No TV or video shooting will be allowed except for documentaries. There are more than one thousand foreigners visiting military cemeteries every month, mostly from Britain and Australia. The new rules apply to the three military cemeteries in Myanmar, which are under the supervision of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and where member countries donate funds for their upkeep. They are: Taukkyan, Rangoon and Thanbyuzayat War Cemeteries.