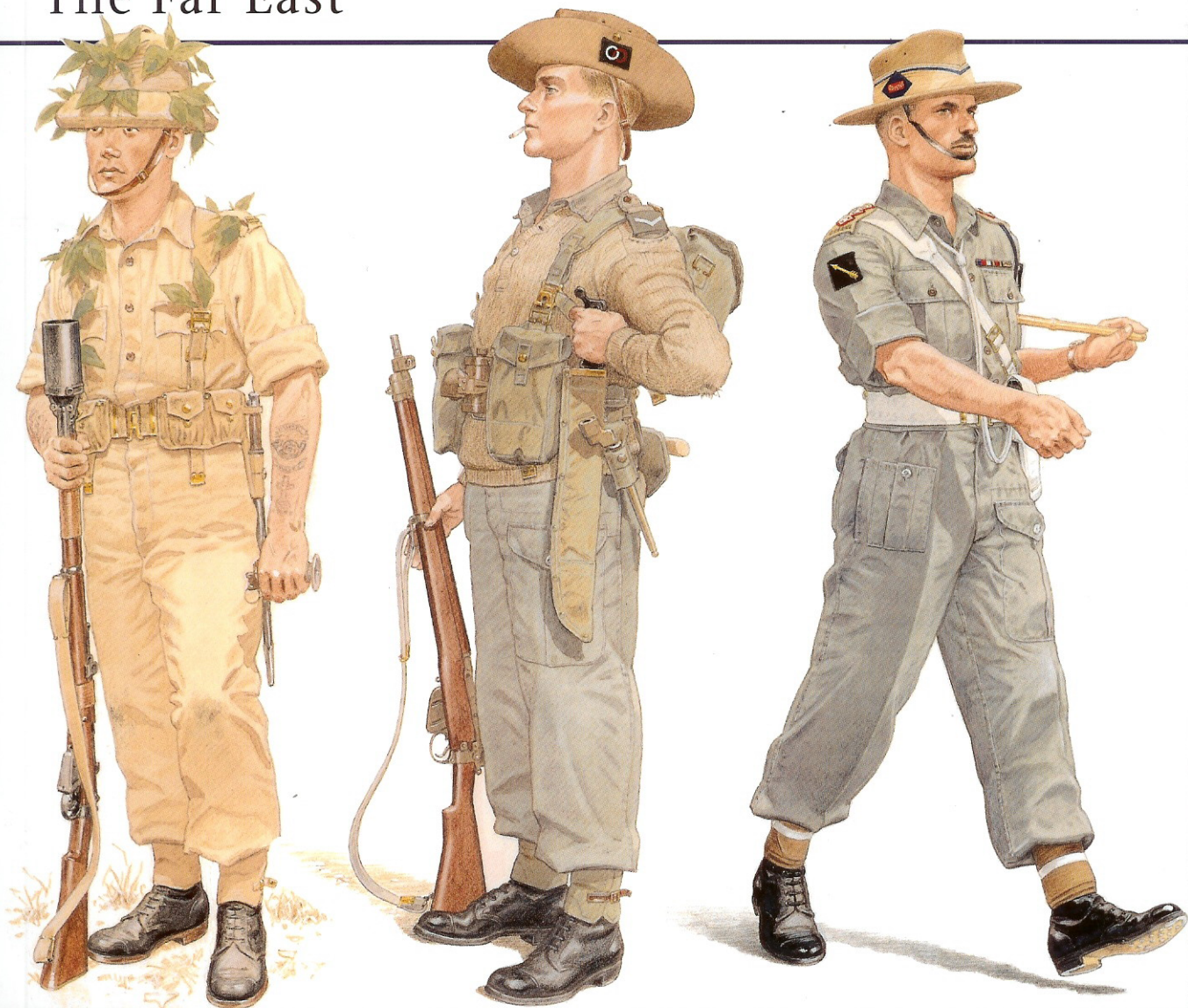


Men-at-Arms

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PUBLISHING

# The British Army 1939–45 (3)

The Far East



Martin J Brayley • Illustrated by Mike Chappell

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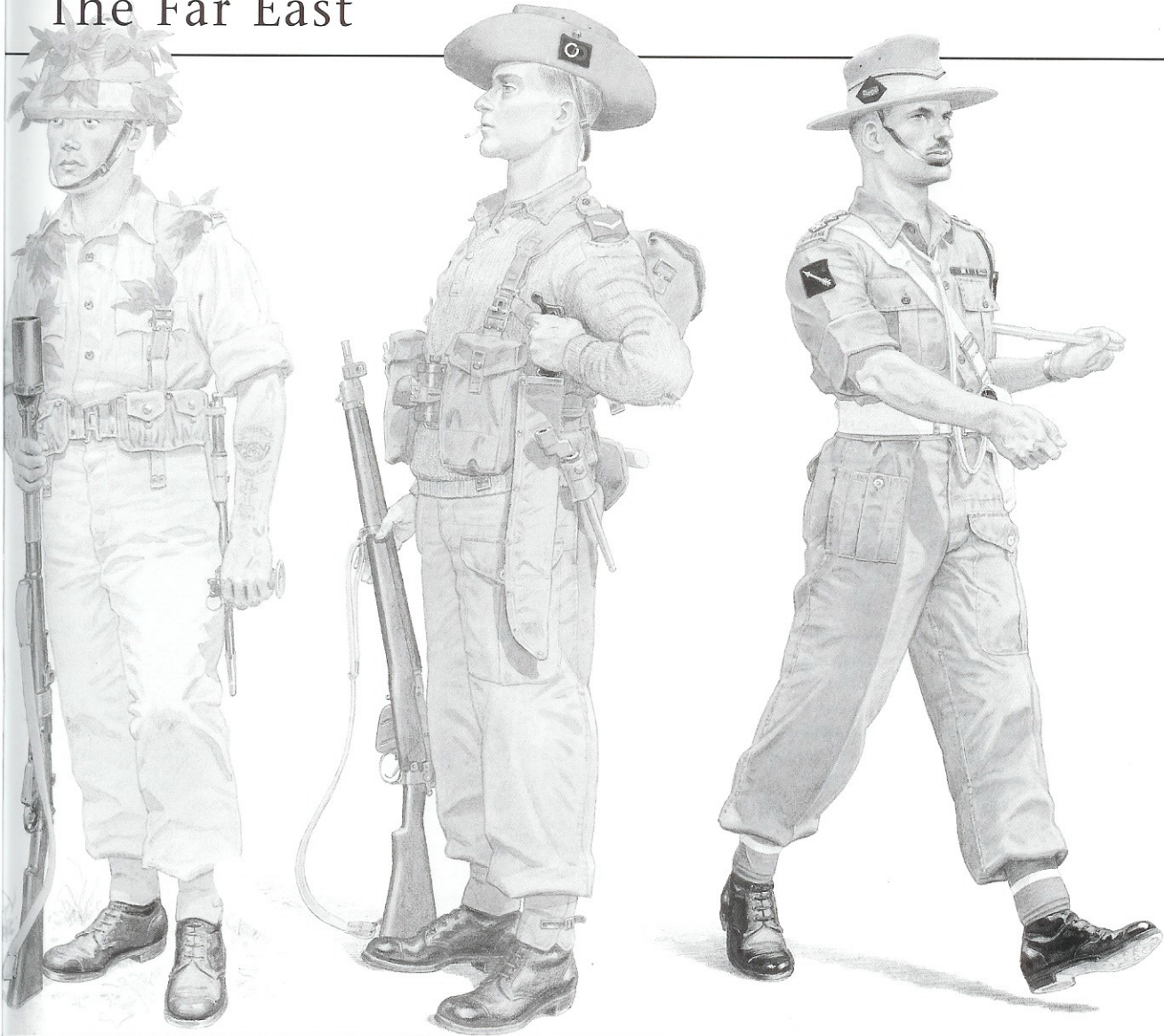
**MARTIN J BRAYLEY** now works as a professional photographer and freelance author after many years' service with the Royal Navy. He is a long-time collector and researcher of militaria, and his published books – with co-author Richard Ingram – include *World War II British Women's Uniforms* (1995); *The World War II Tommy – British Army Uniforms, European Theatre 1939–45* (1998); and *Khaki Drill & Jungle Green – British Tropical Uniforms 1939–45* (2000). This book is the latest in a series of titles for Osprey on the men's and women's services of World War II.



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# The British Army 1939–45 (3)

## The Far East



Martin J Brayley • Illustrated by Mike Chappell

Series editor Martin Windrow

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## Dedication

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'When you go home,  
Tell them of us and say,  
For your tomorrow  
We gave our today'  
(2nd Infantry Division Memorial, Kohima)

## Acknowledgements

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## Author's Note

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The two previous volumes in this series covering the British Army in World War II deal with (1) *North-West Europe (MAA 354)*, and (2) *The Middle East & Mediterranean (MAA 368)*. This final volume gives a concise overview of the operations undertaken in the Far Eastern theatre. However, the three titles as a whole are intended to complement one another as a single collective reference, and rather than duplicating basic information, material of general application has been divided between the three books.

**MAA 354** covers basic infantry and armoured unit and formation organisation; arms and services; Service Dress, Battledress and Denim uniforms; personal equipment, and infantry anti-tank weapons.

**MAA 368** covers Khaki Drill Service Dress and other KD and 'aertex' tropical clothing; US-made War Aid items; insignia, and artillery.

The ATS and Army nursing services are covered in the author's separate titles, *MAA 357 World War II Allied Women's Services*, and *MAA 370 World War II Allied Nursing Services*.

More detail on webbing equipment will be found in Mike Chappell's *MAA 108 (Revised), British Infantry Equipments (2): 1908-2000*, and on insignia in his *MAA 187, British Battle Insignia (2): 1939-45*.

As with any work covering the British Army in the Far East, the bulk of this text concerns the campaigns in Burma. The term 'British' has been used for brevity, but can be understood in context to include, amongst others, Indian, African, Burmese, Malay, and other Allied troops serving in theatre under British command; this is in no way meant to detract from the individual contributions made by these nations.

It should be borne in mind that the opening events of the war in the Far East straddled the international dateline, Pearl Harbor being to the east of the line at 180° longitude and thus a calendar day behind events in Malaya and Burma.

# THE BRITISH ARMY 1939-45 (3)

## THE FAR EAST

### INTRODUCTION

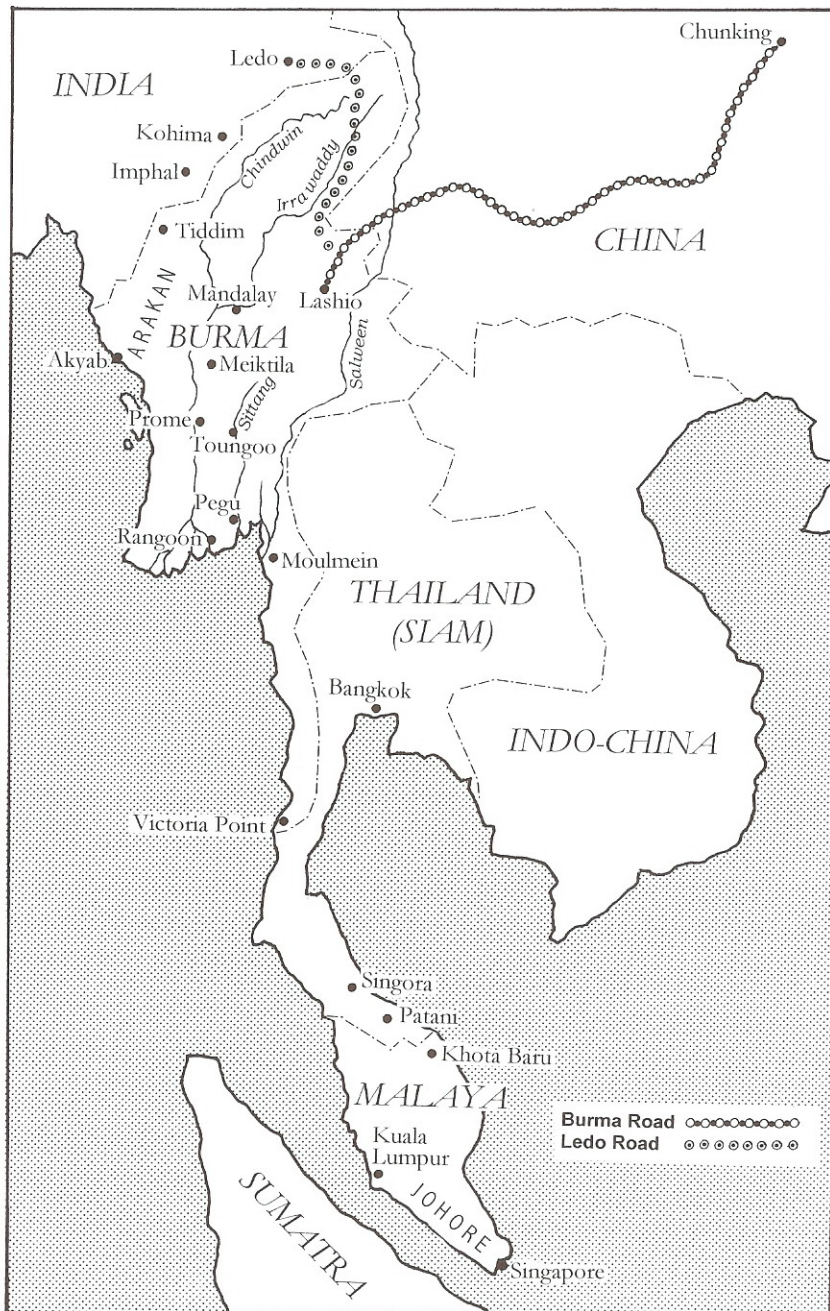
**W**ORLD WAR II WAS A GLOBAL CONFLICT not only in the territories fought over, but in the number of nations that declared themselves at war – although many did so only as a political expedient, with no actual military involvement. This was certainly true of the conflict in the Far East that began on 7 December 1941 with the surprise Japanese attack on the US Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii – an event which overshadowed the simultaneous attacks on British-held Hong Kong and Malaya. On the following day the USA, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Canada, but also Costa Rica, Salvador, Haiti and the Dominican Republic declared war on Japan; later that month Cuba, Guatemala and Panama followed suit. More than three years later the impending defeat of Germany led to other unlikely enlistments in the Allied cause: February 1945 saw Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Chile, Venezuela, Uruguay, Egypt, Syria and Lebanon declare war on Japan, followed within four months by Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, Argentina, Brazil and Italy. If the GIs and Marines clawing their way over the Pacific islands and the British Commonwealth soldiers struggling through the jungle hills of New Guinea and Burma even heard about these new ‘allies’, one can readily imagine their comments. The war in the Far East was fought and won by the United States and the British Commonwealth<sup>1</sup>.

The Soviet Union, locked in its own titanic struggle against Germany, had held an uneasy truce with the Japanese since the



**General 'Bill' Slim was a soldier's soldier, who commanded the greatest respect among his troops. Of humble background, he was commissioned from the ranks of the Royal Warwickshire Regt in the Great War; fighting at Gallipoli and in Mesopotamia, he was twice wounded, and awarded the Military Cross. He was wounded a third time while successfully commanding a brigade of 5th Indian Inf Div in Eritrea in 1940. Promoted from the command of 10th Indian Inf Div in the Middle East to lead 1st Burma Corps in 1942, and 14th Army in 1943-45, Slim showed extraordinary qualities in the face of daunting problems. By nature an aggressive leader, he dealt patiently with such difficult personalities as Stilwell and Wingate. He quickly grasped the importance of air resupply, backing Wingate's long range penetration concept. In 1944 he first held, then utterly destroyed Gen. Mutaguchi's offensive across the Chindwin; then completely out-generalled the Japanese during a relentless advance which by August 1945 had reduced their armies in Burma to a few pockets of starving fugitives. In this portrait he wears the officer's bush jacket with leather 'football' buttons, and a bush hat with the general officer's badge on the front of the *pagri*. (IWM SE3310)**

<sup>1</sup> See also MAA 342, *The US Army in World War II (1): The Pacific*; MAA 362 & 369, *The Japanese Army 1931-45 (1): 1931-42, and (2): 1942-45*; Elite 59, *US Marine Corps 1941-45*, and Elite 75, *The Indian Army 1914-47*.



Sketch map showing the main area of operations of South East Asia Command.

### British Armies in the Far East

**12th Army** Originally formed in the Middle East for operations in the Mediterranean including Operation 'Husky' (Sicily). The 12th was re-formed in May 1945 for operations in Burma, comprising IV and XXXIII Indian Corps. The 12th Army was disbanded in January 1946.

**14th Army** Formed in October 1943 in India, the 14th Army comprised IV, XV and XXXIII Indian Corps; in May 1945 it lost IV and XXXIII to 12th Army but added XXXIV. The 14th Army was disbanded in December 1945.

brief and little-known Mongolian campaign of 1939, in which 30,000 men had died and Gen. Zhukov had first proved his ability as a field commander. Stalin had promised the Allies that he would attack Japan within three months of the cessation of hostilities in Europe; he was to wait until 8 August 1945 – after the dropping of the Hiroshima atom bomb – before declaring war. Thereupon he rapidly expanded his territorial gains in the Far East, crushing the hungry and ill-equipped Japanese Kwangtung Army in a matter of days; the Japanese lost over 80,000 killed and 500,000 captured. To what extent this final Soviet offensive, simultaneous with the unleashing of America's atomic weapons, may have influenced Japan's capitulation is open to debate – it certainly sowed the seeds of a future conflict in Korea. Either way, the surrender of Japan made the long-feared invasion of the 'home islands' unnecessary, and undoubtedly saved many hundreds of thousands of American, British, Commonwealth and also Japanese lives.



**August/September 1945:**  
 Japanese officers symbolically  
 surrender their swords while a  
 British officer stands guard at  
 right. Careful examination of the  
 original image suggests that he  
 is armed with a Mk IV Sten gun  
 with fixed No.4 bayonet; he also  
 wears a No.4 bayonet scabbard  
 at his left side, suspended from  
 a two-piece Airborne pattern  
 frog normally associated with  
 the Mk IV Sten.

### List of campaigns and phases

*Malaya 1941–42:* North Malaya December 1941, Central Malaya December 1941–January 1942, Johore January 1942, Singapore Island 8–15 February 1942

### **South-East Asia 1941–42:**

*Hong Kong 8–25 December 1941*

*West Borneo 16 December 1941–9 March 1942*

**Burma 1942–45:** Retreat from Burma January–May 1942, Indo-Burma border 1942–43 (Arakan & NW Burma), 1st Wingate expedition January–June 1943, Indo-Burma border 1943–44 (clearing the Arakan), Chindwin March–November 1944 (Japanese offensive across Chindwin River and subsequent retreat), 2nd Wingate expedition February–August 1944, Reconquest of Burma 1944–45

## CAMPAIGN SUMMARY

There follows a brief account of the campaigns in the Far East and Indian Ocean, in alphabetical order by country.

### **Burma**

Running down the eastern side of the Indian Ocean (Bay of Bengal), Burma was bordered by India, Tibet and China to the north and Thailand (Siam) and French Indo-China to the east; until 1937 it had been a part of British India. With roughly the same land mass as France, Burma has a terrain of flood plains, swamps, jungle and mountains. The basic geography features plains running down the centre of the country, flanked by mountains to the north, east and west, with a swampy, low-lying western coastal region. Important features are the Irrawaddy River, running down the length of the central lowlands before reaching the southern flood plains, where it empties into the Andaman Sea; and its primary tributary in the north-west, the Chindwin, running roughly parallel with the Indian border. Other important rivers are the Salween, cutting its way through the mountainous eastern part of the country; the Sittang, running parallel but to the east of the southern Irrawaddy; and to the west the Kaladan, hooking down from the mountains bordering the coastal Arakan province to join the Irrawaddy.

The campaign in Burma was the longest fought by the British Commonwealth during the war, commencing in December 1941 and not ending until the Japanese general capitulation of August 1945. In terms of numbers of troops from Great Britain itself it was essentially a limited venture compared to the campaigns in North Africa and Europe. The men who fought in the Far East considered themselves to be the 'forgotten army', unfairly denied the glory enjoyed by those who fought in the desert or NW Europe (and starved of resources for which those other theatres had priority). In more recent times their special difficulties, hardships and achievements have been recognised, but at the time *Picture Post* and similar wartime publications were noticeably lacking in material on the Far East.



**Jungle training, Burma, 1943.** This soldier wears a mix of clothing typical of the period: collarless wool shirt as worn in Europe, KD trousers and steel helmet. Of particular note is the method of carrying the bayonet scabbard: the frog has been looped on to the left shoulder brace of his Pattern 37 web equipment above the basic pouch, keeping the long No. 1 bayonet high under his arm and clear of his legs and the jungle undergrowth.

As far as statistics can be compiled, the British Commonwealth forces suffered 73,909 casualties in Burma, but only 14,326 killed (the incidence of tropical diseases accounting for a high proportion of the overall casualty figure). Of these 14,000-plus fatalities, fewer than 5,000 men were from the British Isles; this represented only a small percentage of the total of 144,079 British soldiers killed during the war – the total deaths for all the armed forces being 264,443. (As a point of comparison, 60,595 civilians were killed in the UK itself as a result of enemy action.) The great majority of the Allied troops deployed in Burma were from the British-led Indian Army, and it was undoubtedly they who bore the greatest casualties.

While only two complete British infantry divisions served in Burma (2nd, and 36th – ex-36th Indian, from September 1944), the number of British infantry battalions in theatre were actually equivalent to eight divisions. The ‘Special Force’ of Chindits had British infantry nearly equivalent to two divisions; and in nearly all cases each of the three brigades making up an Indian division included one British battalion, thus three per division. The Indian infantry divisions deployed on this front were the 3rd, 5th, 7th, 14th, 17th, 19th, 20th, 21st, 23rd, 25th, 26th, 36th (see above) and 44th. The British infantry units

within Indian formations in Burma were thus the equivalent of four additional British divisions. Two British tank regiments also served during the 1942 retreat from Burma, and six others with Indian Army tank brigades during later campaigns; and much of the artillery in Indian formations was British.

### **1941/42**

The objective of the Japanese 15th Army’s invasion of Burma was threefold. Initially it protected the rear of their troops invading Malaya. Later, it would allow Japan to sever the vital ‘Burma Road’ supply link from Burma to China, thus not only countering any Chinese attempts to operate against the Japanese in northern Burma, but also weakening them in China itself, where very large numbers of Japanese troops were tied down throughout the war. Burma was also a potential bridgehead for offensive operations against British India – a hugely attractive, if finally illusory prize.

The defence of Burma came under the responsibilities of Gen. Sir Archibald Wavell as C-in-C India. The high command in-country fell to Lt.Gen. Hutton, GOC Burma Army – an inflated title for two battalions of British infantry, two brigades of Indian infantry, and eight raw battalions of the Burma Rifles, supported by just 37 aircraft.

The initial Japanese assault on Burma opened on 14 December 1941, when troops from their 143rd Inf Regt, 55th Inf Div crossed from southern

Thailand to take the vital airfield at Victoria Point on the Kra Isthmus, denying its use for the support of British troops fighting in Malaya.

On 23 December the first air raids hit Rangoon, the main port for reinforcing Burma and for supplies destined for China. After heavy bombing in the face of limited British air defences, Gen. Hutton requested a withdrawal from the city; but Wavell insisted that Rangoon be held at all costs. He sent Maj.Gen. Smyth's 17th Indian Inf Div by sea to reinforce Hutton, the first elements landing early in January 1942. On 15 January the Japanese began advancing up the Kra Isthmus from Victoria Point towards Rangoon, taking more airfields and moving up their own air forces. On 20 January the bulk of the 55th and the 33rd Inf Div invaded Burma across the Thai border, threatening Moulmein and Kawkaeik.

The Japanese advance from Thailand had soon pushed the British back as far as the Sittang River. The attackers reached a vital bridge before much of the 17th Indian Inf Div could cross to the west bank, and to prevent its capture the bridge was blown on 23 February. The loss of about half of his division was blamed upon Gen. Smyth, who was dismissed from his command. The Japanese now infiltrated between the remains of 17th Indian around Pegu, and 1st Burma Div to the north.

General Sir Harold Alexander was appointed the new commander of operations in Burma, relieving Gen. Hutton on 5 March; but the British position was rapidly unravelling. Counter-attacks by both divisions failed, and Rangoon – heavily bombed and almost surrounded – was abandoned; on 8 March the Japanese 33rd Inf Div entered the city. The capture of the port, and their success in Malaya, allowed the Japanese to ship in their 18th and 56th Inf Divs in reinforcement.

Alexander ordered a withdrawal northwards, and the Japanese followed up the parallel valleys of the Irrawaddy and Sittang. Further north-west the Chinese 5th and 6th Armies under the leadership of US Gen. Joseph Stilwell – appointed as Gen. Chiang Kai-Shek's chief of staff in March – tried to hold Mandalay and Toungoo to safeguard the Anglo-Burmese left flank. On 19 March, Gen. William Slim was named



**A young British captain briefs men of the 11th Sikhs before a jungle patrol; the regiment's 1st Bn served alongside 2nd KOSB and 4/8th Gurkha Rifles in 89th Indian Inf Bde, 7th Indian Division. The Sikhs wear camouflage nets over their KD turbans; the heavily bearded NCO, armed with a Thompson, shows the issue identity tags to good effect – the green octagonal tag and red disc bore identical information of name, rank, number, and religion.**

commander of 'BurCorps' – comprising all British, Indian and Burmese troops – while Gen.Alexander continued as theatre commander. On 30 March the Chinese retreated from Toungoo without destroying another vital Sittang bridge, exposing the flank of BurCorps around Prome. The Japanese now had complete air supremacy, and a further thrust at Migyaunye in early April nearly surrounded the Anglo-Burmese force, which only broke out with the help of a Chinese division.

By 26 April the position in Burma was untenable, and Gen. Alexander ordered a strategic withdrawal to the mountainous border with the north-eastern Indian region of Assam. On 29 April the roadhead of Lashio – the western supply point at the start of the Burma Road – fell to the Japanese, effectively cutting off overland supplies to Chiang Kai-Shek's forces. BurCorps conducted the bitter retreat into India in reasonably good order; by 20 May the last units had retreated into Assam, and less than a week later Burma was in Japanese hands. The retreat from Burma, the longest in British military history, had cost 13,500 British and Commonwealth casualties, compared with fewer than 5,000 Japanese.

### 1942/43

General Alexander's HQ was re-formed at Imphal in Assam; he was transferred to the Middle East in August, but throughout 1942 supplies and troops were built up for a counter-offensive on the Arakan coast of the Bay of Bengal, planned for December. A large Chinese force under Stilwell had also fallen back into India, and was later reinforced. Against a backdrop of limited resources, major political unrest in India, disagreements among the Allied commanders Wavell, Stilwell and Chiang Kai-Shek, and heavy rains hampering the advance, the first Arakan offensive was launched on 17 December 1942 by Gen.Irwin's Eastern Army.

The objective of 14th Indian Inf Div's advance down the Mayu Peninsula was the port of Akyab, which could be used as a forward base and airfield for further operations. Two major attempts were made, but

**A US M3 Grant medium tank of an Indian armoured brigade moves at speed along a timber 'corduroy' road; such tracks enabled vehicles to continue movement during the rainy season when roads throughout the theatre turned to impassable mud. The low-mounted 75mm sponson gun of the M3 Medium, which dangerously prevented crews in the North African desert from adopting 'hull down' positions, was not a problem in the Far East. Enemy tanks were rarely encountered, and were inferior in every way; most tank combat took place at short ranges in close support of infantry.**



both failed; the Japanese reinforced their initially weak forces, and stubbornly defended Rathedaung and Donbaik in January–March 1943. They went onto the offensive in March, and by the time Gen. Slim (XV Indian Corps) was given command in the Arakan in mid-April the British forces were exhausted. By late May 1943 they were back where they had started.

In support of the Arakan offensive the first expedition by Brig. Orde Wingate's Long Range Penetration Group (77th Indian Inf Bde) took place between mid-February and late April 1943 (see below, 'The Chindits'). Although the military results were questionable, this penetration into the Japanese rear as far as the Kachin Hills was good for morale at a time of failure elsewhere, and taught valuable lessons – particularly in the air resupply of isolated troops – which would be put to good use in future operations throughout Burma.

#### 1943/44

October 1943 saw the restructuring of India Command. The combat element became South East Asia Command under Adm. Lord Louis Mountbatten, with Gen. Stilwell as deputy commander; the Indian Eastern Army became 14th Army, under General Slim. In November, XV Indian Corps (Gen. Christison) began a series of advances in the Arakan; and SEAC set about the planning of a new general offensive. The British phase was to be a major thrust into north and central Burma, with 14th Army attacking into the Arakan, supported by a second and much larger Chindit expedition to the Indaw region to harass Japanese rear areas. Meanwhile, Gen. Stilwell's Chinese would advance from Ledo, road-building as they went, to complete a link with the Burma Road; and it was hoped that other Chinese forces would advance from Yunnan Province into north-east Burma.

However, while these operations were being prepared, Gen. Mutaguchi's Japanese 15th Army were also planning to attack. Operation 'Ha-Go' would counter Allied advances in the Arakan, but was to be largely a diversionary move. The main effort, Operation 'U-Go', was to be an ambitious thrust across the Chindwin into Assam to eliminate the vital base area at Imphal; and thereafter Mutaguchi – supported by the renegade Indian National Army led by Subhas Chandra Bose – dreamt of nothing less than an invasion of India, which he believed would take this opportunity to rise against the British.

The 'Ha-Go' attack in the Arakan was launched by the Japanese 55th Inf Div on 6 February 1944, striking at XV Indian Corps around Maungdaw. After three weeks' fighting, particularly at Sinzweya ('the battle of the Admin Box'), it was defeated, largely because instead of retreating, British units held their ground when surrounded and were successfully resupplied by air.

In early March 1944 both Stilwell's Chinese and Wingate's Chindits achieved early successes (Operation 'Thursday'), the former against the

**Officers and men of C Sqn, 116th Regt RAC during the advance through Burma by IV Corps, 14th Army in spring 1945. Equipped with M4 Shermans, this unit and three Indian regiments formed 255th Indian Tank Bde; it first went into action near Pakkoku on the Irrawaddy on 10 February. The 116th RAC had been formed in July 1942 by the conversion of 9th Bn, Gordon Highlanders to the armoured role. As in many such converted infantry units, regimental pride dictated that they retained the tam-'o-shanter and badge of their parent unit. The mixed clothing is characteristic of tank soldiers in the Far East: (left) a trooper wears JG BD trousers with canvas gym shoes; (centre) the captain wears KD shirt and trousers with JG rank slides, while (right) the subaltern wears JG BD blouse and trousers with an officer's khaki wool 'tammie' minus its badge. (IWM SE3511)**



Japanese 18th Inf Div around Walawbaum in the north, and the latter in that division's rear areas. At the end of the first week in March the Japanese opened their 'U-Go' offensive, crossing to the west bank of the Chindwin at several points. The 33rd Inf Div drove 17th Indian Inf Div slowly north from Tiddim, but were stopped and held by 20th Indian Inf Div near Tamu, barring any further advance on Imphal from the south. The Japanese



defeat in the Arakan allowed two Allied divisions to be switched north to reinforce the Assam front. On 5 April the Japanese 31st Inf Div attacked Kohima, guarding a vital railhead north of Imphal, immediately after a single British battalion had been rushed in to reinforce a small garrison of local troops. The Imphal-Kohima road was cut by the Japanese 15th Inf Div, which turned south against Imphal.

Savage battles ensued, with troops at Imphal and Kohima maintaining a spirited defence against suicidally aggressive enemy attacks thanks to their resupply by air. Allied air superiority allowed the RAF to airlift over a million gallons of fuel and over 12,000 reinforcements to this front during the four-month battle. The Japanese offensive phase soon faltered at the end of their over-extended supply lines; Mutaguchi's logistics had only been planned for a three-week campaign. However, although increasingly weakened by hunger and disease, the Japanese fought on with their usual fanatical determination for many weeks after the initiative had passed to the British. A relief force fought their way through to Kohima on 18 April; but the Imphal-Kohima road was not re-opened until 22 June.

On 11 July, Gen. Kawabe, commanding Burma Area Army, ordered Mutaguchi to retreat across the Chindwin; and the arrival of the monsoon rains at the end of the month brought all major movements to a halt. Of the original force of 85,000 Japanese troops committed, fewer than 30,000 were still fit enough to retreat, 53,000 having become casualties; Mutaguchi had also lost all his supplies, transport, tanks and heavy weapons. The temptation of India had proved disastrous for the Japanese, and the defeat of their Chindwin offensive was a setback from which they would never recover.

**The 2nd Dorsets from 2nd Inf Div move toward Kohima aboard Universal carriers – the all-purpose light tracked vehicle of British infantry and support units. This gives a good idea of the narrow roads and thick vegetation encountered in Burma; the photo was clearly taken in the dry season, before the south-west monsoon rains arrived in June, turning the dirt roads into muddy quagmires.**



#### 1944-45

In May 1944 an offensive was launched by the



British infantry move through a Burmese town devastated by battle; one rifleman carries an SMLE, and his mate the No.4 with spike bayonet fixed – a mixture of weapons common in infantry units during the last year of the war.

OPPOSITE At Waw just north of Rangoon in spring 1945, an infantry section land from local boats manned by Burmese. Many of these were used for river crossings during the campaign; and the width of the river in the background gives an idea of the obstacle that Burma's many waterways presented to the movement of men, vehicles and supplies. These troops wear the JG BD trousers with the JG bush shirt, an item preferred over the short BD-type blouse. (IWM SE4337)

Chinese on the Salween River front in an effort to open the Burma Road and link up with Gen. Stilwell's Chinese forces advancing from India. In August the important communications hub of Myitkyina was finally captured. 'Vinegar Joe' Stilwell had an impossibly difficult multiple relationship with Chiang Kai-Shek as both political and military envoy and field commander, and at Chiang's request he was replaced in October 1944

(by three different US generals). The Burma Road was finally re-opened in January 1945, and in the following ten months it carried 38,000 tons of matériel into China. By comparison, the airlift over the 'Hump' from India had been ferrying over 39,000 tons every month, making the effort put into re-opening the road somewhat questionable.

In September 1944, Adm. Mountbatten was authorised to implement Operation 'Capital', the advance by Gen. Slim's 14th Army to reconquer Burma. Slim's major formations were, from roughly north-east to south-west, XXXIII (Gen. Stopford), IV (Gen. Messervy), and XV (Gen. Christison) Indian Corps. The new commander of Burma Area Army, Gen. Kimura, had been warned that he could expect no further support from outside Burma. His 33rd Army (Gen. Honda), with two divisions, was north-east of Lashio, to resist an Allied link-up between India and China; in the centre, between Lashio, Mandalay and Meiktila, the three divisions of 15th Army (Gen. Katamura) were to hold the Allies on the Irrawaddy; and to the south and west, 28th Army (Gen. Sakurai), with two-plus divisions, was to stand in the path of any advance on Rangoon.

On 3 December 'Capital' opened when 11th E.African and 20th Indian Inf Divs (XXXIII Corps) and 19th Indian Inf Div (IV Corps) crossed the Chindwin. General Slim planned to distract the enemy with an obvious push for Mandalay by XXXIII Corps, while IV Corps drove past on the west for the important communications centre of Meiktila, and XV Corps leapfrogged down the coast to Akyab and Ramree. Although enemy resistance was often bitter, and achieved temporary checks, Slim's campaign developed unstoppable impetus, levering the defenders off successive lines by outflanking manoeuvres. By mid-January 1945 the first XXXIII Corps bridgeheads had been won across the Irrawaddy north of Mandalay; a month later, while the defenders' attention was still drawn north, IV Corps began crossing the river far to the south, west of Meiktila. On 3 March, Meiktila fell; by 20 March, Mandalay; on 23 April, Toungoo; and on 3 May 1945, by airborne and amphibious landings, Rangoon.

Slim's victories effectively left the only major Japanese forces cut off in two pockets: the remnants of 28th Army west of the Sittang, and those



**February 1945: 36th Inf Div are pushing on to the Shweli River and Mandalay. Here gunners of the division's 130th or 168th Field Regt RA dig a pit for their 25pdr Mk I field gun, a laborious task that could take many hours. British artillery was superior to Japanese in equipment, organisation and use. (IWM SE1995)**

**General Sir Claude Auchinleck, C-in-C India, inspects the Sherwood Foresters, 1943. The 'Auk' wears the officer's bush jacket while the Forester at right is dressed in khaki aertex shirt with 'Lincoln green' shoulder lanyard and regimental title in black on khaki. Both wear the 'pith hat' or solar topee retained for service in India; the ranker's is adorned with a green fold to the top of the *pagri*.**



of the 15th and 33rd in the southern tip of the Shan Hills east of Toungoo. Starving and disease-ridden, they could offer no serious resistance to British movements, and were desperate only to escape. Japanese units in the Pegu Yomas and Sittang regions attempted break-outs, but were annihilated with a loss of 17,000 casualties to a mere 95 British – a disparity of almost 170 to 1. Further sporadic engagements came to an end following the signing of a preliminary cease-fire on 28 August 1945.

To complete the 'mopping up', a new army, the 12th (Gen. Stopford), had been formed at the end of May 1945 to command British troops in Burma, while 14th Army (Gen. Dempsey) returned to India to prepare for the anticipated invasion to liberate Malaya; Gen. Slim was

appointed C-in-C, Allied Land Forces South East Asia.

In 1941/42 the conquest of Burma had originally cost the Japanese about 2,000 killed, with another 3,500 losses in Malaya and Singapore – stripping the British of most of their Far Eastern colonies had come cheap. The British return to Burma was to cost them more dearly – about 185,149 Japanese killed (41,000 more than the total number of British Army soldiers killed during the whole of World War II).

### **Hong Kong**

This small but important British trading colony on 400 square miles of the Chinese coast had only the most limited defences, and the proximity of overwhelming Japanese forces on the Chinese mainland made it undefendable. Its garrison totalled only 12,000 men – Indian, British and Canadian – a few ships and seven aircraft. The enemy launched an assault on 8 December 1941; their 38th Inf Div, with air support, swept the defenders aside. Between 9 and 13 December the garrison withdrew from the mainland to the island of Hong Kong itself. Assaults followed from the 15th; the Japanese secured a beachhead, but so spirited was the resistance<sup>1</sup> that the enemy were forced to regroup on 20 December. The attack was soon resumed with renewed vigour and, running short of food and water, the garrison were forced to surrender on Christmas Day 1941.

### **India**

India's eastern states of Assam and Bengal, under the control of Eastern Command (Eastern Army, from April 1942), bordered Burma and offered a route to the heart of India following the Japanese conquest of that country. The enemy advance on this front and the battles of Kohima and Imphal are covered above under 'Burma'.

There was much political and civil unrest within India during the war, dating back particularly to the 1935 India Act. Congress Party figures such as

<sup>1</sup> See MAA 359, *Canadian Forces in World War II*



Major John Coates, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, offers a cigarette to a sergeant during training in northern India. The 1st Bn were in the Far East throughout the war, serving in Burma in March 1942 and again, with 47th Indian Inf Bde, from October 1942 to July 1943. The 2nd Bn were in India briefly with 13th Inf Bde of the much-travelled 5th Inf Div in summer 1942 after serving in Madagascar. Major Coates wears a KD bush jacket with camouflage-covered solar topee and Pattern 37 pistol order; the NCO wears a khaki aertex shirt with white tape badges of rank, and his topee bears the regimental green hackle and red triangle patch. Both wear black-on-khaki epaulettes.

Gandhi and Nehru capitalised on the disruption caused by war to launch a programme of agitation for Indian independence. Others, and prominently Subhas Chandra Bose, went as far as joining the enemy. Bose became leader of the Indian National Army, a Japanese puppet organisation which recruited among Indian prisoners of war in Axis hands (some 67,000 had been captured at Singapore alone). Politically, the fact that some 20,000 Indians had joined the INA was instrumental in Britain's rapid granting of Indian independence after the war. Militarily the INA achieved little; about 7,000 of them fought

alongside the Japanese in the Imphal campaign, but more were to desert than were to become casualties, with many units surrendering en masse, and the Japanese eventually recognised the INA as a liability.

An introduction to the major part played by the Indian Army in the Far East campaigns will be found in *Elite 75, The Indian Army 1914-47*. Despite the independence movement, from a pre-war strength of 160,000 in 1939, India was to mobilise all-volunteer armed forces of over two and a half million men, creating 268 infantry battalions. Indian troops fought in East Africa, North Africa, Italy, Greece, Syria, Iraq, Persia, Burma, Hong Kong and Malaya; of these 24,338 were to be killed, 64,000 wounded and 12,000 missing in action.

### Madagascar

This huge island lying in the Indian Ocean off the east coast of Africa was a French colony. Its governor had rallied to the Allied cause after the collapse of France in 1940; but anger at the British attack on the French fleet at Mers-el-Kebir led to his replacement by a pro-Vichy governor. The possibility of a Japanese occupation of Madagascar, with the consequent risks to Allied shipping on the Cape-to-Suez route and across the Indian Ocean, prompted the British to move against the large naval base of Diego Suarez at the northern tip of the island.

Against a garrison of over 34,000 French colonial troops the Allied amphibious force comprised two infantry brigade groups and No.5 Commando, with strong naval and air support. In the first major Allied amphibious operation of the war, codenamed 'Ironclad', troops landed on 5 May 1942 with little initial opposition, but soon ran into fierce resistance, having lost the element of surprise in a naïve and fruitless attempt at diplomacy. By the 7th the northern part of the island had surrendered and the Vichy forces had pulled south. Their continuing resistance, and the insistence of the South African Gen. Smuts, left the Allies no option but to extend their original limited operation to encompass the whole island. At the start of September major moves were supported by fresh troops including men of the King's African Rifles, in ground and amphibious assaults in the east, west and south. The island capitulated on 5 November 1942, control passing to Free French forces.

### Malaya

Malaya was not a single nation but a collection of states, the main groupings being the Unfederated Malay States, the Federated Malay



**During October 1941 soldiers of the 1st Bn, Manchester Regt from 2nd Malaya Inf Bde were undergoing basic jungle training, including the use of foliage for camouflage. Shortages of equipment left infantry battalions in the Far East under-armed and using P37 cartridge carriers instead of basic pouches. Most of the 2nd Manchesters would be captured during the Japanese invasion of Malaya. (IWM FE18)**

States and the Straits Settlements – the latter a British colony, and the former pseudo-protectorates. Economically vital to the war effort, Malaya produced nearly 50 per cent of the world's natural rubber and over 50 per cent of its tin ore. Japan's war aims included the seizure of such resources, and during the late 1930s she had been active in placing spies and recruiting anti-imperialist subversives.

Although very conscious of Malaya's economic and strategic importance, with the Royal Navy's main Far East base at Singapore, Great Britain in 1940–41 had finite resources and far more immediate needs closer to home, so defensive preparations were limited. Lieutenant-General Arthur Percival's inexperienced 88,000-strong

Indian, Australian, British and Malay garrison was weak in armour, anti-tank guns and aircraft; the 9th and 11th Indian Inf Divs were posted in the north and 8th Australian Div further south in Johore. Some limited training was undertaken in jungle warfare, but no specialised techniques were developed against a background of contempt for the supposed inadequacies of the Japanese soldier. This blindness to the danger posed by the Japanese Army extended even to such an intelligent commander as General Wavell. Their encounter with the reality was to deliver a shocking blow to the confidence and prestige of the colonial powers, with major consequences during and after the war.

Lieutenant-General Yamashita's 25th Army, based on three infantry divisions, invaded Malaya in the early morning of 8 December 1941, making a diversionary landing at Khota Baru in north-east Malaya with simultaneous main attacks at Singora and Patani in southern Siam just across the border (the international dateline meant that all these strikes

**Malaya, early 1942: a Vickers team of the 2nd Bn, Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders from 12th Indian Inf Bde guard a plantation road typical of those found throughout Malaya; the regularly spaced rubber trees presented little obstacle to Japanese outflanking moves. Supporting them is an antiquated-looking 1931 Lanchester 6x4 armoured car manned by the Federated Malay States Volunteer Force. This obsolete AFV, wholly unsuited to off-road use, also took part in the brief defence of Singapore.**



against the British took place prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, east of the dateline, on 7 December). These initial assaults were soon followed up with further landings; and an advance by 11th Indian Inf Div to meet the forces pushing south from Singora was thrown back on 10 December. The invaders were battle-hardened from long years of campaigning in China, well equipped and well supported on the ground and in the air, and were highly motivated. Their own contempt for the 'soft' white colonialist garrisons would soon seem better founded than the thoughtless overconfidence of the opposing commanders, who were not of the highest calibre. Many of the garrison were badly led, poorly trained, ill equipped and lacking in mobility, and some soon displayed fragile morale.



**Malaya, early 1942: just behind the front line, medics attend to a wounded soldier at a Regimental Aid Post. All wear khaki shirt and KD trousers, or in the case of the soldier at far right, 'Bombay bloomers' worn turned down – these are identified by the button on the trouser leg level with the wearer's hand.**

Yamashita's 70,000-strong force employed their favourite tactics of rapid advance, aggressive assault and opportunistic infiltration on several axes simultaneously. Pushing fast down the roads, their columns took to the jungle to outflank British attempts to establish defensive lines; cutting British lines of communication, they demoralised the defenders and in some cases caused stark panic. Their movement was greatly aided by the many roads built in the 1930s to serve the needs of the rubber industry; a feature of the campaign was the exploitation of these routes by bicycle troops during advances by separate columns. Though no more accustomed to jungle terrain than the British Commonwealth troops, the Japanese were ruthlessly disciplined to self-sufficiency in the field while keeping up a relentless pace of advance. Their field artillery – including integral batteries within the infantry units – and their four tank regiments were all thoroughly trained in direct infantry support; they were accustomed to night fighting; and by day they very quickly enjoyed complete supremacy in the air.

In the face of failure to check the landings, Gen. Percival had little option but to order a withdrawal to pre-planned holding positions based on successive river lines; and successively, these failed to hold, partly due to further Japanese coastal landings behind their flanks. On 11 January 1942 the main supply base of Kuala Lumpur fell to the Japanese Imperial Guards and 5th Inf Divs, but Percival still hoped to hold a line across Johore. On 22 January reinforcements including the British 18th Inf Div and further Australian units began landing at Singapore; but on the 25th, Percival ordered a general retreat to Singapore Island across the Straits of Johore. In 54 days the enemy had routed the defenders and advanced 600 miles down the length of Malaya.

## Singapore

The island of Singapore had been designated as a major fortress; positioned at the southern tip of Malaya, it was ideally located to defend the peninsula from any invasion from the South China Sea. Economically it was a vital hub for trade and commerce in the Far East, dubbed 'the Jewel of the Orient' by the Japanese. Coastal fortifications along the south of the island defended against any seaborne invasion and commanded the strategic sea route through the Straits of Malacca, and further guns on the north coast protected the new naval dockyard. The weakness of the northern defences in the face of any attack from Johore had been appreciated, but it was thought inappropriate to expend the limited resources on defending the island against assault from the north – from this direction Singapore was in effect already protected by the troops on the mainland.

The capital ships HMS *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* were ordered to Singapore in October 1941 to deter any attempted seaborne assault; but they were intercepted by Japanese aircraft off the east coast of Johore on 10 December and, with only limited AA defences, both were sunk with heavy loss of life. Their loss was a major blow to the Royal Navy and to British morale.

General Wavell, who was the theatre commander as C-in-C India, visited Singapore on 8 January. When he commented that only limited and discreet efforts were being made to build defences around the island, Percival informed him that he did not wish to cause concern among the civilian population. Wavell replied to the effect that a Japanese invasion would cause far more consternation than the digging of trenches; and on 10 January he signalled Prime Minister Winston Churchill that he considered Singapore undefendable. The PM responded that the island must be held at all costs.

Troops retreating from Malaya had completed their withdrawal across the Straits of Johore and into Singapore by the early hours of 1 February 1942. The equivalent of nearly four divisions were now packed onto the island, but the retreating troops were exhausted and had lost much of their equipment, while some of the newly arrived reinforcements were also ill-equipped, disorganised, and low in morale. As the last 'Jocks' of the 2nd Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders reached the island end of the causeway linking Singapore to the mainland it was blown up – incompetently; although cut it was far from destroyed, and Japanese engineers would soon bridge the breach.

General Yamashita was not far behind; pausing briefly to build up supplies and rest his men, he sent 18,000 troops of his 5th and 18th Inf Divs across the north-west strait on 8 February, and followed up with 17,000 more the next day. The defenders were unable to contain the bridgehead and pulled back to a line running across the island, before eventually withdrawing into the last defence line around Singapore city. Percival was

**A poignant view of artillerymen grinning for the camera, having just arrived as reinforcements at Singapore docks. These men were all destined to become casualties or prisoners when the garrison surrendered on 15 February 1942. The gunners wear khaki shirts, KD 'Bombay bloomers' (with legs buttoned up), Wolseley helmets, P37 web equipment with cartridge carriers, and respirator haversacks. (IWM FE312)**





**Singapore, September 1945:** troops of 5th Indian Inf Div disarm the Japanese who had held the island for three and a half years. The soldier leaning over the rear of the truck carries the Indian pattern machete in its leather scabbard; others can be seen to wear the divisional shoulder patch of a red disc on a black rectangle. At left, note some Japanese wearing 'jungle hats' not unlike those adopted by the British as a replacement for the felt bush hat.

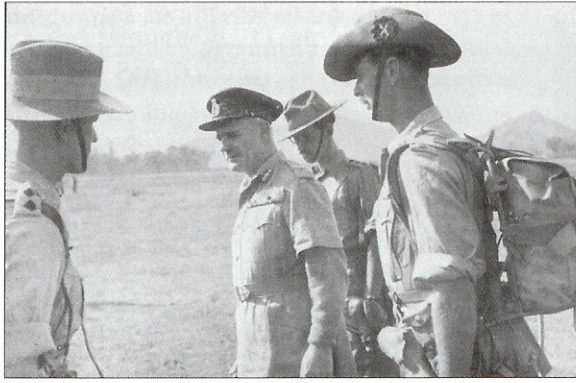
keen to counter-attack; but against a backdrop of dwindling food and a dangerous shortage of water (the pipeline across the strait had been cut), and with a million civilians to consider, he decided against it. Some 62,000 Allied troops were surrendered to Gen. Yamashita on 15 February 1942, most of them without having fired a shot. It was later revealed that their excessively extended supply lines were failing the Japanese troops attacking Singapore, and that Yamashita had already been considering pulling them back to regroup. Of this attacking force of 35,000, 1,714 had been killed. This most shocking of British defeats brought Commonwealth casualties in Malaya to a total of about 9,000 killed and wounded (roughly equal to Japanese casualties), but about 128,000 prisoners (28,500 British, 67,000 Indians,

18,000 Australians and 14,000 local Chinese and Malays). Many thousands of these would later die in atrocious conditions – some 12,500 in the notorious Burma Railway labour camps alone.

Malaya and Singapore remained in Japanese hands for the rest of the war. A major planned operation to liberate the country was aborted by the atomic bombs; on 9 September 1945, British amphibious forces landed without incident at Port Dickson and Port Swettenham, not far from the capital Kuala Lumpur, and the Japanese forces dutifully surrendered.

### **Thailand (Siam)**

Siam had been renamed Thailand (*Prathet Thai*) by Prime Minister Phibun in 1939, but 'Siam' remained the name in general use for some time thereafter, particularly in the West. Siam's borders had changed many times over the centuries; parts of Malaya, Burma, Cambodia and Laos had been under Siamese control but had been ceded to colonial powers in the late 19th century. The fall of France in 1940 gave Siam the opportunity to invade Cambodia and Laos in an effort to retrieve former territories which had long been disputed with the French. As 'mediators' in the dispute the Japanese had been allowed to base aircraft and ships in Siam, just as they had in French Indo-China. With Japanese bases on her soil, Siam was soon obliged to form an uneasy military alliance with the Japanese Empire, and allowed its troops to cross Siamese territory to attack Burma and Malaya. The Phibun government was one of the few that was actually sympathetic to the principles of Japan's 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere', and had been one of the few wholly independent non-colonial nations prior to the Japanese occupation. In 1943, with Japanese approval, Siam annexed the four Unfederated Malay States. This act and the previous seizure of French colonies was forgotten after the war, when a general record of non-compliance or open resistance to Japanese occupation, and the efforts of a number of pro Allied government officials, were felt to have earned Siam non-belligerent status.



Lord Wavell, wearing SD cap, inspects Chindits prior to their first raid. Right of him is Maj. Bernard Fergusson, CO of No.5 Column in the first, and of 16th Bde in the second operation; and at far right, Maj.Gen. Wingate. Fergusson wears an Everest carrier to which have been strapped both a large (P08) and a small (P37) pack. Between Wavell and Fergusson can be seen the bespectacled Capt. J.Fraser. Bernard Fergusson later wrote a memoir which is still a classic in the literature of jungle soldiering – *The Wild Green Earth* (1946).

## THE CHINDITS

The 38-year-old Brig. Orde Wingate, a highly imaginative (if neurotic) officer with a background in unconventional warfare, was the mastermind behind the concept of inserting long range penetration forces behind enemy lines and continuously maintaining their supply by air. This was a bold response to the Japanese tactic of threatening Allied lines of communication and attacking their rear echelons, thus tying down front line troops in the defence of their rear. The prime factors were to be high mobility to

maintain the element of surprise, striking where least expected and melting back into the countryside; and the air-dropping of supplies at random locations selected by radio-equipped RAF teams accompanying the penetration groups. In effect, the raiders would not have any lines of communication to be cut; while their employment as part of a wider, co-ordinated offensive could disrupt the Japanese rear and force them to reposition troops, to the advantage of the overall Allied plan.

Wingate's concept was taking shape even during the retreat from Burma, and Gen. Wavell quickly accepted it in principle, although he was unable to commit troops to any major offensive at that time. Wingate nevertheless convinced him that a long range penetration brigade (77th Indian Inf Bde) would be able to achieve valuable results even operating on its own – inflicting damage, gathering intelligence, making contact with co-operative Burmese, and testing equipment and methods for future ventures. If the operation were successful it would also provide a valuable fillip for morale at a dispiriting time, when there were enormous obstacles to any general offensive and the initiative seemed to have been abandoned to the Japanese. By July 1942 the brigade – not a hand-picked force, nor volunteers, but ordinary infantry – was training in the jungle, and the launch of its first operation was ordered in February 1943.

To distinguish his force Wingate chose the insignia of a *chinthe*, the mythical lion whose image guards Burmese temples, but he misheard the word and accidentally corrupted it to *chindit* in an interview – an error for which he was characteristically angry with himself; and 'Chindits' was the term which stuck to his units, probably because it was easier to pronounce.

For the first Chindit operation, codenamed 'Longcloth', 77th Indian Inf Bde consisted of 13th Bn King's Regt, 3/2nd Gurkha Rifles, local troops of 2nd Burma Rifles, and 142 Commando Company. Standard brigade structure was abandoned, the units being separated into eight numbered 'columns' each of three infantry and one support platoon. Each column carried four anti-tank rifles, two medium machine guns, two light anti-aircraft guns and nine light machine guns; these heavy weapons, the radios and stores were carried on 1,000 mules, which could also provide an emergency food source as their loads were used up.

Each man carried in excess of 72lbs of equipment (proportionally, more than the mules). The weight was supported by the Everest carrier (a metal rucksack-type frame but without any pack), and included seven

days' rations, a machete or Gurkha *kukri* knife, rifle, ammunition, grenades, groundsheet/cape, spare shirt and trousers, four pairs of socks, balaclava (for the cold nights), knife, plimsolls, washing and sewing kit, toggle rope, mess tin, water bottle and *chagil* water bag.

The objectives for 'Longcloth' involved severing main rail supply lines at three separate locations, gorges and bridges being prime targets. In order to achieve this the brigade's columns were divided into two groups: a Northern group with 2,200 men in five columns, and a Southern group with 1,000 men in two columns, with the Burma Rifles divided into reconnaissance platoons for each column, 142 Cdo Coy providing demolition teams, and an RAF radio team with each column. Wingate would march with the Northern group, to cross the Chindwin at Tonhe on 14/15 February, moving east via Pinbon to cut the railway between Bongyaung and Nankan. The Southern group, under Lt.Col. Alexander, would cross the Chindwin some 35 miles further south at Auktang, marching via Thaiktaung to blow the railway at Kyaikthin.

These objectives were achieved by 5 March; airdrops were called in and received successfully, and casualties were light in the initial clashes with the enemy, whose searching battalions were indeed confused at first by the apparent lack of any rear lines supporting this mysterious force. Pushing further east, both groups then used native boats to cross the Irrawaddy (a mile wide at some points) with the aim of blowing up the Mandalay-Lashio road at the Gokteik gorge. By now the Japanese

had observed the air drops, and concentrated on surrounding them rather than finding their 'rear lines'; and Wingate found himself in a deadly area of open, waterless terrain. Difficulties multiplied; and on 24 March the IV Corps commander, Gen. Scoones, radioed an order for the Chindits to withdraw.

Up to this point casualties had been less than 5 per cent, but the retreat was to be a terrible ordeal. Ambushed at the Irrawaddy, Wingate ordered the columns to disperse, each making their own way back to British lines – 250 miles distant even as the crow flies, but across two major rivers and some of the most punishing hill terrain on earth. Hungry, ill, exhausted, having lost most of the pack animals, and under constant threat of attack, it took the dispersed parties until the end of April before the last of the emaciated troops were back on the west bank of the Chindwin, having marched between 750 and 1,000 miles. Of the 3,000 men who had set out only 2,182 were to return; and of these, some 600 were declared unfit for any further active service.

The value of 'Longcloth' was questioned: it had achieved little of any strategic value, since the absence of simultaneous major operations meant that the disruption of Japanese deployments had had no overall benefit. However, it had been a major publicity coup, raising morale in Britain and

'Raiders' of the first Chindit expedition, Operation 'Longcloth' in 1943, for which 77th Indian Inf Bde received a generous scale of issue of the M1928A1 Thompson SMG. Some entire sections were armed with them, the 'Tommy gun section' frequently being used as the cut-off force in ambushes. On the hip of the man at right, note the specially produced triple carriers for the weapon's 20-round magazines – see Plate B3.

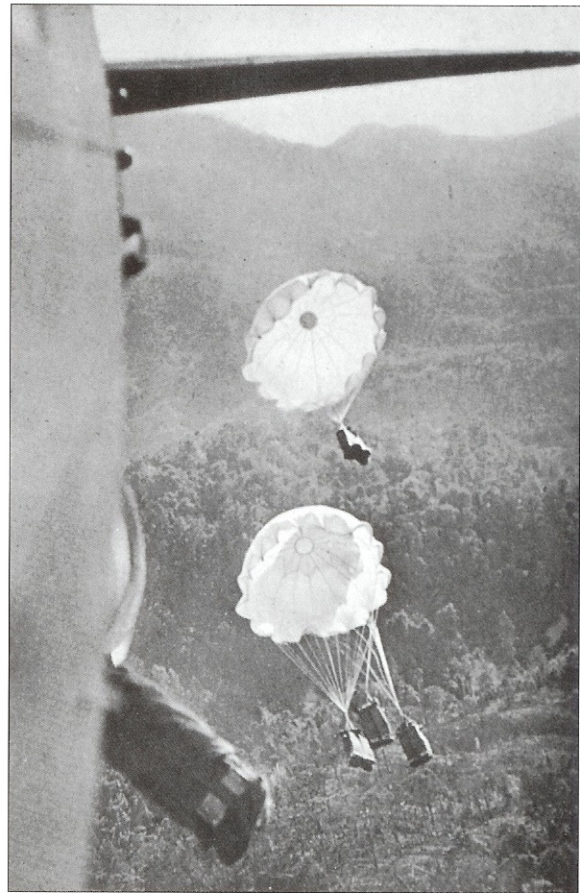


among the forces in the Far East. Perhaps most importantly, it helped to dispel the paralysing image of invincibility that Japanese soldiers had enjoyed since the start of 1942, proving that the British Army could strike deep into their rear and survive. The techniques of deep penetration, jungle movement and air re-supply were all valuably tested. An unlooked-for result was that it led some Japanese commanders to believe that they could employ their own incursion tactics on a grand scale; they attempted to do so in their 1944 Chindwin offensive – but without the necessary air support, and with disastrous consequences for their 15th Army.

### **The second mission**

Both Churchill and Roosevelt were impressed by the raiders' exploits, and Wingate obtained approval for a second expedition early in 1944 as part of Operation 'Thursday'. This involved not only a greatly enlarged Chindit 'Special Force', most of it air-landed; but also 3,000 US soldiers of the 5307th Composite Unit ('Merrill's Marauders', the only US combat unit in Burma), who operated independently of the Chindits in support of Stilwell's Chinese; and the USAAF 5318th Unit, commonly called 'No.1 Air Commando', to provide air support for the Chindits.

This time the Special Force was not to raid and withdraw, but to establish itself astride the enemy's lines of communication over a wide area of the Japanese rear between Indaw and Myitkyina, and to fight to stay there, as part of an overall plan to cripple the response of the Japanese 18th Inf Div to a major offensive in the



**Supplies are dropped to the raiders by parachute. The locations of suitable clearings were radioed to the RAF by specialist RAF signallers accompanying the Chindits. While the two groups of columns kept together and travelled according to a common plan most of the stores were retrieved, although on occasion they were captured by the enemy or lost in the jungle. During the dispersed retreat phase the system inevitably broke down.**



**This image taken during the first Chindit expedition offers a stark contrast to the picture on page 18 taken before their departure. Seated, left to right, Maj. Fergusson, Lt. Harman and Cpl. Dorans; standing at right with two Burmese, Capt. Fraser.**



A typical metal ration container as dropped to the Chindits, containing essentials including tea, chocolate, and – despite their lack of calories – ‘V’ cigarettes. These were considered so essential to morale that they took the place of a small quantity of food in all rations.

north by Stilwell’s Chinese. Some units would march in across country, while others would be flown in by glider, to clear airstrips for transport planes to land reinforcements and heavy equipment. Here ‘strongholds’ would be established, with garrisons large enough to repulse the Japanese attacks which they were intended to attract; meanwhile ‘floater’ columns would attack enemy communications. The Special Force (sometimes wrongly called ‘3rd Indian Div’) consisted of some 20,000 men in six brigades: 14th, 16th & 23rd British, 77th & 111th Indian, and 3rd West African Brigade. Each LRP brigade was brought up to the equivalent strength of four battalions; seventeen of these were British, including some Royal Artillery and Reconnaissance units fighting as infantry.

In early February 1944, 16th Bde entered Burma on foot and made a long and exhausting approach march to establish ‘Aberdeen’, a base near Manhton north-west of Indaw. On 5 March, 77th Bde began to fly in to ‘Broadway’ further east in the northern Kaukwe valley, followed by 111th, and later by 14th and 3rd W.African Bdes; despite the loss of many gliders and men the strongholds were established, and by 13 March Wingate already had 9,000 men in position. Another stronghold was established at ‘White City’ near Nami, between the first two.

What the Allied planners could not have foreseen was that the expedition coincided with Japanese 15th Army’s offensive across the Chindwin towards Imphal and Kohima, which began on 15 March; this greatly complicated the Chindits’ missions. The raiders did indeed draw enemy units away from the Chinese offensive, however; and also critically interrupted their logistics for the Imphal offensive (Japanese sources state that this was decisive). The urgent need for transport aircraft to support the defence of Imphal interfered with Wingate’s plans, however; and on 24 March a B-25 Mitchell bomber in which he was travelling crashed with the loss of all on board.

Wingate was replaced as overall commander by Brig. Lentaigne of 111th Bde; and on 9 April the mission of the Chindits was changed by Slim and Mountbatten. They were to move north, establishing a new



For the second Chindit operation in 1944, 3,134 mules, 547 pack horses, and 250 bullocks (to provide fresh meat ‘on the hoof’) were flown in to the ‘strongholds’ in converted Waco gliders or C-47 Dakotas. Here bullocks are loaded into a C-47 specially fitted out for the purpose with pens and a plentiful supply of straw on the deck. These aircraft could also carry troops (and did – including Wingate and Merrill), but troop transports did not operate a reciprocal arrangement...

The second Chindit expedition was misused by Gen. Stilwell as conventional infantry, sent to attack major fortified Japanese positions despite their light equipment and lack of support and services. By the time Mogaung, west of Myitkyina, fell to them on 26 June 1944 after five days of continuous heavy fighting, they were so reduced by battle casualties and sickness as to be hardly viable as a combat force. Photographed at Mogaung, Brig. Michael Calvert (left), CO of 77th Bde, discusses the next phase of operations with two of his officers. All three wear JG BD clothing; the officer at right wears the Indian JG vest and carries a US M1 carbine. Calvert had a remarkable career as a leader of unconventional forces, and in 1951 was responsible for the re-raising of the disbanded SAS in the guise of the Malayan Scouts. (IWM SE7918)



base at 'Blackpool' near Sahmaw, and to operate solely in support of Stilwell's operations. The spent 16th Bde were withdrawn; but despite their lack of heavy equipment, and their growing fatigue after many weeks of jungle fighting, the four remaining Chindit brigades (14th, 77th, 111th & 3rd W.African) were now misused as conventional infantry. They lost their dedicated air support from 1 May; and on 17 May, Special Force came under Gen. Stilwell's command.

The Chindits fought a number of successful defensive and offensive battles, taking Mogaung and contributing greatly to the vital capture of Myitkyina; but Stilwell resisted all appeals to pull them out when they were clearly exhausted, and it was the end of August before the last units (of 14th Bde) were airlifted out of Burma. The Special Force had suffered 20 per cent casualties – 3,628 men, over a thousand of whom were killed. Few of the survivors were judged fit for further active service.

Other offensive operations involving raiders were planned and training commenced; but the Chindits were disbanded in February 1945 before they could see further operational service.

## JUNGLE FIGHTING

Jungle is classified as 'primary' or 'secondary'; it is densely vegetated forest, characterised by temperatures upwards of 80° F (26° C), 80–95 per cent humidity, and as much as 80in. of rainfall annually. The underlying terrain is often rugged and frequently mountainous. True primary jungle has mature vegetation, with tall trees forming an overhead canopy which restricts light and therefore reduces the vegetation on the jungle floor, allowing for easier movement and shelter from the sun – but primary jungle was rarely encountered in Burma. The widely scattered population



**Chindits being flown back to India after the second expedition – these men are not wounded, but present a typical picture of malnourishment and exhaustion. A medical inspection on 8 July 1944 revealed that every officer and man of 77th and 111th Bdes had suffered at least three, and in some cases up to seven separate attacks of malaria; their average weight loss was 42 pounds (3 stone) per man, and death rates from cerebral malaria and typhus were rising. Even so, it would be the end of August before the last units were pulled out.**

meant that secondary jungle was the most common; this is found in areas of human habitation where trees and vegetation have once been cleared. The clearings are rapidly reclaimed by thick undergrowth, which causes slow movement, provides little shelter from the sun, and offers very limited visibility. The difficulty of movement in such country is aggravated by the extremely steep slopes of the forested hills, and the swamps of the river valleys and the coastal belt.

Disease is the greatest cause of casualties in jungle terrain, where even minor scratches are liable to severe, even incapacitating infection, which can lead to crippling ulcers. Extreme bowel disorders are commonplace, even when following strict food hygiene and personal sanitation regimes. The chafing of pack straps on constantly wet clothing encourages the skin diseases which are endemic to such regions. The 'Memoranda on Medical Diseases in Tropical and Sub Tropical Areas – 1942' lists 38 diseases prevalent in tropical climates, ranging from ancylostomiasis, dysentery and malaria through to plague and yellow fever. Add to these diseases malnutrition, heat exhaustion, heat-stroke and dehydration, as well as insect bites and stings, and the discomfort of tropical warfare becomes readily apparent.

Although troops fell victim to all of the various horrors that nature could throw at them, by far the worst was malaria, the highly debilitating disease spread by the anopheles mosquito; casualties due to malaria routinely exceeded those caused by enemy action. The victim is typically bedridden by extreme muscular weakness, subject to several days of alternating uncontrollable sweats and shivering, and drifts in and out of consciousness; once suffered, malaria will return to attack the victim periodically. One particular strain, cerebral malaria, is often fatal. A man weakened by malaria would have to rely on his comrades to remove him to a place of safety, often requiring up to four fit men to transport one victim; the impact of the disease on army manpower was therefore extreme.

While quinine and mepacrine (also known as atebrine) both proved reasonably effective in the treatment of malaria, prevention was obviously better than cure. Troops were issued suppressive mepacrine tablets, insecticide sprays, mosquito repellent, and mosquito-proof clothing. The tablets were normally taken bi-weekly at a medical parade, so that a medical officer could ensure that they were actually swallowed (there was a widespread myth among the troops that they caused impotence or sterility). Frequent lectures emphasised the need for regular doses of the mepacrine tablets, and the importance of using mosquito nets and protective clothing to keep all exposed skin covered during the hours between sunset and sunrise when the mosquitoes were at their most active. Despite the extreme difficulties endured in the Burma campaign, it was considered that compliance with these practices was generally



Covered by a rifleman, an NCO advances into a banana grove firing a burst from his Thompson. In forested areas encounter engagements typically took place at very short range; and throughout the Burmese campaign the Japanese showed their usual brilliance in constructing and camouflaging strong, mutually supporting machine gun bunkers from logs and earth. Both men wear P37 web equipment with small packs, suggesting a short range operation. Interestingly, the helmets have fine camouflage lines painted on them – an artistic rather than a practical addition.

sufficient to prevent infection; any man proved to have contracted malaria through disregard of preventative measures was judged guilty of an infraction of discipline and was liable to be severely punished.

Even soldiers who escaped the threats from tropical diseases, flora and fauna still had to endure a climate which was almost unbearable for Europeans, ranging from searing sun to heavy rain. Burma has three main seasons. The south-west monsoon (a term actually referring to seasonal winds, not the rainfall with which it has become synonymous) blows in from the Indian Ocean from June to October; this brings heavy falls of rain on a daily basis and is accompanied by extreme humidity. During the region's winter, from November to March, the north-east monsoon blows from Central Asia, bringing relatively cool, dry weather, although temperatures are still frequently in the high 70s F (24-26° Centigrade). Between the two monsoons comes the hot season, when the temperature can exceed 100° F (38° Centigrade). In the hot spring months the sun and the airless heat are painfully debilitating. In the rains of summer and early autumn all operations were chronically hampered by thick mud on the unmetalled roads and mountain tracks. The extreme humidity drained men's energy, rotted clothing and equipment, spoiled food supplies, and caused weapons to rust rapidly, firearms often having to be cleaned three or more times in a day.

### Rations

One of the preoccupations of all soldiers is food, its quality and quantity never coming close to what 'Tommy' would wish. The problems of provision and cooking were great. Each man could only carry a relatively small quantity of food and water; consequently a regular re-supply had to be available, carried by motor transport up the lines

A British muleteer and his beast rest in the shade. The mule's load – including the bipod for a 3in. mortar – has been removed, which suggests that the column is some way from the enemy. Mules, horses and elephants were all used to carry weapons, equipment, ammunition and supplies, being able to penetrate jungle and mountain tracks impassable to motor vehicles. SEAC returns for April 1945 showed 23,595 mules, 6,758 horses and 739 donkeys on unit strengths – an indication of their value, and of the scale of the logistical problems of providing fodder and veterinary care. (IWM SE533)



- 1: Sgt, 1st Bn, Lancashire Fusiliers; India, 1939  
2: Capt, 2nd Bn, Suffolk Regt; NW Frontier, 1939  
3: Pte, 2nd Bn, KOYLI; Burma, 1942



1: 2nd Lt, 4th Bn, Royal Norfolk Regt, 18th Inf Div; Singapore, February 1942

2: Pte, No.5 Commando; Madagascar, May 1942

3: 'Raider', 13th Bn, King's Regt, LRPG (77th Indian Inf Bde); Burma, February–March 1943



1: Despatch rider, 2nd Inf Div; Indo-Burma border, 1943

2: Sniper, 1st Bn, Northamptonshire Regt, 20th Indian Inf Div; Burma, January 1944

3: Pte, 1st Bn, Somerset LI, 7th Indian Inf Div; Burma, February 1944



- 1: Lieut, 1st Bn, South Staffordshire Regt, Special Force; Burma, March 1944  
2: Pte, 4th Bn, QO Royal West Kent Regt, 5th Indian Inf Div; Kohima, April 1944  
3: Pte, 9th Bn, Royal Sussex Regt, 36th Indian Inf Div; Burma, 1944



1: 'Chindit', 1st Bn, Beds & Herts Regt, Special Force; Burma, June 1944

2: Sgt, 7th Nigeria Regt, Special Force; Burma, 1944

3: WO1, 1st Bn, Essex Regt, Special Force; India, 1944



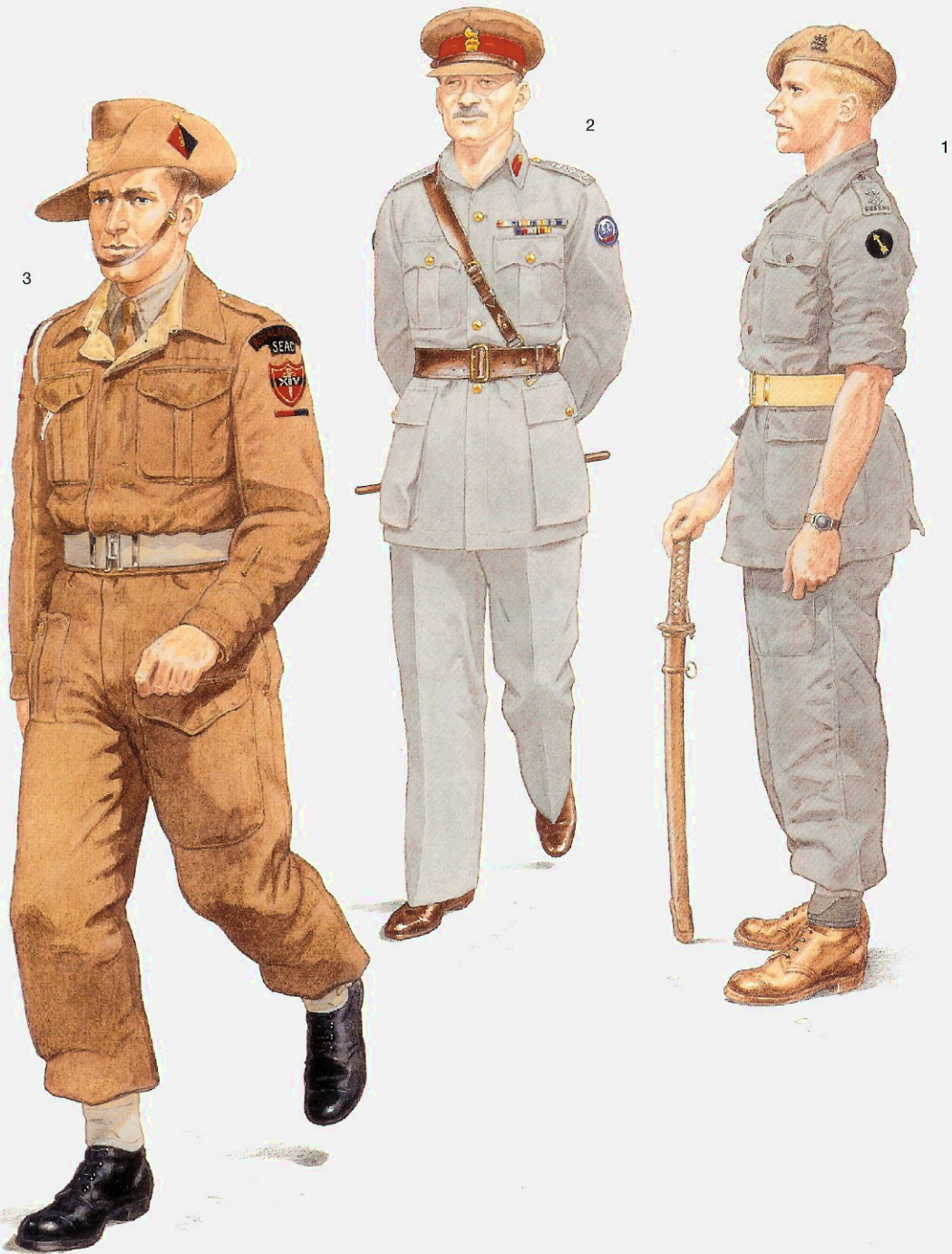
- 1: Tank crewman, 150th Regt RAC, 254th Indian Tank Bde; Burma, February 1945  
2: L/Cpl, 1st Bn, Devonshire Regt, 36th Inf Div; Burma, May 1945  
3: Capt, 2nd Bn, Dorset Regt; Burma, spring 1945



1: Lieut, 1st Bn, Queen's Royal Regt, 7th Indian Inf Div; Burma, September 1945

2: Staff Col, HQ South East Asia Command; Ceylon, 1945

3: Gunner, Royal Artillery, 14th Army; India, 1945



1: Pte, 7th (LI) Bn, Parachute Regt; Singapore, October 1945

2: Pte, 13th (Lancs) Bn, Parachute Regt; Java, December 1945

3: Capt, 1st Bn, Queen's Royal Regt, 7th Indian Inf Div; Thailand, January 1946



of communication or, as was most often the case in Burma, flown in or parachuted. In many instances the men were able to carry as much as seven days' rations but the weight – in the region of 14lbs – added greatly to their burden. Composite or jungle rations, supplemented by American C- and K-rations, formed the staple diet of troops in the front line. These were enhanced by whatever else could be made available: every effort was made to air-drop fresh eggs, porridge, rice, fruit and fresh water to troops who could not be reached along the normal LOC – the eggs are recorded as surviving the drops due to their packaging.

As much as 99 per cent of the troops' hot food was cooked centrally and brought up from the rear by the unit CQMS; even in the Chindit columns due provision was made for the preparation and provision of hot food. A typical day's ration from the six-man 'Compo' box might consist of the following: tea, sugar, milk, rolled oats, tinned bacon, biscuits, margarine, cake, main meal (tinned meat and vegetables), tinned fruit and sweets. Ancillary items included salt, cigarettes, matches, water sterilising tablets, soap, toilet paper, vitamin tablets and mepacrine tablets. This was an ideal that frequently exceeded what was actually available, although much effort was made to ensure an adequate and varied diet. Regional maps were annotated with details of villages that held regular markets, enabling troops to barter for or buy fresh provisions. Parachute fabric from air-drops was a readily available barter item, and popular with the Burmese since cloth was in short supply; in return they would trade rice, fruit, vegetables and the occasional fowl or pig.

Air-dropped water caused problems, as the 'flimsies' (British petrol cans) initially used tended to burst regardless of the amount of padding employed; the problem was overcome by using rubber tyre inner tubes as water containers. Clean water was at a premium in many areas; the streams and rivers were a high risk source due to waterborne diseases, but were frequently used at need, with a liberal addition of sterilising tablets. During the rainy season fresh water could be collected in rubberised groundsheet/capes and decanted into water bottles or the ubiquitous *chagil* cloth water bags.

### Equipment

The nature of jungle operations demanded a greater degree of self-sufficiency from the individual soldier than in other theatres. Most equipment had to be carried; it was unlikely that the company transport would be able to bring up the goods once the troops had dug in – if it was not in your pack you went without. This lack of guaranteed support led to most troops using the Pattern 08

'Raiders' brew up in the jungle during the first Chindit operation. The provision of hot food and drink demanded the use of fires, which in the same circumstances would have been absolutely forbidden in Europe or Africa for fear of drawing enemy mortar fire. In Burma native villages were numerous, however, and it was hoped that their fires and brush-clearing would mask the raiders' presence – although every effort was made to keep smoke to a minimum.





**The only way of extracting wounded from the mountains and jungle was by the laborious effort of comrades carrying the stretcher to the nearest road, river or airstrip – which in the more remote areas of Burma was days or even weeks away. During the Chindits' Operation 'Longcloth' in 1943, carrying stretcher cases across rugged terrain for many hundreds of miles was simply impossible. Unless a wounded man could keep up with the column with minimal help there was no alternative but to leave him behind, with food, water, and a weapon. Given the Japanese record of treatment of enemy wounded who fell into their hands, it was tacitly hoped that if friendly villagers did not find and care for them, the seriously wounded would take their own way out. Although it was never spoken of, it is clear that the helpless were often given a merciful overdose of morphine before being abandoned.**

**During 1944 men of the 6th Bn, South Wales Borderers move along a muddy jungle road, making use of cover. Jungle roads were either dry and dusty or, during the rainy season, deep in fluid mud. (IWM SE364)**

large pack for their kit, and in many instances the P37 small pack as well, whereas in Africa and Europe the small pack alone was sufficient for most daily needs.

Some units expanded the large pack by attaching basic pouches to its sides, and sometimes the small pack to the rear flap, thus providing a large volume pack that could easily be discarded at the start line of an operation or if they came under fire. Some took this modification further: Lt. Tony Parkes of 1st Queen's Royal Regt described the fitting of opposing pairs of leather 'cups' – made from e.g. old boot tongues – facing downwards on the front surface of the large pack and upwards on the rear of the belt, to take lengths of wooden slat or bamboo which distributed some of the weight to the hips. He also described replacing the rear buckles of the P37 belt with buckles and long sections from pack cross straps, so that more equipment could be attached directly to the belt. Where possible the shoulder braces of the 1937 set were discarded, so that only one set of straps – the pack shoulder straps – crossed the shoulders, to reduce chafing.

Private Newcombe (2nd Dorsets) listed the following kit as carried by him in Burma during 1945: large pack containing 1 set underwear, 1 pair boots, 1 pair gym shoes (or Japanese 'tabi'), mosquito net, US issue blanket, 2 packs toilet paper, 1 or 2 towels, 'hussif' ('housewife' – sewing kit), washing kit, 'Tommy cooker', jungle ration, salt tablets, water purification tablets, and a bottle of 'scat' (insect repellent). When the steel helmet was worn the bush hat was worn on the pack's helmet X-straps; an enamel mug was also attached to the pack. It was this equipment that was dropped at the start line or when making contact, leaving the soldier with essential ammunition and food – P37 web equipment with water bottle and intrenching tool; 200 rounds of .303in ammo (or four magazines for NCOs armed with the Thompson or Sten), and one Bren gun magazine for the section LMG carried in the basic pouches, along with one phosphorous and two No.36 fragmentation grenades. The rubberised groundsheet/rain cape was often worn rolled and attached to the back





A carbine-armed officer or WO (foreground) and men of the 9th Bn, Royal Sussex Regt – cf Plate D3 – manhandle a CMP Ford truck along a particularly difficult section of road during 36th Inf Div's advance in Burma, 1944/45. (IWM SE1945)

Men of the 4th Royal West Kents training in India in 1943; all wear KD uniform with Indian-issue Field Service caps of matching material. In April 1944 this battalion would become famous for their desperate defence of Kohima. (IWM IND4124)



of the belt; being waterproof it was used to store the day's rations – bully beef and biscuits. Each rifle section also had two triple-tube holders for six mortar rounds, carried in turn by the riflemen.

## UNIFORMS & EQUIPMENT

British and Commonwealth garrisons stationed in India and the Far East had been wearing sand-coloured cotton Khaki Drill (KD) uniform since the end of the 19th century (see MAA 368, p.36 *et seq*). During the 1930s this had been replaced for field wear by a matching tropical shirt of softer, better-ventilated 'aertex' fabric, worn with KD shorts, or with 'Bombay bloomers' – trousers which could be worn either full length and confined by hose or puttees, or buttoned up to form rather baggy and inelegant shorts. This clothing proved inadequate as jungle uniform in Malaya and Burma. The shorts and Bombay bloomers left the lower legs exposed to thorns and insects, with a consequent risk of infection; and the light colour, while not necessarily conspicuous when immobile in the dappled, high-contrast light of the jungle, was highly visible during movement.

This shortcoming was overcome in 1942/43 by bulk-dyeing KD items a dark 'jungle' green colour. These redyed KD uniforms, together with drab brown Indian-made wool angora shirts, soon became the standard jungle clothing – though even as late as 1944 some units were still wearing KD in Burma, and it continued in use in India. The redyed kit was simply a stop-gap while the lessons learned in theatre were put to use in developing jungle clothing. Much effort was expended during 1943 in testing variations of uniforms, equipment and materiel. The first dress specific to jungle warfare was the Indian-made 'jungle green' (JG) version of the British Army's ubiquitous Battledress uniform (BD). First produced in 1943, the 'JG BD' consisted of a cool aertex BD blouse and hard-wearing drill trousers; this uniform was also produced in khaki for non-jungle terrain. The new JG BD saw widespread issue in early 1944, but the blouse was soon dismissed by the troops as being uncomfortable and impractical; being so light in weight it tended to ride up even more readily than the original wool BD blouse, leaving the midriff exposed and causing chafing under equipment. Where possible it was replaced by a longer, four-pocket JG aertex bush shirt, or the comfortable and popular two-pocket Indian wool (flannel) shirt.

### The Lethbridge Mission

The inadequacies of the JG BD and much of the other equipment in use in Burma led the British Army to undertake a major research mission into the requirements for the design of a completely new range of uniforms and personal equipment. The field research was carried out by 220 Military



**Field Marshal Viscount Wavell, as Viceroy of India, presents the Military Medal to L/Cpl. Williams of the 2nd Bn, Royal Norfolk Regt from 5th Inf Bde, 2nd Infantry Division. Williams wears the Indian-made jungle green Battledress blouse and trousers with the khaki felt bush hat; the censor has deleted the sign of 2nd Inf Div – crossed white keys on a black square – worn under the turned-up left brim. He still carries the long No.1 bayonet that was normally replaced by the shortened Indian version. The troops in the background wear JG BD with a mix of bush hats and tam-'o-shanters, the latter identifying men of the 1st Bn, Royal Scots from the division's 4th Infantry Brigade. Wavell wears the staff officers' red-banded khaki wool SD cap and KD bush jacket and trousers. (IWM SE2862)**

Mission (or the 'Lethbridge Mission', after its leader Maj. Gen. J.S.Lethbridge), who spent six months in the Far East between October 1943 and March 1944. They consulted the military authorities of India, Australia, New Zealand and the USA, as well as seeking the opinions of the troops on the ground, in order to assess the clothing and equipment currently in use and make recommendations on replacement or modification where necessary. This exercise resulted in a recommendation for a complete new range of uniforms and equipment and the discarding of all the items previously in use as unsuited to jungle warfare.

Backed up by extensive scientific research in Great Britain, the new '44' pattern clothing and equipment was to be the most up-to-date then available to any nation, and at an average saving of weight per soldier of 16lbs. It included: boots, socks, underwear, pullover, two-piece jungle suit (or tank suit), tropical hat, poncho, Mk IV helmet (with removable liner, the shell being usable as a water bowl), load-carrying equipment and rucksack. In addition the set included a light-weight blanket, personal kit and ancillaries such as petrol lighter, soap dish, shaving/signal mirror, washing kit holdall, lightweight razor, 'housewife', clasp knife, combination knife/fork/spoon set, alloy mess tins, and individual water purifying

bag. Other items included sunglasses, a waterproof cover for the AB64 'paybook', 'fishnet' mosquito protection, section medical kits and barber kits – as well as a new rifle and bayonet. The only items that remained in use from the old inventory were the toothbrush, comb, field dressing and lanyard. This new equipment represented the most painstaking study of a British soldier's actual needs that had ever been carried out before (and probably, since).

A new transportation pack was included in the 44 equipment. The Carrier, Manpack, GS was a modernised version of the US forces' Packboard, Yukon, based on an item used by prospectors in the 19th century. The idea itself was much older and such packs, with head harnesses, have been well known to eastern peoples for centuries; however, the head harness (designed to distribute some of the weight to the strong neck muscles) issued with the GS carrier was much disliked by British troops, who rarely used it. The carrier could be adapted to carry a wide range of equipment from water and ammunition to heavy weapons; it could also take the Pattern 44 rucksack, which was attached using three D-rings on the outer edge of the back panel. This method of carrying the rucksack provided better support than the rucksacks' integral shoulder straps, which placed all the weight on the wearer's shoulders.

Although no widespread issue of the 1944 equipment was made to troops already in theatre before the war ended unexpectedly in August 1945, individual components were provided for evaluation and as

replacements, with many troops receiving some of the small items such as the combination KFS set and signal/shaving mirrors. (For further details of the 1944 clothing and equipment see the present author's *Khaki Drill & Jungle Green: British Tropical Uniforms 1939-45 in Colour Photographs*.)

### 1944 web equipment

Major production of the new jungle web equipment began in 1944; it was intended that the new equipment should initially be issued to units in the UK preparing to go out to the Far East, with units already in theatre being kitted out as production rates allowed. The 5th Parachute Bde were the first troops to reach the Far East wearing the new kit (see Plate H), arriving in India just days before the collapse of Japan in August 1945; and as late as 1946 the majority of troops in theatre were still wearing Indian-manufactured clothing and equipment. The 1944 web equipment was designed specifically for jungle use; it was lightweight, water- and rot-proof, and had light alloy fittings. It was intended that a drab set of the equipment be issued for temperate climate use, but massive stocks of the P37 equipment precluded any such move. (For further details of the 44 equipment see MAA 108 (Revised), *British Infantry Equipments 1908-2000*.)

### Small arms

The full-strength infantry section of 1944 consisted of ten men, divided into a rifle group of seven and a Bren LMG group of three. The section commander, normally holding the rank of corporal, led the rifle group and was armed with a 9mm Sten sub-machine gun, which was now replacing the .45in. M1928A1 Thompson. The six riflemen carried the No.4 rifle, now replacing the No.1 Mk III SMLE, both in .303in. calibre. The Bren group were led by the section second-in-command, a lance-corporal or experienced private; both he and the Bren 'No.2' were armed with rifles, and the 'No.1' carried the .303in. Bren gun. The platoon HQ section held a 2in. mortar and a PIAT (Projector, Infantry, Anti-Tank), the latter replacing the .55in. Boyes anti-tank rifle, production of which ceased in 1943.

Each rifle battalion had a Support Company which grouped one platoon each of six 3in. mortars, three Universal carriers, six anti-tank guns, and pioneers (see MAA 354). The standard British infantry flame-thrower was the 22kg 'Ack Pack'. The doughnut-shaped unit worn on the operator's back carried 18.6 litres of fuel, which could be discharged out to a range of 45 metres; this fuel capacity gave enough for about ten two-second

**'Second Arakan', February 1944:** a Bren gunner cleans his stripped-down weapon while enjoying a smoke. Corporal Deniham wears an Indian wool pullover, JG BD trousers, grey wool socks turned over the top of web anklets and, unusually for this date, the khaki wool Field Service cap.



'bursts'. It was not a normal part of the table of equipment of the infantry company, and due to the slightly controversial nature of this weapon little mention of its employment was ever made.

Heavier weapons were provided by the Support Battalion held at divisional level. This consisted of an HQ Company; a Heavy Mortar Company, having four platoons each of four 4.2in. mortars; and three Machine Gun Companies each of three platoons, each with four Vickers .303in. machine guns. In Burma mortars, Vickers, PIATs and flame-throwers were normally carried by pack mules, or tracked Universal carriers if the terrain permitted.

The principal weapon of the infantryman was the .303in. bolt action rifle, initially the pre-Great War SMLE (Short Magazine Lee Enfield) Rifle No.1 Mk III, which was gradually replaced by the Rifle No.4 from 1943. The essential characteristics of both types were similar: a charger-loaded ten-round detachable magazine, an effective range of 600 yards and a maximum range of 2,000 yards. The No.1 weighed 8lbs 14.5oz, while the No.4 was slightly lighter at 8lbs 10.5oz. A variant of the No.4, the No.4T (for Telescope), was used as a sniper rifle.

The SMLE and No.4 rifle were both considered to be too long and unnecessarily heavy for the restricted confines of jungle warfare. With a No.1 bayonet fixed, the 3ft 8½in. SMLE had an unwieldy combined length of 5ft 1½ins. The Indian Army cut down the bayonet by 5ins., new bayonets with purpose-made short blades being designated the Mk.2 series; many units in Burma preferred the SMLE and short Indian bayonet to the No.4 and its spike bayonet.

By the end of 1943 a modified 'No.4, Lightened' rifle had been produced; this was some 5ins. shorter than 3ft 8½ins. (4ft 5ins. with spike bayonet fixed) of the No.4, and weighed 11lb 14.5oz less. It had a sling loop on the right side of the butt, a rubber butt pad to absorb some of the excessive recoil produced by the short barrel, shortened fore-end woodwork, and a flash hider also necessitated by the shortened barrel. As well as muzzle flash and a vicious 'kick', the lighter weight and reduced barrel also limited the range and accuracy; the sights were ranged from 200 to 800 yards only, compared with 2,000 yards on the SMLE and 1,300 yards on the No.4. This was not initially considered to be a problem due to the short ranges at which the enemy were usually encountered in the jungle; but it was one of the factors that led to the decision not to adopt it for general issue post-war. In March 1944, 100,000 lightened No.4 rifles were ordered; that September it was officially approved for service as the 'Rifle No.5 Mk I', and 251,136 were completed before the end of the war.

Junior leaders – NCOs and some officers – were armed with sub-machine guns. The British acquired the .45in. Thompson in very large

**Native troops manhandle crated ammunition. The poor quality of Indian-made webbing is evident upon examination of the image: both the two small packs which are visible have lost the buckles to the securing straps, which are heavily frayed, and the soldier at right has also lost the rear buckles from his belt.**





During the 1944 rainy season men of the 2nd Bn, York & Lancaster Regt were engaged in heavy fighting on the Arakan front as part of 14th Infantry Brigade. This depleted rifle section wear full JG BD uniform and are armed with the Bren, a mix of SMLE and No.4 rifles, and one Thompson. Two of the men carry toggle ropes around their waists; these proved invaluable in negotiating steep, muddy tracks. (IWM IND3918)



quantities, and its stopping power was welcomed by those who carried it. Production of the 9mm Sten saw the Thompson gradually replaced in front line units by the smaller and lighter weapon in the last year of the war – though many mourned its loss. The officers and many NCOs of some units were equipped with the semi-automatic US .30cal. M1 carbine; light and pleasant to use, it had a 15-round magazine and longer accurate range than the SMG, though its stopping power was inferior to a rifle. Officers, vehicle crews and some weapons crews were armed with a .38in. revolver – normally the Pistol, Revolver No.2, an inaccurate six-shot weapon weighing 1lb 11.5oz. A number of .45in. US M1911A1 and 9mm Browning HP semi-automatic pistols were also issued to specialist troops such as paratroops and commandos. Due to its poor stopping power and accuracy – and the fact that it identified their status to enemy snipers – many officers discarded the revolver in favour of a rifle or sub-machine gun.

A section's basic complement of ammunition was 160x9mm rounds for the Sten in five magazines, 800 rounds of .303in. in five-round chargers carried either in the basic pouches or in disposable cotton bandoliers, 21x30-round Bren magazines, and ten grenades, both

ABOVE, LEFT Infantry section firepower is aptly demonstrated by this 'gun group', 1944: the NCO i/c is armed with a 9mm Sten, the No.2 of the Bren team with the .303in. SMLE, and the No.1 with the Bren gun. Note the mess tin carried in a water bottle cradle on his belt by the Bren gunner. (IWM SE2374)

ABOVE A Bren team of the 1st Bn, Royal Scots Fusiliers, 29th Inf Bde, 36th Inf Div man a foxhole that has been strengthened using railway sleepers. The gun has been given a makeshift sling of broad webbing – the narrow issue sling tended to cut into the shoulder. (IWM SE259)

Burma, 1942: the rifle platoon's integral support weapon for delivering short range HE, smoke and illuminating bombs was the 2in. mortar. This early Mk II has a fixed baseplate, collimating sight and trip-firing mechanism; its 19lb weight was later reduced to 10 $\frac{1}{2}$  lbs by the deletion of the heavy baseplate and sight. This soldier has strapped a 'billy can' to his large pack in preference to the issue mess tins.



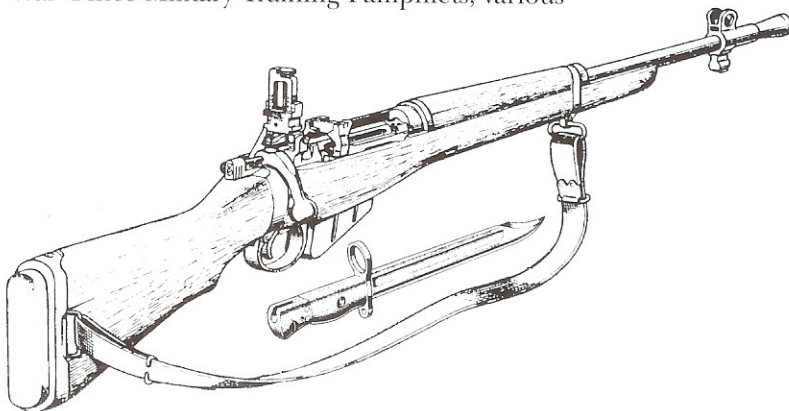
smoke and fragmentation. In combat, of course, extra ammunition was carried as needed and available. The section's load would routinely be increased by ammunition for the mortars and PIATs.

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Rifle No.5 Mk I and bayonet No.5 Mk I. This 'jungle carbine' was a lightened and shortened version of the No.4 rifle designed for use in the close confines of jungle terrain. Plans to adopt it as standard for all theatres were dropped: the shortened barrel gave it excessive muzzle flash and a kick like a mule - the consequence of using the standard .303in. ammunition in a weapon that would have benefited from a reduced-power round.



## THE PLATES

### **A1: Sergeant, 1st Bn, Lancashire Fusiliers; India, 1939**

This senior NCO typifies the splendid turn-out of the pre-war 'Tommy' in parade order. He wears Khaki Drill Service Dress tunic, KD shorts (an alternative to the long trousers, worn at the CO's discretion), and the 'pith hat' sun helmet. As a sergeant he wears the senior NCOs' red sash over his right shoulder. The new Pattern 37 web equipment was in short supply and the old Pattern 08 belt is worn; some infantry units in India were still using the 1908 set as late as 1941. The Lancashire Fusiliers are identified by the white-on-red 'LF' and grenade flash and the yellow hackle worn on the pith hat. As a long-serving Regular soldier this sergeant wears the ribbons of the Army Long Service & Good Conduct and India General Service 1908–35 medals over his left breast pocket.

### **A2: Captain, 2nd Bn, Suffolk Regiment; Razmak, NW Frontier of India, 1939**

The officer's tropical Service Dress was styled on the woollen SD worn in temperate climates. Well starched and pressed by the 'dhoby wallah', it was worn with a matching cloth belt or, for prescribed occasions, the Sam Browne. Being on parade this officer carries the 1892 infantry pattern sword, with a leather-covered scabbard; the use of swords was later discontinued for the duration of the war. The khaki pith hat had replaced the old universal Wolseley pattern foreign service helmet for all troops in India and Burma in 1938, though the Wolseley was retained in all other tropical stations. The Suffolks adorned their pith hats with a stylised Gibraltar Castle badge in yellow cloth worn on the left side; the castle was also part of the design of their cap and collar badges. Of note is the unique *pagri* with a broad front and seams at the side and rear, rather than front and rear, and regimental red top fold. Straight trousers would later replace the breeches and leather gaiters, worn here with spurred boots. This company commander wears the Military Cross, 1914–15 Star, 1914–18 War, 1918 Victory, and India General Service 1908–35 medals, the latter earned when serving with the regiment's 1st Bn; the 2nd Bn had not received the IGSM 1936–39 before the outbreak of World War II.

### **A3: Private, 2nd Bn, King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry; Burma, 1942**

The 2nd KOYLI had been in Burma since 1936. Units in India and Burma had been of secondary importance, and the demands for new uniforms and equipment for troops fighting the Axis in Europe and North Africa had taken priority. The outbreak of war saw the issue of a few Bren guns and a quantity of P37 web equipment (though many infantry units in India received the cartridge carriers, as here, rather than the larger basic pouches); but the Lewis gun remained the outdated mainstay of platoon firepower. The lightning Japanese offensive of early 1942 found the 2nd KOYLI as poorly equipped as any unit in theatre: they had no steel

**Riding a Norton motorcycle this despatch rider, Gunner Tully, wears JG BD and the early pulp helmet: cf Plate C1. He was photographed while delivering despatches in the Bishenpur area near Imphal on the Assam–Burma border. (IWM IND3728)**

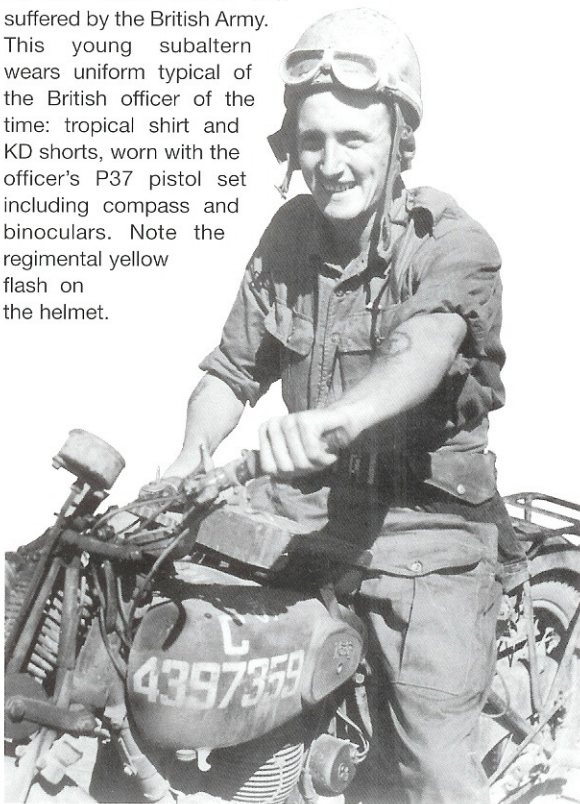
helmets or machetes, only 20 compasses for the whole battalion, and just before they went into action as part of 1st Burma Bde the battalion's machine gun platoon had their Vickers MMGs taken away for airfield defence. It is hardly surprising that after the fighting around the Sittang River and Maymyo the battalion could muster little more than 80 'fit' men. They retreated into India, where the almost destroyed 2nd Bn was to play no further active part in the campaign.

This private handling an SMLE with a grenade discharger cup wears the 'aertex' tropical shirt with sleeves rolled short, tucked into the KD trousers; the pith hat and 1937 web equipment are partially hidden by foliage applied as camouflage. The discharger for Mills grenades – which gave a range of up to 200 yards – was safer than the 2in. mortar in thick forest: their detonation was time- rather than impact-fuzed like the mortar bombs, which could explode prematurely when they struck overhanging jungle vegetation.

### **B1: Second Lieutenant, 4th Bn, Royal Norfolk Regiment, 18th Infantry Division; Singapore, February 1942**

The issue of tropical clothing to the three Territorial battalions of the Royal Norfolks in September 1941 led many to believe that they were heading for the Middle East. Their actual fate was to be far worse; and by the time the 'Terriers' reached Singapore, Gen. Yamashita's troops were already sweeping down the Malay Peninsula towards the Straits of Johore. The troops reinforced the Singapore Island garrison; but after only 17 days, incompetent senior commanders, low morale and shortage of water would deliver them into the long horror of Japanese captivity, in what many consider to be the worst defeat ever suffered by the British Army.

This young subaltern wears uniform typical of the British officer of the time: tropical shirt and KD shorts, worn with the officer's P37 pistol set including compass and binoculars. Note the regimental yellow flash on the helmet.





**Ngakyedyauk Pass, 1944: Cpl. Trickett, unit unknown, advances cautiously with his SMLE at the 'port' – cf Plate C3. He wears JG BD, Mk II helmet, Pattern 37 webbing, and a disposable cotton bandolier with five pockets each holding two five-round .303in. chargers.**

**B2: Private, No.5 Commando; Madagascar, May 1942**

This commando wears the recently introduced 'Hat, Fur Felt' more commonly known as the 'bush' or 'slouch' hat (or even, incorrectly, the 'Gurkha hat' – the Gurkhas wore two hats one inside the other, giving a double-thickness brim with no turn-up). The hat is worn here with the left side fixed up, which allowed for the drill movement of 'slope arms'; this style was seldom seen in the field, but was later re-adopted following the widespread use of divisional signs on the brim. Khaki aertex shirt and KD 'Bombay bloomers' are worn with hosetops and web anklets. The weapon is the popular Thompson M1928A1 sub-machine gun with Cutts compensator on the muzzle; over half a million 'Tommy guns' were purchased from the Auto Ordnance Company in the USA to fill Britain's need for SMGs prior to the appearance of the Sten gun.

**B3: 'Raider', 13th Bn, King's Regiment (Liverpool), Long Range Penetration Group (77th Indian Infantry Brigade); Burma, February–March 1943**

The drab wool shirt worn here is Indian issue, worn with KD

trousers and Indian-made 'ammo boots'. The well crammed-out P08 large pack is supported by its straps but is not attached to the brace extenders, allowing it to be dropped rapidly in case of contact with the enemy. As he is armed with a Thompson a pair of the special three-pocket carriers for the 20-round magazines are worn on this raider's P37 web equipment.

**C1: Despatch rider, 2nd Infantry Division; Indo-Burma border, 1943**

'Don Rs' were indispensable to effective communications at all command levels; but since they had to get the despatches through in all weathers – particularly difficult during the monsoon rains – they suffered a disproportionately high number of non-battle casualties. This rider wears wool Battledress trousers with leather motorcycle boots, both splattered with the mud to which local roads were reduced during the rains. The helmet is the US M42 'armored force helmet', as provided along with the M3 Lee medium and M3 Stuart light tanks then being supplied in quantity; they were also popular with Don Rs serving with Indian divisions in the Mediterranean. The Indian waterproof motorcycle jacket was not as well designed as the British equivalent but did at least provide some protection from the weather.

**C2: Sniper, 1st Bn, Northamptonshire Regiment, 20th Indian Infantry Division; 'Heartbreak Hill', Burma, January 1944**

The 1st Northampton had spent the first four years of the war on security duties in India, but in December 1943 they received orders to depart for Burma as the British battalion of 32nd Indian Infantry Brigade. The battalion's first blood was drawn at Kyaukchaw before they moved on to take part in the heavy fighting around Imphal in March 1944. On 7 January 1944 the sniper section were relieved of their (unusually well-regarded) Ross rifles, which were replaced by eight brand new No.4 Mk I(T) weapons. The weather was atrocious at the time, and the snipers had to 'zero' their new sights at 50 yards in torrential rain. Four sets of tree-climbing irons were also issued to the section at this time, but they were not particularly appreciated and were soon abandoned.

Staying dry during a tropical downpour is next to impossible; the Indian-made cape of water-repellent drill fabric offered some protection, but the damp permeated every item of clothing and equipment – causing particular problems with the snipers' telescope sights. The felt bush hat absorbed a fair quantity of water before its shape collapsed, but the steel helmet was more popular during heavy rains.

**C3: Private, 1st Bn, Somerset Light Infantry, 7th Indian Infantry Division; Ngakyedauk Pass, Burma, February 1944**

The 1st Somersets were the British battalion of 114th Indian Inf Bde, serving alongside 4/14th Punjab Regt and 4/8th Gurkha Rifles; they were replaced by the 2nd Bn, South Lancashire Regt in April 1944, and returned to the North-West Frontier. The Ngakeydauk Pass in the Mayu Hills, above the 'Admin Box' position, was a key objective of the failed offensive by Japanese 55th Inf Div during 'Second Arakan'. Night patrols were a frequent requirement in Burma, where the Japanese excelled at night-time infiltration. Patrols also sought intelligence on enemy positions and movement, and provided a 'doorbell' for early warning of enemy moves on Allied positions. The patrols were fraught with dangers, not

the least of which was becoming separated and lost – once isolated, it was a lucky man who managed to return to his own lines safely. Calls for assistance were often ignored as the Japanese frequently called out in English to fool Allied troops into giving away their positions; for a lost individual to do likewise was just asking to be caught by the enemy or shot by a British sentry.

In the Burmese mountains the evenings could be chilly, particularly after the heat of the day; this soldier wears a 'cap comforter', Indian-made jungle green drill cloth Battledress trousers and woollen pullover over an angora shirt. On his feet are a prized possession – Japanese 'tabi' canvas and rubber shoes; men who managed to acquire them used them as slippers in bivouac areas, or as silent and sure-footed shoes for patrol work. Minimal equipment was carried on patrol, usually limited to weapons and munitions; this man carries the SMLE with the shortened Indian No.1 Mk I\* bayonet, a cotton 50-round bandolier of .303in. ammo and two grenades. For camouflage all exposed skin is blackened – it is also liberally coated with insect repellent.

**D1: Lieutenant, 1st Bn, South Staffordshire Regiment, Special Force; Burma, March 1944**

The dress and equipment of the 'Special Force' benefited from the knowledge gained by the valiant efforts of the 'raiders' of the first Wingate expedition. Early in the operation, perhaps having just flown in to 'Broadway', this platoon commander from Brig. Calvert's 77th Indian Inf Bde still appears fit and healthy. He wears the bush hat, modified for jungle camouflage by the addition of green paint; leather boot laces are wound around the *pagri*, providing 'ready use' replacements, a tourniquet, or general cord for lashing equipment to the pack or even making a bivouac – the cord from air-drop supply parachutes was recovered for the same purpose. Although the Indian Army's 1943 'JG BD' uniform was almost universal issue by this time, this officer has chosen to wear an Indian-made brown angora shirt, comfortable during the day and providing extra warmth at night or when in the chilly highlands. The trousers from the JG BD set are worn with standard issue 'ammo boots' and short puttees as issued to other ranks. The second Chindit expedition saw the provision of a quantity of US .30cal M1 semi-automatic carbines, popular for their light weight, and their rapid rate of fire compared to the revolver or bolt-action rifle. A US War Aid machete, manufactured in the USA for British use and modelled on the British issue item, is worn at the left hip on the P37 web equipment.

**D2: Private, 4th Bn, Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment, 5th Indian Infantry Division; Kohima, April 1944**

Kohima in the hills of Assam commanded a vital railhead at Dimapur on the lines of communication for the units in north-

east India and northern Burma which were preparing for 14th Army's 'big push'. For two weeks in early April 1944 the 4th West Kents, from 161st Indian Inf Bde, bore the brunt of the Japanese 31st Inf Div's attempts to take the surrounded town in savage fighting at extremely close quarters. Eventually they and troops of the Assam Regt were relieved by one Indian and three British battalions which fought their way through to reinforce the small garrison, although the battle was to continue until the end of June.

This exhausted soldier cradles several cartons of US K-rations, air-dropped along with water and ammunition to the beleaguered garrison. He wears Indian JG BD trousers and JG vest, and a Mk II steel helmet with an Indian camouflage net. With the Japanese often only yards away from the forward trenches weapons were normally carried at all times. The standard British issue machete would have been invaluable for the rapid opening and dispersal of the air-dropped supplies, few of which would land within the tiny defensive perimeter.

**D3: Private, 9th Bn, Royal Sussex Regiment, 36th Indian Infantry Division; Burma, 1944**

The 72nd Inf Bde (until May 1944, Indian Inf Bde) was composed of three battalions which had formerly been converted to the armoured role as numbered regiments of the Royal Armoured Corps; later all became infantry once more, the 160th Regt RAC reverting to its original identity as 9th Royal Sussex. This Bren gunner wears the JG BD uniform, unpopular for the tendency of the aertex cloth blouse to ride up and separate from the drill cloth trousers, leaving an expanse of bare flesh at the waist. In this battalion it was common to adorn the bush hat with the regimental cap badge, generally an isolated or individual practice. The



**February 1945: a lance-corporal of the 3rd Carabiniers relaxes while one of the unit's M3 Lee tanks is ferried across a Burmese river. The black Royal Armoured Corps beret with the Carabiniers' regimental badge is worn with JG uniform and heavily blanched Pattern 37 'pistol order'. On 13 April 1944 this regiment's B Sqn distinguished itself in the recapture of Nunshigum, a hill feature dominating vital airstrips on the northern edge of the Imphal base area. (IWM SE3175)**



**Tank crewmen – cf Plate F1. All wear JG BD trousers with web anklets and ammo boots, and a mixture of JG BD blouse, JG vest and buttoned Indian wool pullover. The corporal's rank badges are made of plain white tape; the captain wears his 'pips' on KD epaulette slides. (IWM SE 2543)**

**RIGHT Men of the 1st Bn, Devonshire Regt add their signatures to captured Japanese flags; for a more fully dressed figure from this unit, see Plate F2. (IWM IND3383)**



bush hat was comfortable but in most units it was the 'SOP' to don the steel helmet when anticipating enemy contact, hence its carriage on the pack. The Mk II steel helmet was designed to provide low velocity ballistic protection (from shrapnel, etc.), but it was also found to offer some limited protection from the Japanese 6.5mm reduced power round used in their Type 11 machine gun. Ammunition magazines for the Bren are carried in the Indian-made P37 web set; Indian webbing was of coarser fabric, less wear-resistant, and had poor quality brass or steel fittings which were prone to breaking or corrosion.

**E1: 'Chindit', 1st Bn, Bedfordshire & Hertfordshire Regiment, Special Force; Burma, June 1944**

The LRP brigades were composed of four battalions; the 14th Inf Bde comprised the 2nd York & Lancasters, 2nd Black Watch, 1st Beds & Herts and 7th Leicesters. Naked from the waist down, this Chindit is preparing to wade one of the many rivers that marked every valley floor. Major rivers such as the Chindwin presented obstacles to both sides; without boats or rafts they were not easily crossed except by strong swimmers. The multitude of smaller waterways were easier to overcome; pack mules were able to swim or wade across with their muleteers and accompanying troops. It was common practice, where time and circumstances permitted, to remove as much clothing as possible – particularly the JG trousers, which were difficult to dry in the humid jungle environment, and which caused uncomfortable chafing and associated skin disorders when sodden. His trousers, food and other items that need to be kept dry have been placed high on his pack to keep them clear of the water. Boots, although they would suffer from repeated soaking, were kept on when wading, as cuts from sharp stones could cause

medical complications which might have painful, even dire results. The quantity of equipment needed on such expeditions was not easily carried in the basic P37 web configuration; it was the practice to add basic pouches to the sides of the large pack, and even to stitch the small pack to it (this practice was not unique to the Chindit units). Although bulky and uncomfortable, the load was easily dropped if necessary, and because of the nature of operations could often be left at base areas while patrolling. This man's load includes a *chagil* (the cloth water bag which kept water cool through slow evaporation – carried two per section), jungle ration in cloth bag, hammock rolled and tied below the pack with salvaged parachute cord, a *kukri*, and half of a US issue blanket (US issue shelter halves were also air-dropped into bivouac areas).

Although Col. Cochrane's USAAF 1st Air Commando did sterling work in locating the Chindit columns for air resupply drops, the environment and mission drained the troops' strength rapidly. Wingate had made careful provision for his units, with regular mail drops, and special items to be dropped to the troops as morale-boosters as needed. These included curry powder for the Gurkhas, and small luxuries – such as snuff for one particular officer (unfortunately on one occasion the snuff reached the Gurkhas in error, and was employed in their cooking before the mistake was noticed...)

**E2: Sergeant, 7th Nigeria Regiment, Special Force; Burma, summer 1944**

The 3rd (West African) Bde had white NCOs as well as officers, and it was practice for them to wear full beards in the field. This sergeant wears no badges of rank – he is well known to his men. He wears the khaki wool pullover with brown suede shoulder patches that was issued to African troops; a bush hat, and Indian JG trousers tucked into US issue canvas jungle boots – these were air-dropped to his

unit to replace worn-out ammo boots. His web equipment consists of P37 'musketry order', and he carries an Indian machete and a Mk III Sten sub-machine gun. The Indian machete was much disliked as it did not hold an edge and easily burred. The withdrawal of the Thompson SMG and its replacement by the Sten was also unpopular: the Thompson was much heavier, but was trusted for its reliability and stopping-power. It also 'looked the part', while the Sten – which usually worked acceptably well – looked cheap and poor-quality, and failed to instil confidence.

**E3: Warrant Officer Class I, 1st Bn, Essex Regiment, Special Force; India, 1944**

This Regimental Sergeant Major from 23rd Inf Bde – which was held back in reserve during Operation 'Thursday' – wears an unusual mix of well-pressed khaki aertex shirt with JG BD trousers, and bush hat. 'Bulled' ammo boots and neatly blanched web belt and anklets with polished brasses complete the RSM's smart and soldierly appearance. On both upper sleeves he wears the yellow-on-blue patch of the Special Force, showing the mythical *chintre* and a pagoda. Below this on the right sleeve is the polished brass Royal Arms badge of a WO1, on a backing in the traditional purple of the Essex Regt – 'the Pompadours'. The 1st Essex had previously served in North Africa, and the RSM wears the ribbon of the Africa Star over his left breast pocket.

**F1: Tank crewman, 150th Regiment RAC, 254th Indian Tank Brigade; Burma, February 1945**

Despite the initial prejudices against using tanks in the varied terrain of Burma they were put to good use, faring extremely well against the much lighter Japanese tanks on the rare occasions when they were encountered. Tank units were dispersed in brigades as Corps or Army assets, being deployed to provide direct infantry support as 'bunker busters' wherever the terrain permitted. The 150th Regt RAC was formed in October 1941 by the conversion of 10th Bn, York & Lancaster Regiment. Unusually, this M3 Lee regiment was to fight divided in the Imphal/Kohima campaign: from November 1944, C Sqn served under IV Corps command in 254th Indian Tank Bde with the 3rd Carabiniers and the M3 Stuarts of 7th Indian Light Cavalry, while the rest of the regiment was with 50th Indian Tank Bde, a XXXIII Corps asset. The re-united regiment fought with 254th Bde under XXXIII Corps during the subsequent reconquest of Burma.

This crewman wears a JG aertex bush shirt tucked into the JG BD trousers – more comfortable than the JG BD blouse. Web equipment consists of the P37 pistol set; unusually, the holster and ammo case are not worn over the brace attachment but off-set to one side. Infantry battalions converted to Royal Armoured Corps regiments generally continued to wear their parent unit's cap badge on the black 'tankie' beret, as shown here. NCOs in this brigade wore rank chevrons either on the sleeve or as epaulette slides.

**Lieutenant-Colonel White, CO of the 2nd Dorsets, photographed with his carrier platoon at the Ava bridge crossing the Irrawaddy near Mandalay. He wears JG BD trousers, angora shirt, Mk II helmet and US M38 leggings; and is armed with the US M1 carbine – White procured enough of these in March 1945 to equip all his officers. See Plate F3. (IWM SE3647)**

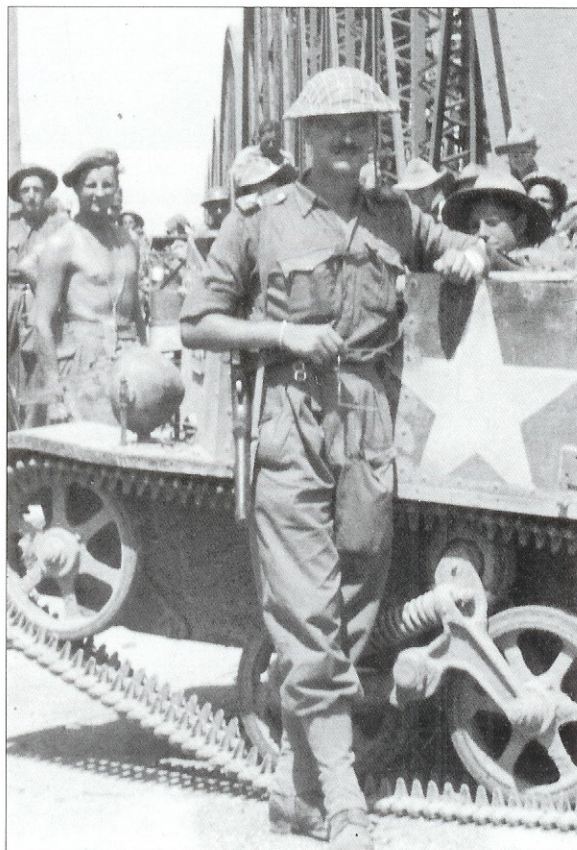
**F2: Lance-Corporal, 1st Bn, Devonshire Regiment, 36th Infantry Division; Burma, May 1945**

The 1st Devons had spent the entire war in the Far East, initially with 2nd and later 80th Indian Inf Bdes before joining 26th Inf Bde in April 1945. Full JG BD uniform is worn with an Indian JG pullover for additional warmth.

The bush hat is worn with the left brim fixed up, showing the divisional sign of the 36th – since September 1944, a British rather than an Indian formation. Within the division it was common practice for NCOs to wear their rank painted onto JG slides worn on the epaulettes. A US issue M1942 machete is carried on the P37 'battle order'; the cartridge belt hooks of the US scabbard entailed the cutting of two slits in the canvas and threading them through the web belt. The P37 entrenching tool is also carried – this item was noticeably absent until the latter part of the war; a GS torch is also carried on the belt. By this stage of the war the No.4 rifle was being issued in some quantity to troops in Burma, although it did not replace the faithful SMLE – a mix of both weapons was seen in many rifle companies.

**F3: Captain, 2nd Bn, Dorset Regiment; Popalon, Burma, spring 1945**

With the 1st Cameron Highlanders and 7th Worcesters, this battalion formed 5th Inf Bde, 2nd Infantry Division, which served in the Far East from June 1942. By 1945 many officers of the Dorsets had purchased commercially made Indian jungle hats – similar to those that were eventually to be issued to all ranks for jungle warfare – as a replacement





**Adm. Lord Louis Mountbatten, Supreme Allied Commander SEAC, during a visit to troops in Burma, late 1943. He wears KD trousers, aertex bush jacket with bronze naval buttons and shoulderboards of rank, Pattern 37 pistol order, and a khaki-crowned cap with admiral's ranking. Mountbatten, as supreme commander, was responsible for all land, sea and air forces in theatre; he also had to exercise the skills of a diplomat in handling the often difficult relations between the British, US and Chinese commanders.**

for the felt bush hat. Bought for an extravagant price from a firm in Calcutta, they soon acquired the nickname of 'IWT hat' ('I Was There' – from the title of a contemporary publication telling soldiers' stories). They were usually adorned with the regimental 'LIV' patch (for the old 54th of Foot) that had been adopted for wear on the solar topee when the battalion arrived in India. In the Dorsets the Indian angora wool shirt had almost totally replaced the much-disliked JG BD blouse; initially no rank was worn in the field, but 'subdued' insignia were eventually adopted by officers. Equipment consists of P37 'musketry order' with added revolver holster and ammunition case, with a whistle lanyard attached to the marching compass; and the popular US issue canvas leggings. Officers of this battalion received the US M1 carbine in March 1945.

**G1: Lieutenant, 1st Bn, Queen's Royal Regiment, 7th Indian Infantry Division; Burma, September 1945**

By September 1945 the rounding up of Japanese troops in southern Burma was well under way, although isolated pockets of resistance would hold out even after the official surrender. This young platoon commander of a veteran battalion of 33rd Indian Inf Bde now displays his rank and regimental title on the shoulder strap slides of his JG bush shirt, with 7th Indian Inf Div 'golden arrow' patches pinned loosely to the sleeve, and JG BD trousers. Australian russet-brown jungle boots – popular, but hard to obtain – are worn with Australian wool ankle-puttees. The web belt has been 'blancoed' with a locally found clay called *mutti*. The khaki wool beret was unsuited to jungle use but added to the officer-like appearance now that the war was over. Peace had also brought the opportunity to gather the odd souvenir, such as this Japanese NCO's *shin-gunto* sword; while the battalion was still fighting on the Sittang River such an item would have been considered simply as excess baggage.

**G2: Colonel, HQ South East Asia Command; Ceylon, 1945**

Under Adm. Mountbatten (Supreme Allied Commander SEAC), HQ South East Asia Command had been formed in November 1943; its sphere of operations covered Burma, Malaya, Sumatra, Thailand and French Indo-China, the latter two for clandestine operations only. Its operational orders were to increase pressure on the Japanese in Burma in order to relieve pressure on the US forces in the Pacific, and to maintain a supply link with China. Originally based in New Delhi, the HQ moved to Kandy, Ceylon, in June 1944.

The introduction of JG clothing brought with it the opportunity for officers to purchase smartly tailored JG bush jackets and slacks in lieu of the KD SD previously worn. An unbecoming beret-like cap resembling the European/Mediterranean theatre General Service cap but made of jungle green drill material was often worn, but staff officers tended to display their status by wearing the khaki wool SD cap with its red staff band. The scarlet gorget patches of staff rank – here the smaller pattern made for wearing on shirts – are worn on the collar, and the 'rising phoenix' patch of SEAC at each shoulder. A plausible set of medal ribbons for such an officer at this date would be the 1914–15 Star, British War Medal 1914–18, 1918 Victory Medal, India General Service Medal 1908–35, Africa Star, and 1939–45 Star.

**G3: Gunner, Royal Artillery, 14th Army; India, 1945**

Wool battledress was rarely worn in Burma, normally remaining with the rear echelon packed into a kitbag, along with the greatcoat and any other effects that were not required in the field. Although much British-made BD was brought into theatre, replacement items were often of Indian manufacture. Indian BD had a distinctive rough fabric that always looked unironed and of inferior quality; the stitching was frequently undyed or poorly dyed, showing as contrasting lines. This veteran now back in a rear area wears it with a JG angora shirt with tie, and a new replacement bush hat. Belt and anklets of late-war Indian manufacture, made from pre-dyed JG web with blackened metal fittings, saw limited issue before the end of the war.

His insignia are 'ROYAL ARTILLERY/ SEAC' shoulder titles, the 14th Army formation badge, RA blue/red arm-of-service stripe and white lanyard, and on his lower left sleeve a wound stripe. On the side of his bush hat is the RA diamond flash with an added 'knuckleduster knife' device.

**H1: Private, 7th (Light Infantry) Bn, Parachute Regiment; Singapore, October 1945**

Plans for the reconquest of Malaya included operations by two airborne divisions, the Indian 44th and British 6th; but only the latter's 5th Parachute Bde arrived in India before the war ended, on 7 August. They were briefly deployed on relief operations in Malaya before moving to Singapore, where they were employed in quelling civil unrest in the aftermath of Japanese occupation.

Coming straight from the UK, this para has received the fruits of the major reforms sparked by the report of the Lethbridge Mission. He wears the 1944 pattern JG shirt and trousers – the former could be worn loose or tucked in. For these duties it is fully 'badged', with his parachutist's brevet on the right sleeve, the Pegasus patch of Airborne Forces on both sleeves, and a green bar at the end of the epaulettes identifying his battalion. The maroon Airborne Forces beret bears the silver Parachute Regt badge. Wool ankle-puttees are worn over the new British russet-brown jungle boots. Equipment consists of the 44 webbing set in 'battle order'; he carries the No.5 Mk I 'jungle carbine' and its bayonet.

**H2: Private, 13th (Lancashire) Bn, Parachute Regiment; Java, December 1945**

The process of securing the far-flung Japanese-occupied territories required a large number of troops, and had to be completed rapidly because of the risk of dissident factions wresting power from the civil and military authorities. An odd situation therefore developed in the months immediately following the Japanese surrender: many territories found themselves still policed by armed Japanese, some under the command of specially trained Allied officers, others working under communicated Allied orders, and a few operating unchecked and still at odds with the local populations. Operation 'Pounce' was a mission to disarm the Japanese in Java, Indonesia, and to restore order to the island prior to the return of Dutch colonial troops, who were due to relieve the British the following April. However, the Indonesian nationalists seized the opportunity offered by political disorder to begin guerrilla attacks on the British force.

This soldier of 5th Para Bde is typical of those deployed on counter-insurgency operations at this time. He wears the 1944 pattern jungle uniform (with black epaulette loops

**Policing duties in the formerly Japanese-occupied colonial empire were highly sensitive in the immediate post-war months. Here a Corps of Military Police 'wireless car' patrols a 'Chinatown' to maintain order in a restless neighbourhood. The 'redcaps' wear SD caps, JG BD trousers, JG bush shirts with 'MP' right arm brassards, white tape badges of rank and JG epaulette slides with black 'CMP(I)' titles. Note the long white oversleeves of the sort worn by traffic control personnel, in the case of the corporal driver with full size rank chevrons. The wireless operator, in black RAC beret, is a trooper from the Reconnaissance Corps. (IWM SE7364)**

identifying his battalion), and 44 web equipment 'battle order', complete with new water bottle, haversack, the machete based on the popular US M42, and a waterproof cape attached below the pack. This trooper wears the 1944 pattern 'Gaiters, Jungle', a modified copy of the US M38 canvas leggings – which US troops had since discarded – with russet-brown jungle boots. The leggings and leather boots were also soon to be discarded, and replaced by a high-leg jungle boot with canvas upper and rubber sole styled on the US M42; this type were not issued until after the war.

**H3: Captain, 1st Bn, Queen's Royal Regiment, 7th Indian Infantry Division; Bangkok, Thailand, January 1946**

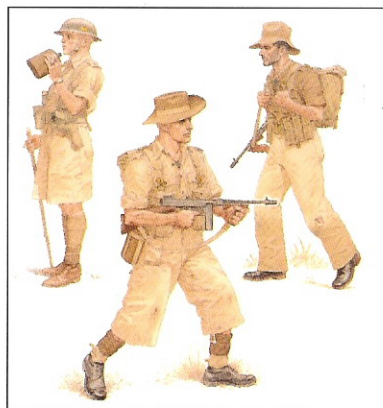
Mopping-up operations meant that little time was available for celebrating the end of the war. This division, on occupation duties in Thailand, held its Victory Parade only in January 1946. The disliked JG BD blouse once again became dress of the day, being smarter than the mixture of shirt types that had replaced it in the field; it was nonetheless referred to as 'overalls' by US servicemen who mocked the appearance of British troops still dressed in the inferior Indian kit. The troops knew that the superior 1944 uniform had been on issue since the summer of 1945; but it was only issued in the UK to troops who were being deployed to the Far East, and was not yet available in the quantities required for a wide-scale issue to troops still in theatre, so Indian-made clothing still prevailed. For their parade the 'dhoby wallahs' did their best for the 1st Queen's, starching and pressing their newly issued JG Battledress. Bush hats had been replaced by double-brim Gurkha hats worn with a nine-fold *pagri*; note the blue regimental fold, and the insignia on the right – a dark blue diamond with 'QUEEN'S' in a white arc on a red patch. Puttee tapes and web equipment were whitened, all metalwork highly polished, and boots 'bulled' overall. The old round sign of the 7th Indian Inf Div had by this time changed to a square, here in gold wire on black and retained by press studs. This company commander displays medal ribbons and, on his left shoulder, a blue regimental lanyard.



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