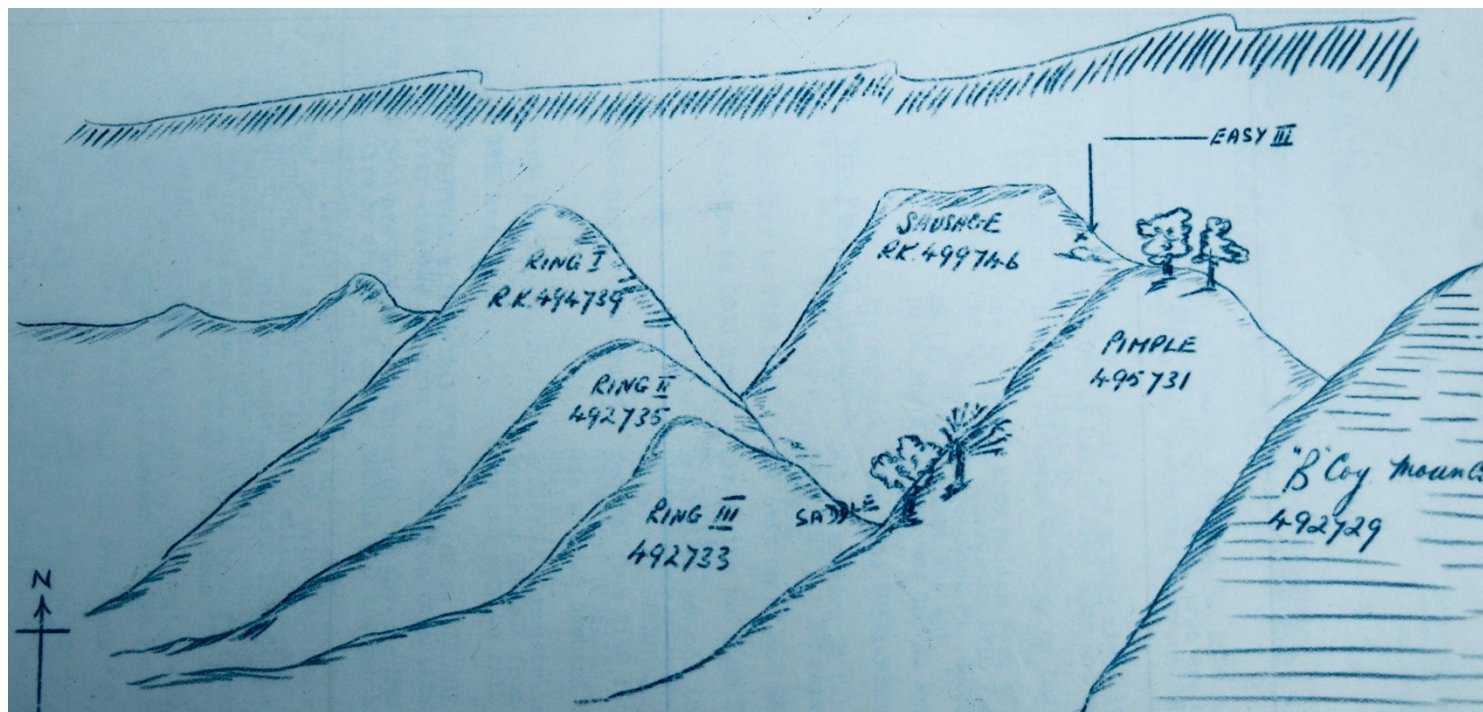


A HILL CODE-NAMED PIMPLE

(AND AN AMAZING STROKE OF GOOD FORTUNE)

Short WW2 reminiscences of Lt Murdo MacLeod DUNCAN

Edited by M.I. Duncan



“Dedicated to my family and to those who were not as lucky as I was and did not return.”

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Introduction

One night in March 1997, Murdo MacLeod DUNCAN decided to record his War Memories. This book is an account of the two 90-minute audio tapes Murdo recorded. As he alleged, the following is a personal account and the reminiscences of a junior officer who was not aware of the larger picture. It is therefore meant to be nothing more than a narrative of a brief period of Murdo's life and distillation of some of the exciting things that happened to him. The place names used have not been updated and as he announced them. Since Murdo thought that it was worthwhile to record these anecdotes, we hope that the readers do so too. Perhaps deliberately he rarely mentioned such things as his living conditions (apart from sleeping amongst scrubland or the pleasures of taking a bath), but it must have been under the grimmest of circumstances and one can imagine that the battle-hardened and confident enemy, the darkness and inhospitable terrain was often the source of fear and uncertainty for the soldiers. Moreover, apart from comments of when he had malaria himself, he did remark that there were as many soldiers going backwards for treatment as there were at the Front. The same certainly applied to the Japanese troops, as Murdo once discovered on a patrol.

Having obtained only part of the 2nd Suffolk's War Diaries, and tying them up with evidence wherever it was found, we can recreate the ambiance of period in April 1944 leading up to when Murdo was wounded. It should be noted that War Diaries (retyped at the end of the book, with a glossary, in case there is too much difficulty reading the originals) are daily entries, recording the activities of a unit and, although names are mentioned, they do not normally deal with the circumstances or fate of individual personnel but should assist researchers and historians.

Hopefully the tapes Murdo painstakingly made will give the reader the desire to find out more about this mostly forgotten war. He was invariably a conscientious person, before and after the War, but how many would twice read a ship's regulations of their Honeymoon night or defend his bathing party? Murdo wished to tell more anecdotes about Southern India for example, or his twenty years in the Army Cadet Force but, regretfully, these will never be known. However, when the missing part of the Suffolks War Diaries becomes available (October 1943 - end of February 1944), we can piece together some of the actions in the Arakan prior to March 1944 and where the heat was still intense, for the monsoon has just finished. The jungle had a particularly sinister atmosphere on first appearance, a factor not to be ignored and the 2 Suffolk was ordered to capture a series of features which were known to be strongly held.

Murdo had the hallmarks of a leader, he was bold and nothing would shake him, but it is a tragedy that he wasn't more explicit regarding the exact circumstances of when he was wounded, or the jungle training in October 1943, or the week's march to join 123 Brigade in the Arakan. Murdo's memory was a good one, but perhaps it was simply a lack of taping time left or simply his wish to keep the narrative humane. Clearly the family should have asked him more questions when he was still alive.

As Murdo highlighted, he was extremely lucky all through his army service for he could have found himself a prisoner in Rangoon in early 1942 had the ship S.S. Jalaqurda not make an about-turn when it did.

Murdo's family are also included as it gives the reader a background to where his inherited inner strength stemmed from.

Burma Star Association meeting:

I was prompted to speak at that Burma Star meeting after another member, a doctor who, with his wife, had been captured in Singapore, told us that one of his jobs once was to sample a cargo of cheese and was asked to do it by taking 10% sample. Ten per cent of fourteen tons! An absolute impossibility. I then, in my turn, told the company that I reckoned that I had a rather similar but much more difficult problem, even more insurmountable, and I then went on to talk as follows, more or less.

Pearl Harbour was, of course, December 1941, and I was with the 2nd Welch in Bangalore then, and even in February '42. And although there had been a lot of trouble, say, six months earlier in India over Ghandi's passive resistance and civil disobedience movement, I am sure that everyone knows of how up to 60 Battalions of Infantry were tied down with that. But anyway, February '42, in Bangalore, the Japanese, making their way up towards Rangoon, the Jap Fleet more or less unchallenged in the Bay of Bengal, and yet we in Bangalore, were largely on a peacetime footing. Our soccer team, all India Champions, were a thousand miles away on tour. On pukka nights, all the best silver, spread along a table about 15 yards long, was displayed, everything was pretty well perfect. Training, of course, but excellent barracks and, by the way, I know a lot about what I am about to say because I was the I.O., Intelligence Officer, and the Weapons Training Officer. IO and WTO and I had offices at either end of the barracks and often no-one could ever find me! Well, my Intelligence Section was made up of

the drummers, eh the pipers, no, the drummers, the brass band, the brass band I think were the pioneers, drummers were my Intelligence Section. But as this was peacetime, there was any amount of sport; there was snooker, there was dancing and, suddenly, one day, the Japs making for Rangoon as I say, one day a train came into the Columba station and we were told to get aboard. What a fuss because everything had to be wound up. At that time the battalion had been in India for about 30 years, so there were any number of troops who were married to Anglo-Indian girls.

Anyway, somehow or other, things were tidied up but of course we left a rear party and boarded the train. Some of the staff had a sweepstake on our destination, for a bit of a lark; put the name Bangalore on a slip of paper because there a quite a few Bangalores and there was quite a laugh about that. Well, end of February, it took us five days and six nights, or the other way about, to get to Calcutta where we boarded a pilgrim ship¹ whose hull wasn't any thicker than plywood. The Japs, very near Rangoon mind you.

On board, settled down as best we could, and the CO – Commanding Officer - sent for me. He said, "Duncan, I managed to get hold of a street plan of Rangoon I'd like you to make copies for each of O Group", the Order Group, and he handed me this wee map showing the main streets, and the cinemas and parks and such like. So, I took it away and cut out a dozen pieces of carded paper and then intervened with ordinary paper and got to work on the deck. I found that I couldn't manage very well because it was rather windy, so I marched into the wheel house, the bridge, where there

¹ In their regimental history book, The Welch Regiment say the ship was called the S.S. Jalaqurda

was a beautiful, solid mahogany table the width of the bridge, so I put my stuff down there, carefully, and began to trace. However, the wheel house was open-sided and there was still a bit of a draft, so I looked round and found a couple of pairs of dividers and I jammed them into the top corner the paper to keep everything steady and set to. A couple of minutes later, the First Mate, or some braided officer, came in, and blew his top because I was apparently making holes in their marvellous plain table where all their instruments were! I was beginning to argue with him when the CO sent for me again and the messenger said "The maps have arrived and they are down on the pier".

So I had to give up my business and go down to the pier. And there, believe it or not, our maps were being unloaded from two lorries. There were boxes and boxes, actually fifty-seven in all. I will never forget that number. Fifty-seven boxes of maps. Two and a half or three-foot square but only about twelve to fifteen inches high. Rather like tea chests but about fifteen inches high. Well, Intelligence Officer, of course, was always the Security Officer too. I had to lay them outside with my helpers and, taking the lids off, found that each box contained a different map. Fifty-seven different maps and five hundred copies of each! What on earth was I going to do? I went back to the CO and explained the problem and he said "Well Duncan, we'll have to have them." So, I started with my Intelligence Section taking the first top map out of the first box, the second map from the second box as so on, until I had a roll of fifty-seven maps, which we tied up. And then another roll of fifty-seven maps, and then another, until we made, I think, a dozen rolls. The company commanders refused to take them! Mind you they were

bigger than bedding rolls and they had their own kit and all sorts of things to carry. Wouldn't take them! So, I had to put these rolls into a cupboard on the ship and leave all the other maps wide open for anyone's inspection on the quay. Beautiful maps. Straight off the printing press. You see the trouble was that no-one seemed to know where we were going to land and these maps covered the whole of Burma. A few different scales; a lot of variation in the method of showing relief, quite a lot of course had the normal contour lines, brown contour lines and every fifth one a darker brown but there were hill shadings, tainting, hachuring, and by Jove these Burma hills, you know they ranged up to nineteen thousand feet. And they looked very dark and menacing with the hachuring.

The boat got steam up. Still, all I could hope for was that we would get some indication as to our disembarkation point and then I could perhaps have time to extract the relevant maps. However, steam-up, down the Hugli Delta and out into the Bay of Bengal. We didn't waste time of course. We got stuck into weapon training particularly. That Welch Regiment, which I said had been in India for a long time, had never seen Bren guns - it was only the drafts out from the UK who had handled Brens - so there was quite a bit of that weapon training and, typical of someone's army, perhaps Fred Karno's Army, not one of these Bren guns had its firing pin.² So, although we did a lot of dry drills, we had hoped to fire them into the sea at least, but that was out of the question. However, we were lucky enough, dead lucky, because on the 9th March I think was when Rangoon fell and our poor steamer turned about and steamed back to Calcutta, where we got on another train, might have been the same bleeding one, and headed south.

² In the book previously referred to, there is no mention of missing firing pins

And we eventually pulled in at Bangalore Station, the RSM won the sweep and there, waiting on the platform, waiting with open arms to receive us, talk about security, waiting to receive us with open arms, were our bearers whom we'd paid off and sacked, a fortnight before!

Black Watch Barracks (summer of 1939): Well, that was my story on the 12th of March this year, 1997, but if I am going to talk about the War, I may as well start at the beginning which was the early summer of 1939. Being twenty-one on the 1st of July I was one of four First Militia and, living in Fife, I was told to report to the Black Watch Depot in Perth. Now I was fortunate as you will hear, and very lucky throughout all my service and, as I had been in the university OCT – Officer Cadet Training - , I had some idea of drilling, of dressing and keeping my uniform and so on and it was that aspect which caught the eye of a corporal, who told a sergeant, who told an officer and an interview and within three months, sent down to England to an OCTU, Officer Cadet Training Unit.

Now, in Perth, it was quite a fine summer; a good summer in fact. But there is not a lot to remember about it. The sport, of course; played a lot of football and, one day, I learnt a lesson. Having been the opening bat for Varsity both before the War and, afterwards as a matter of fact, one day the orderly sergeant said "Anyone here played cricket?" And I, and a chap near me immediately jumped to attention. And he said "Right, down to the North Inch". It could have been the South Inch. One of the Inches. And there, he and I sat the whole blinking hot summer's day acting as scorers while the Black Watch officers played some other mob. And bad enough as

that was, maybe even worse, was the fact that all our mates, having done their day's parade and what not, washed and changed into civvies, walked out into the town, and we were still sitting there at 7 or 8 a clock at night, putting dots or wee figures depending on how many runs were scored off each ball. No, the lesson, none of you know it, never volunteer!

Still in the so-called sporting line, I was impressed, not impressed by but impressed into my platoon boxing team; mainly because I was the only one the proper weight for the light-weight division, under nine nine³, so into the platoon boxing competition. I won my first bout, and in the second round I met a good friend of mine. He was a lovely wee chap and I was able to hit him; God help me! Slammed into his face whilst he was crouching in front of me. And that was me into the final. I didn't see the other semi-final but I was told by my mates that I was going to be hammered because my opponent was not only a bit of a boxer but he was a real fighter. Fortunately for me, he sustained a bad cut in his eye in the semi-final and he scratched and so I became, and I have since claimed quite rightly to be, the undefeated lightweight champion of that Black Watch Militia. As a reward, I and the other winners, were given chits by the PRI, President of the Regimental Institute, to go to the canteen where they were exchanged for regimental ties. All the other militiamen wore black ties, we had the privilege of wearing the Black Watch regimental tie. Now further to that, a few of us went down to the South Inch one night where there were shows. Swings and so on; shooting galleries; roundabouts and a boxing booth. And there was no other person than Benny Lynch, ex-World Champion, offering

³ 135lbs...Ken Buchanan's weight

a fiver to anyone who could stand up to him for a round! And I didn't bother!

We were in the habit of getting an issue of a huge mug of coco and a big slab of cake every eleven o'clock. And we were disgusted when that issue, or ration, stopped dead, on the outbreak of war! My job, having been rushed down to the Forth Bridge, was to guard its northern approaches, above North Queensferry, because apparently, there were Irish labourers working in a quarry and therefore supposedly had access to explosives. And I distinctly remember looking down on the main road, the north-south road down to the ferry, for there was no bridge in those days, and seeing high-powered touring cars rushing south certainly with regular officers, and probably T.A. ones too, who had been up in the Highlands rushing south to join their units.

Those of you who know Perth will remember Kinnoull Hill. A lovely vantage point and there is a magnificent view down the valley of the River Tay. We were taken up there quite a lot because it was ideal country for target recognition and practice of fire orders. In those days, to give a fire order, you only had to remember the code word D.R.I.N.K.; D designation, designation of unit, what unit - R range - I indication of the target - N number of rounds to be fired and K the kind of fire – automatic, single shots, rapid perhaps. And one day our platoon sergeant asked "Anyone here knows what drink stands for?" and I was the only one that did! And from there on, if it hadn't been suggested previously, then from there on, my future was more or less assured.

OCTU Colchester (09/39-02/40):

And so, as I said earlier, towards the end of September I went down to join the 166 OCTU at Colchester. There was another one there, 164, which had one or two quite well-known men. As far as I was concerned the most famous was Peter Cranmer, an English rugger international, centre, whom I'd seen him as a boy at Murrayfield and played against him. Now Essex and Colchester, of course, are normally the coldest part of Britain and that winter of 39-40 was very cold indeed.

Commissioned to The Welch Regiment

However, got through the four months without too much trouble and then on the day of our commission, the 10th of February 1940 soon arrived. And one can imagine, I hope, the uproar when it was announced, "Murdo MacLeod Duncan" who of course had opted to go back to the Black Watch of course or any Highland regiment, but no, "Murdo MacLeod Duncan to The Welch Regiment"! So, back to Fife for a few days leave and, tragically, my uniform didn't arrive in time although I had been fitted for it, properly paid for it, and so I had to report to the Depot in Cardiff in my best civvy suit, which in those days was my father's Seaforth Highlanders kilt and my grandmother's, my own grandmother's tweed jacket and waistcoat. I was met by O.C. Depot, a Major who, as a Lieutenant-Colonel in Ireland I got to know, with "Why are you flaunting your national dress down here?" After a few days in Cardiff, four of us, three from the London Scottish and I, and we had known each other at OCTU you see and we remained good friends, were shifted to join the 4th Battalion in Ireland. It was a T.A. battalion. The 4th TA Battalion based in that well know Welsh Town of Llanelli, of The Welch Regiment in Banbridge Town, County Down.

4 Welch in Northern Ireland (02/40-mid 41)

I was allocated to B Company, which was in a huge old barn and the majority of our men were in old linen mills, with the machinery all removed. My company commander was away in France as a matter of fact having a look/see because this was a period known as the Phoney War. And he saw nothing really, came back and reported nothing; there wasn't much to say. In fact, our colonel called us all together one day, and this is an indication of the sort of thinking despite Hitler's Blitzkrieg and Poland and the earlier activities and the Spanish Civil War, he called us one day and said (Murdo attempts to imitate his posh accent) "Gentlemen, I don't know what to recommend if it's going to be a war, like The Great War, then it had better be Macintoshes, rubber oils so that you can rub off the mud of the trenches easily. If not, gabardines". God Almighty!

However, got stuck into training and it was pretty horrific mainly because that part of Ireland at least, covered in wee fields and thick hedges; they weren't terribly high but, if you were small, you'd have to go through five or six hedges in the space of a couple of hundred yards. Please note now that I was "P.B.I." Poor Bloody Infantry all my service. In order words, I never had a cushy staff job, or rolled in vehicles much. There is a new member of our golf club now, well he has been for two years now and, when he arrived, he said "Call me Colonel". He didn't say that to me. "Call me Colonel". And I had quite a shock but it turns out that he is a half-colonel, a lieutenant-colonel, in the Dental Corps! So that made me feel quite uppity. Nice enough chap and a delightful wee wife; Innes will remember her because she offered her husband's sword or sabre or something to cut his wedding cake.

I was reasonably happy in The Welch. I got on exceptionally well with the men, always have done, but I wasn't too keen on the officer class. T.A. as I said, largely, a few regulars, but largely T.A. who had been together for several years in annual camp and whatnot; solicitors, bankers, and so on. A bit clamish, but no problem with the men. And incidentally, I served for a while with the Royal Welch Fusiliers from Wrexham, Wales, and I found that the same thing applied there.

First meeting with Norah Preston

My next crucial date was the 1st of April. The day, in Scotland at least, when the children "hunt the gowk". I think I mentioned that I was commissioned on the 10th of February. Yes, the 10th of February. And it was the 10th of February 1917 when my parents were married. Well the 1st of April, after duty, I went to the pictures. I was a little bit late and the main feature had started. There was no usherette with a torch to show me to a seat, so I took the first empty one I came to. And as my eyes got accustomed to the half-light, I saw that I was sitting beside a girl of some sort. And to my horror, there was an empty row immediately beyond us. Totally empty. So, I felt that I had to apologise and she said "That's all right." Now and again, during the picture, I stole a look at her; admiring her profile or silhouette and I pretty well decided then to get hold of her at the end of the picture but she beat me to it because, while I had to stand to attention for the National Anthem, she scooted out! I followed as quickly as I could and was just managed to see her going down the hill of the main street, perhaps a hundred or a hundred and fifty yards ahead. I chased after her and I was lucky enough as it turned out, to catch up with her as she stopped at the door of a house and, while waiting for her knock to be answered, I had reached her side. When the door opened, I asked as politely as I could to

the owner of the house if I could come in. And he said "Certainly". I think they would probably had done to any soldier. And so, that is how I met one Norah Preston who was, assuredly, The Star of the County Down. (You can hear on the tape that he is a bit choked).

Now I will confess something which has never been mentioned to anyone before on this Earth. You see, there is something about me. I do some daft things at times. And that is maybe why I never quite hit it off with senior officers; even head-teachers were a little bit worried because they could never quite guarantee what I might do or say and, that night, before going to the pictures, I had insisted that my batman and I change greatcoats. Well, he was sensible, an oldish soldier, not to walk out in an officer's greatcoat, but I went to the picture house wearing a private soldier's greatcoat and Norah Preston, on that first meeting with me, didn't think that I was any other than a private in The Welch Regiment!

I always tell this story, or the previous story, of our meeting that it happened in the evening, well after twelve o'clock on the 1st of April and so there were no comebacks.

Norah was a smashing woman. I saw that from the very beginning. I don't say that she fell for me (laughs) and so, I daren't say, can't say that true love ran either smoothly or didn't run smoothly. In fact, we had a bit of a row after a fortnight and have no earthly recollection as to why, but I volunteered to join an independent company for Narvik, because the Germans had invaded Norway. And by the Grace of something or other, I was taken off that draft at the last minute. And two nights later, walking down Banbridge, I turned a corner and Norah and I came face-to-face! And so, we resumed our relationship.

Banbridge itself, fine little clean town with a very long wide main street. And the main road crosses the River Bann at the bottom and then a steepish hill through which traffic goes in a cutting; it's known as The Cut in fact; whereas pedestrians and shoppers go either side of The Cut and then over the bridge. Well, one day I was marching smartly across this wide street, swinging my cane, when around the corner at the bottom came three Dispatch Riders, and I was in the middle of the road. Two of them I could have stoked because I knew they would have gone either side of me these Welsh rascals, and they probably tried to brush me. However, nothing I could do. Well, I could have panicked! But no. I stopped dead. Brought my cane into my side, turned sideways to them and how they decided it I do not know, but two went behind me and the other across my front. I immediately set off for the far pavement, swinging my cane and my arms and neither glanced right nor left, and certainly not blaring at them as they roared up the hill. There were some women, presumably shoppers, standing on the pavement gaping at me.

I went to one or two interesting courses that year, 1940 still. One was an interpretation of aerial photographs at the fine little seaside resort of Bangor, County Down. I was the last officer to arrive there and found that the hotel which was booked, was totally occupied, so I was put up all by myself in the biggest hotel in the town. Could have been the Royal, I forget its name. I was all alone there. Norah came down for a day. Interpretation of aerial photos, a very interesting week indeed. Then later on that year I was sent to Bisley for a sniper's course and it is a small matter of history, a BIG important matter of history that, that Sunday, I went down to the nearby village of Woking to do some shopping; bought a copy of "Gone with the Wind" for Norah there; and that Sunday, the 15th of September marked the turning point if the Battle of Britain. For "friend" Goering sent

over his bombers and each bomber with five fighter escort to try and blast London into submission and the RAF out of the sky. So, the South-East, and Woking to a certain extent, fairly caught it that day. In fact, I was so worried, I curtailed my shopping and went back to the camp where I would be in company of other officers if any bombs fell on us (you can hear him chuckle). It was later claimed that a hundred and eighty-five aircraft, enemy aircraft, were shot down that day and, although that was shown to be an exaggeration, "friend" Goering never again attempted the like and, in fact, it meant that Heil Hitler would cancel his invasion plans thereafter.

Norah's family

Well Norah and I were going steady, as they say, during that summer and autumn of 1940 and until I was well accepted by her family. Grand family; parents, sister Lily and four brothers, although not all of them at home. Bertie was the oldest and he, and his son Robin whom you will know, Robin became the fourth generation of managers of the linen thread mill, not linen cloth of which there were plenty around, but linen thread. Bertie the oldest and Stanley, worked in the mill⁴. Sam, who was in a newspaper office had been in the British Territorial Army, went to camp in 1939 and never came home until after the war, like so many others. Walter, the youngest, was in a bank in Southern Ireland, and he came north at the outbreak of the War and joined the "Maritime Attacks". And of course, neither Sam nor Walter had any obligation to risk their lives and futures.

⁴ This would be F.W. Hayes and Co who built Milfort Terrace, Banbridge for their managers

Sam came through Dunkirk, last week of May, first week of June 1940 and I remember his embarrassment, he was a sergeant, when I insisted of carrying his suitcase down to the train on his return to his unit. But after all, I was in love with his sister! He had married Etta Dawson and the father of Pat and Noreen.

Now we decided, Norah and I decided, that we would get married at the beginning of 1941, actually the 17th January 1941 and, as my parents had never met her, we decided to go to Fife for our honeymoon. Perhaps I should have said that, prior to this, the Welch Regiment had been moved from Banbridge to Keady in County Armagh, a very quiet sleepy village only three miles from the Eire Border. Much of our work there was taken up digging a defensive line, the Bann Line, facing south because Southern Ireland, or Eire as it would be called, was a neutral country. It is well known that Dublin never had a blackout and that the German planes reputedly took their bearings from the lights of Dublin town.

Our wedding and honeymoon (01/41)

Most of the wedding arrangements fell upon Norah. Well, we were going to be married in Banbridge, in a little Baptist Church at the head of the town, and what a day that was because her parents were most respected people; Norah herself was extremely popular with the choir and whatnot, and then there were four rascally brothers who did their best to get me sozzled, and that was fairly easy because you see the Burns Laird steamer

Belfast to Glasgow didn't leave until ten p.m. so there was ample time for them to do their dirty work!

We all eventually got to the pier and the bottom of the gangway and, saying good-bye, Norah and I climbed aboard and down to our cabin, a double cabin of course. Norah eventually got into bed and I was about to join her and put the lights out when a knock came to the door. So, I said as politely as I could (shouts) "What is it?" "It is the Purser, sir. Sorry to disturb you but I have come to inform you that you are the only officer on board and so you are automatically O.C. Ship" – Officer Commanding Ship. "And you are supposed to sleep in cabin forty-three connected to the bridge by speaking tube." I said "Is it a double cabin?" "No sir". "Well then I am going to stay here then". "Very good sir" and I heard him walking away. Well, what a pickle that was! And I put the light back on for there were notices all around the place; on the back of the door, how to adjust your life jacket, fire arrangements, two sheets about regulations for troops, no smoking, that sort of thing. So, I read these troop regulations, read them twice, then put the light out again and got half into bed when there was another knock on the door! I said "What is it?" "It's the Purser again sir. Sorry to disturb you but I have just come to inform you that another officer has just arrived on board". Now, I had read the regulations carefully and I knew exactly what it was so I said to him "Rrrrrright make him ship's adjutant and tell him to report to me in the morning at breakfast how many submarines he had sunk." "Very good sir". And we were left undisturbed thereafter.

⁵ *Athenia* was the first UK ship to be sunk on the 3rd of September 1939 by Germany during World War II with 117 civilian passengers and crew killed.

It was pretty late the following morning before we went down to the saloon. The steamer was well up the Clyde on its way to the Broomielaw and on entry for breakfast I got the shock of my life because there was a chap in greyish uniform with a lot of braid, and wearing ribbons I'd never seen before, but he was obviously my ship's adjutant. And after speaking to him for a bit I found out that he was a Czechoslovakian Air Force pilot who could hardly speak any English. Perhaps as a parenthesis of that, because none of my children was born before 1949 and so they may not know there was a fair amount of submarine activity there, the *Athenia*⁵ for instance, was sunk right at the beginning of the War bringing a boatload of children to Canada and convoys used to take troops abroad. Glasgow itself and Clydebank, highly industrialised areas which copped it, especially Clydebank bombing, so there might well have been a stray German submarine for the Czechoslovakian Air Force pilot to deal with.

Back from our honeymoon, Norah and I were lucky enough to get a very nice little flat in Keady and life through February, March and April went very well indeed. And these of course are winter months, rigger months, and despite the fact that the Welch were great rigger enthusiasts and produced many marvellous players, I was the regular stand-off. Now rigger comes into the following story.

A shot in the air

With C Company and one day we were out on an exercise. There was live firing and, as a result, when we marched back into the billet, between the high walls of our linen mill, the company commander halted us, turned us around in line, I stepped to his rear and then he gave the usual order for inspection port arms. Now this company commander had been a solicitor in Civvy Street and he probably went back to his practice. He was a red-faced, erraticable creator if ever there was one! And he had a tremendous command of language. So, when he gave the order to ease springs, whereby every soldier had to work his bolt backwards and forwards thereby ejecting a bullet that is already in the chamber, up the spout, and emptying his magazine and then coming down to attention or stand at ease. When he gave that order a shot went up into the air! Well, that company commander went WILD! Danced! He was literally dancing on the spot and what a turn of abuse, he first attacked the young fella. The only phrase I remember him using was “you syphilitic toad”.

Now I don't know quite what it was, but that company commander had it in for me. No question about that. At the time we had a shortage of officers, people going on courses and whatnot and I was the only other officer in the company. There could well have been three more, one for each platoon, but the nominal platoon commanders were two sergeants and a lance-sergeant. It was our practice, a lance-sergeant and I, to go round once a week checking the weapons, checking the rifles and bolts with their serial numbers to see that everything was all right. And we did this by recording everything in a huge ledger, the Arms History Book, which lay in the company office all week, was picked up and returned there until the next inspection probably a week hence. One day I was sent by the Adjutant to see our offices, told to report there and, in going in, there was the C.O. –

Commanding Officer - sitting behind his desk, the second in command on his right, another Major standing on his left, the Adjutant hovering in the background and out of the corner of my eye I saw my company commander! I was obviously on a charge of some sort! And the C.O. read it out. I was accused of consistently ending out secret documents to junior NCOs. Secret documents? Junior NCOs? Is a lance-sergeant a junior NCO? Now there was nothing I could say in my defence. I was utterly, I was absolutely dumbfunnit and the C.O. then said “Duncan, seven days CB” – confined to barracks - I was allowed back home to tell Norah that I wouldn't be back for a while and collect my pyjamas, razor and so on and for the next 5 or 6 days I didn't see her at all.

Now the following day, the Saturday, we had an important rucker match in Belfast against North of Ireland and I was, of course, the automatic stand-off. On Friday night, I slipped home. Up to Belfast the following day in trucks and cars and I played a pretty poor game and, on the way back, we all stopped off at a country pub and a company commander, the same rascal who had been out and behind lines in the phony war said to the Colonel, “Oh sir, you shouldn't have let Murdo home last night!” Sneaky. Well, to give him credit, the C.O. said nothing about it, then or at any other time. So, you see I, having been a private soldier in Perth for seven or eight weeks, and then an acting, unpaid, and unwanted lance-corporal for some more weeks, and four months as an officer cadet without incurring any punishment, served my CB as an officer. And once later, latish 1942, I fell foul of another C.O. and TOTALLY innocent, I suffered a similar sentence. But God knows when I can get on to that.

But surely nobody with any spirit would have stood for that sort of thing so I immediately asked for an inter-company transfer. It wasn't granted. So, I talked the whole business over with Norah and, although it probably meant

our splitting up so soon after getting married, I told the C.O. that I wanted to be sent back to the Depot in Cardiff to the pool of officers where I might have landed up in the Middle East or out in India.

Depot and aerodrome in Norfolk (04/41)

As it happened, I was sent to Norfolk to a young soldiers' battalion, 70th Young Soldiers Battalion⁶, young men mostly from remand homes who at that time were guarding one of the many aerodromes in the east. We were eight miles from Thetford and we were allowed out one night in seven. I was only out once because I was there for only twelve days. It was an augmented company; there were four platoons, one on each side of this rectangular aerodrome. In the middle of each, two barrack blocks with a kitchen unit. We, in our little platoon area had, of course, been issued with rifles, I had a 38 pistol with six rounds, there was stacks and stacks of ammo, thirty thousand rounds of ammunition for our 303s but it happened to be for Winchester 300s. We had a Bofors gun, in a circular concrete emplacement so we could have a 360° traverse but we had nothing for which to fire from the Bofors. All there was in May '41, my 38 and six rounds, if they came my way. Well, our company commander was one of the many NCOs who gained rapid advancement at the beginning of the War. So, he was a Major and one of the most useless people I have ever come across. He was so useless, and ignorant, that he was known throughout the regiment as F.A. Jones.

One day he organised a cross-country run, flat country, although fences and one or two gates were incorporated. Now I had never run a cross-country in my life, four and a half miles; don't think I ever did more than half a mile at school, at one time; but I was pretty fit and was used to jogging about. Always jogged, even in my ammunition boots, so, I entered. Was encouraged to enter. And we set off on the appointed day. After two and a half or three miles, there was a smallish group of us, and testing about a couple of times with spurts, I decided that I could beat any of them on the run-in. And so, on the last half-mile there was only four of us, queuing up on the home straight and I breasted the tape having won on the last one hundred yards to a certain amount of cheering from that company commander and his office staff, and one or two other hangers-on who hadn't entered. The aerodrome was run by exiled Poles who were flying Wellingtons, and who were as made as hatters. They lived and dined in the big house and we joined them there for meals. Well, that night, on-going up to the Mess to dine; I looked at the company notice board and there were the details of the cross-country and there was my name, Lieutenant Duncan..... second! I was placed second! I didn't bother about eating that night. I couldn't find the company commander so I tackled him the next day and said "What the hell do you mean by putting me second?" I didn't even give him his rank, his name or F.A. or anything. "What do you mean by putting me second?" And he replied "Oh, I wanted to encourage the troops". Now, he didn't like my attitude and, unknown to me, he rang up the C.O. whose Headquarters were in Biggleswade, near Bedford. He came roaring down in his car, interviewed me and I told him the story with

⁶ 70th (Young Soldiers) Battalion: Wikipedia says those volunteers who were too young to join the Army

a few more F.A.s probably, and within a couple of hours, I was on a train and back to the Depot in Cardiff, where I joined a draft of officers who were due to reinforce the 2nd Battalion in India.

2 Welch, Bombay (05/41)

I don't actually remember getting any embarkation leave, but I got Norah over from Ireland to Cardiff, and had two or three days together before we had to part. She actually went back up to Ladybank, because it was in those days travel restrictions were very much in force between Britain and Northern Ireland and there was no knowing of when she'd see my parents again had she not taken that opportunity. I and the other officers and a batch of troops eventually entrained, went up to Glasgow, on to the tail of the bank where we boarded our liner, whose name I just cannot remember⁷. And after a voyage of about five weeks, the highlights being, I suppose, anchoring off Freetown, Sierra Leone, five days ashore in Durban and eventually reached Bombay.

Now with regard to that voyage, one thing that pleased me very much was winning through, and there was a lot of troops aboard, winning through to the final of the table tennis competition, where I met an English county player. Now it is no exaggeration to say that I have never before, nor afterwards, met a player who could beat me. Certainly, you could take games off me but not sets and, amazingly when I met this county player the boat seemed to roll when it was my time to return and so I was able to

⁷ It was one of the ships belonging to Convoy WS.7x which arrived in Bombay on Monday, 5th May 1944. The ship, the Strathmore, had 3,478 troops aboard.

smash him. And I held that man to twenty-one – sixteen, both games. Very pleased at that.

Our evenings on board were spent in the big saloon drinking, playing tombola, housey-housey, or bingo as it is called nowadays, and I well remember one night when a young second lieutenant, may or may not have too much to drink, got up and started telling jokes. One of them was about a colonel's wife and a second lieutenant's wife. They were apparently walking down the bazaar one day and passed an entry and a very strong whiff came out of it and the colonel's wife said "My God! That place smells like a brothel". The second-lieutenant's wife replied "I am afraid I do not know what a brothel smells like"! Well, immediately a colonel sitting near me jumped up and said "A second lieutenant was boasting to his colonel about how many times he had it on the bridal night. And the colonel replied 'I am afraid that I only had it once but then my wife wasn't used to it'!"

Landed in Bombay, went straight to Colaba Barracks where the Welch were internal security. Been there thirty years. At the end of May '41, perfectly peaceful. The C.O. used to ride about on a white charger and anyone seeing that beast out of the corner of his eye no matter how far away, saluted it. I was very quickly sent to a company up-country. It was run by one of these ex-sergeant-majors, now a major, Major Miller, and seeing his surname was Miller, he was nicknamed Dusty Miller.

First attack of malaria

Joined B Company at Deolali, and I may as well say now that I later visited Deolali as a patient in hospital. I well remember one night at two in the morning, the night nurse came round. She saw me awake so she took my temperature, shook the thermometer, put it back in again, looked at it and said "Are you feeling all right?" And I certainly did, I felt wonderful. Perfect! And said "Why?" and she said "because you are 106.2!" And that scared me so much because I felt grand, that I crawled weakly out of bed, got my wife's photographs, and back in. I must say that I once later achieved that pretty high temperature and I was so annoyed when neither hospital would allow me to have the temperature charts for future references. Incidentally too, in this room today, where I am recording, I can see two of the actual photos of Norah that I had with me that night. Where the third one went, I do not know, but I remember it well and I have a replica of it because Sharon with her pencil has made enlargements of all three.

I never really got a chance to see Bombay because of this move to Deolali and I always regret that I didn't arrive there on a previous convoy because just when I got there our Welch Regiment Soccer Team contested and won the All India final⁸. Had I been acclimatised, I am quite certain that I would have been a member of that team for, in those days, every team of whatever sort had to have a commissioned officer in its ranks for disciplinary purposes. No matter how helpless the best officer was, he had to be put in the team. In this particular instance an officer, whom I got to

know quite well, was shoved in goal, but I would almost certainly have been there may be out on the right wing.

Battalion moves to Bombay (06/41-05/42)

Well only a fortnight in Deolali and then we moved south for the whole battalion, evacuated Bombay and went down to Bangalore. A wonderful city. A marvellous climate. I saw a wonderful city, certainly the European part, excellent barracks, very extensive married quarters. It was in dry country, no jungle there. I was put up in a maharajah's palace along with a lot of other junior Welch officers. Somehow or another, I arrived rather late and found that they had teamed up in pairs in various bedrooms they had booked and I was left in the big central bedroom; a sort of hexagonal bedroom with the others around about it. And there were five, maybe seven doors leading into my bedroom and through it to the bathroom, which was attached to my bedroom. The amount of traffic backwards and forwards was shocking. One day I was lying quietly on my bed having a doze when they started up with a tremendous amount of shouting and banging. I stuck it for a minute or two then I got up to see what was going on and there were a couple of Welch officers, who had actually been policemen before the war, throwing gym shoes up at a bat hurtling around the ceiling. I watched them for a while. They hadn't a hope in Hell of hitting it. So, I said, "Give me a gym shoe" and I studied the flight of that bat, and when it came around one corner, I aimed at the opposite corner! Got it! Flattened it against the ceiling and it dropped dead. What thanks did I get? That night

⁸ 1940 and the only time they were champions

when I pulled back my top sheet, there was the dead bat nestling in the middle of my mattress.

Sport played a large part of our lives and that year passed off pretty peacefully in Bangalore although Congress activity was fairly prevalent on the Madras side. Pearl Harbour and Christmas came and went. I became the I.O. and Weapons' Officer and then in late February came that move to Calcutta which I endeavoured to describe to the Burma Star Association.

[Battalion moves eastwards to near Conjeeverum \(05/42-05/43\)](#)

Then, possibly April, perhaps May, April '42 we'll say, the battalion moved eastwards towards the coast leaving behind a small nucleus whose jobs included overseeing our property, liaising with the married families who were quite happy there, while we swapped our comfortable quarters for tents in scrubland near the large and important Hindu city of Conjeeverum, between Bangalore and Madras. There a quite a few good stories to account about this period.

I was actually O.C. – Officer Commanding - “D” Company for there was such a shortage of officers and, one night in our Mess tent, a bell tent, I was sitting with my only other officer, ex-Guardsman, and very typically Guardsman and Englishman and a moustache to boot; sitting there in the evening with a hurricane lamp, two camp chairs, a rickety camp table; well not so quite rickety to my surprise as you'll hear in a minute, sitting in our singlets, when the guardsman, the ex-guardsman, suddenly screamed and jumped up on his chair and then up on to the table, pointing to the door! Well, there was no door, it was a canvas door, open doorway. I turned round and there, in the door, about to come in, possibly even having come

in a foot, was a huge tarantula spider! Screaming his head off. I, quietly got up, did a semi-circle of the tent to a corner where I picked up a tent mallet and, God help me, I brought it down on that poor beast's body. Smashed to smithereens. That body had been the size of a soup plate, and its legs, one of which I was able to extract and stretch, was about nine inches long. But there, that's your Guardsman for you!

Another night, another officer, sitting there in the dark, and the telephone rang, picked it up and was told that such and such a soldier had gone berserk and we were to put our lights out. There had been some shooting which I couldn't account for. I poked my head out, which I don't suppose I should have done, but there was nothing to be seen. Ten minutes later, the phone went again and on picking it up I was told that everything was now okay and that that soldier had been hit by a pickle. Puckle, I suppose, which was a sort of zinc container for water. And I said “a packal”. Well, it turned out to be a pickle.

A new C.O. came to us. We didn't know anything about him. English again and had the thinnest legs I've ever seen. We tended to laugh at first but then he told us all one day of how he had won many a bottle of champagne through the thinness of his legs, which was a First War wound legacy.

[Ordered to volunteer for Burma \(05/43\)](#)

One morning as O.C. D Company, I, lying in the bed, perhaps five past seven, when the flap opened and in came the C.O. without any warning, and without any invitation, and he looked at me and said “Come to the Order Room when you are dressed.” I went there in the course of the morning and the Adjutant marched me in. The C.O. “Why were you in bed after reveille?” Why were you in bed after reveille (repeats question to himself).

I was able to explain that as Acting Company Commander, the Sergeant-Major and I had made the details the night before and there were no parades until after breakfast, until O Nine Hundred (09:00). That wasn't good enough. He said "Duncan, for seven days you will turn out the guard at twenty-two hundred hours, twenty-four hundred hours – I never knew there was such a time, I thought we went from 23:59 to 00:01, anyway – 22, 24, 02 Hundred hours, 04 Hundred hours and you will report to the Adjutant fully dressed at 06 Hundred hours." Well, I said, "Let me speak" and he said "Get out!" The Adjutant, who was a good friend of mine, flicked his head in the manner of Joe Baker or Jimmy McGrory would do, and I went out. He followed me after a short time and he said to me "Murdo, why were you in bed after reveille?" "Why not?" he said, "you should have said why not!" And right enough, I had never seen any regulations with regards to that, certainly not for officers and CERTAINLY not on active service! So, I said "I want an interview with the brigadier". He replied, "It won't do you any good." So, it was my turn to say "Why not?" "Because the C.O. is the acting brigadier"!

So, for the next two days and nights, I carried out my normal duties and turned out that guard as per instructions. Fortunately for me, the whole battalion went out on a seven-day exercise and I remember very little about it except that I had some trouble with white ants and I had brought my record player and stack of 78 records. Put them in the handy Bren Gun carrier and, what with the heat of India itself and the heat from the engine probably, and the metal round about, when I came back, those records

were unplayable. They were domed like that soup plate I mentioned earlier.

Now although there are one or two aspects of Southern India I would have liked to have mentioned, I may say that as regards to that C.O., a few days later, the Adjutant came to me, he put his arm around my shoulder, and he said to me "Murdo, you are ordered to volunteer for Burma!" And so, I went up to the Arakan Peninsula and joined the Royal Welch Fusiliers (RWF) around June 1943 who, at that time, were literally fighting for their lives⁹.

Pests and trials of having malaria

I am wondering if people reading all this are satisfied of the approach of it; the content. I am sure you adults don't need to be told numerous religions, and customs and caste systems and so which pervaded pre-independent India. But I really am wondering if they aren't at all disappointed. After all, this is about MY war. And after twenty pages, not a shot has been fired in anger! Not a shot. By the way, regarding that shot which went up into the air, and on the command "ease springs", I don't think, I will have to check up again, I do not think that I closed the bolt and pressed the trigger, as one must do before coming down. And not a single Jap has put in a suicidal charge.

You see, faintly conscious of how Norah came back from New Zealand in 1980, she'd been taken by Sharon to a primary school and a class quizzed her with questions like "Have you seen the Loch Ness Monster?" "Did you

⁹ On the 18th March 1943 alone, the Battalion lost 13 Officers and 150 Other Ranks at the Battle of Donbaik

know Henry VIIIth?” Well, similarly, how many Japs did I kill? Was there a lot of blood? Were you frightened ever?” Well, I’m going to apologise to them, right now, for I am going to talk for the moment about pets, or pests. In Southern India there were of course lots of monkeys of various sorts and the wee monkeys, wee pye-dog, puppies, very endearing animals and I kept some of each at one point or another. With the regards to the pests though, no need to mention mosquitos, they which gave I and thousands and thousands of others malaria. And I had that malaria five or six times, right up until 1950. And it was a nuisance. I remember once going back and, for anyone who has had malaria and take it again they know it. But the hospital authorities always have to do the blood tests. A simple pinprick in the thumb, and then a smear, and it would be either positive or negative. I remember one time, after perhaps the fourth perhaps, fourth visit to a hospital, I took it again. But they could not get a positive. I had perhaps eighteen or nineteen separate pinpricks and got to the stage that when I saw the nurse coming down the ward towards me, I almost wanted to SCREAM! For a simple pinprick. Leaches, ants, any number of ants of all sorts and if there was food, there were even more ants. We regularly used to stand tables in tins of kerosene or paraffin was it? I forget. White ants were an entirely different matter and they were a nuisance in Southern India. They didn’t often build those big towers such as one sees in the African Savanah but we came across quite a long mound, rather like the traffic calmers, or sleeping policemen, as we have in our streets in Edinburgh now, and they were very persistent of course. You’d flatten these once a day in a camp site, and the white ants would begin to build up again straight away.

I spent one very wet night in one of the very little Indian temples out in the bush. Solid stone building, like a wee flat square, like an outdoor coal cellar,

hardly a crack in the walls and, when I came out in the morning a huge scorpion came with me, in fact I think it preceded me. Another occasion later on when we had moved down to the Madras coast and my job, along with other officers, took it in turn, was to patrol a few miles of coast with two or three men. The officer was armed with a very light pistol which he was supposed to fire in the air if he saw anything suspicious! God, the Japs would have done what they liked! And our army would have been helpless because the roads would have been choc-a-bloc with refugees. Anyway, this particular night, I sent the men off in two different directions and lay down on the sand. Beautiful slopping beach, the tide far out, if there was a tide, but a lovely gently sloping beach, and I lay down. You may not know it but even if you dig a hollow for your hips, sand is still damned hard stuff to lie on. It didn’t stop me from dozing off, fractionally, let’s say, I dozed off fractionally, with my rifle on my side, I woke with a start and there, a foot, eighteen inches from my boots was a huge crab. I slowly, quietly as I could, took hold of the rifle and raised it a fraction, and then jabbed at the crab with the butt, but I was short by about six inches. And that crab, I’ve never seen anything like it, it took off for the sea like a racehorse. NEVER see anything so fast in my life!

Divisional Battle school at Chingleput

Pye-dogs were a pest, but even more so in Burma. I’ll hold that for a moment because I went to the Divisional Battle School at a place called Chingleput, south of Madras. And it may be of some interest to you to learn that once in Stranraer, the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Dr Neville Davidson, who my father knew in Aberdeen and who, in fact, christened a brother of mine, the middle child of five, but who had died in infancy and after whom my Innes is named, told us, the

assembled school, that the ruffles around his neck and around his wrists were made by the native women in Chingleput. But in Southern India it was still, say, September 1942 and Dagger Division¹⁰ were set up at Chingleput. The procedure of course was to call for volunteer officers to staff it, the madder the better, and one of our chaps Dick, Christian name Dick, quite a good friend of mine, and ideally suited for the job, joined the staff. And then when they were ready, they took batches of officers from the units around about in order to immune them, to get them used to the sound of shell fire, machine-gun bursts and so on.

Well, I went there twice and the first time, all officers I said, but the first exercise I was appointed as a section commander and had to attack a rather tricky little hill along a valley. And as we approached it, I saw Dick who, as a member of staff, therefore an umpire, I saw Dick ahead of me so I said to the chaps "Right come on boys" and started to move forward and suddenly was a tremendous BANG and Dick fell. I went up and knelt down beside him and he was covered in blood, and his eyes, I don't know what way his eyes were, but he was dead. I looked up and another staff officer said "Leave him. Get the Hell out of here" and so off I went with my men and eventually captured the hill. Well that certainly upset me. That evening, after washing and changing, I went to the Mess tent. I'd had, admittedly, a drink or two to steady myself, went late into the Mess tent and there were only two empty seats. I took one and I knew who the other one was for. Started to eat the first course and then I felt that empty chair being pulled out and somebody sitting in it. And when I turned round it was this rascal Dick! It

was all part of the set-up. At the crucial moment he had burst a French letter of goat's blood and splattered it all over him. Realism they called it.

Well, the next day, we were all taken up to a hillside overlooking across a valley to another hill. We weren't in trees but we were closely grouped and the Chief Instructor wielding a stick put us in the picture. There was going to be firing, shell bursts, rifle, machine-gun fire, and every now and again across the valley, tiggers would appear, and we'd have to take particular note of them. So, the proceedings started and I could hear bullets whizzing past and, of course, you will know that if you can hear a bullet, it has already gone past you. And suddenly one officer's haversack fell off, or half fell off his shoulder, and that was because a bullet had cut through the brass D of his haversack. And immediately another officer put his hand to his head and he had been nicked as neat as you like, like a razor blade, a long red thin line just above his ear on his skull and, at that, the Chief Instructor said "Gentlemen, I think that we had better lie down". And we did. The next day, I was on the opposite side of that valley; another batch of VIPs came to observe, and I heard all about from one of them, a fellow officer from the same regiment. They had been put in the picture. They knew what to expect and suddenly, a wee figure rose out of the ground and started to zig-zag up the hill as hard as it could go and at the top, it dived into cover. Well, that wee figure was actually me! I had been nominated as platoon runner for the day and I was with the platoon commander, the platoon Sergeant Major, in a trench when that poor Sergeant-Major copped it. A bullet, through from one shoulder to the other. It must have gone through his spine and he died instantaneously and the platoon commander sent

¹⁰ 17th Indian Division because of its badge

me, the runner, up the hill to raise the flag for cease-firing. But that is typical of battle schools. Instructors, sergeants and sergeant-majors, good shots admittedly, but too liable to take a chance when officers were on the receiving end, giving them the fright of their lives. Another casualty like that, although it didn't involve me at all, and that battle school closed down.

The Division, 19th Indian, did not see action until the middle of 1944 when the Japanese were being swept southwards to annihilation. I, as I say, had volunteered, so to speak, to go up and help reinforce the RWF's in the Arakan in the summer of 1943.

Description of Arakan, Burma, in comparison with Scotland

So, what about Burma. Well, it's an utterly hopeless task to describe either it, and I was a geography teacher of sorts, or the various campaigns. After all, as a country it is a good deal bigger than France and by area it could hold twenty-six Scotlands, or 10 New Zealands. Fortunately, my war, and after all that is what I have entitled the tapes, simple account but personal of course, and as accurate as my memory serves. So my war, except for the last four weeks of action, was waged in the coastal plain in the Arakan, in a region which one could describe as maybe a 60 mile wide wedge at Chittagong and tapering to a hundred or two hundred yards down near the strategic town of Akyab. Chittagong was again in the News in mid-1997 with that cyclone and associated tidal waves because thousands and thousands of people have died throughout the years and, you may

remember, or you may have read recently, that over 138,000 died in a 1991 cyclone. That casualty figure surely tells us very clearly the nature of the coastal plain that we initially occupied and were then driven back, we advanced again say in March or April 1943 with the RWF, retreated once more, advanced again, beginning of 1944 when I was with the 2nd Suffolks, and that position was held, tenuously held, successfully held in, for instance, the Admin Box, which I will eventually come to.

So that front stabilised and eventually pushed southwards when the Japs had their final retreat. But we missed that because our division was flown north to help the Jap threat to Imphal, Kohima and India. The flat coastal plain, mangrove swamps, tidal creeks, numerous choungs, river valleys, sometimes dry and sometimes torrents depending on season, paddy fields, small hills rising to two thousand feet in the Mayu Range, densely jungle right to the very top and my units were always on the seaward side of that crest on the coastal plain. Other divisions on the east side were linked up with West Africans¹¹ in the Kalidan Valley. I think that I will have to provide a map for this. That's an idea, an accompanying map. But let me try and illustrate with reference to Scotland whose outline you all know. Oh remember, Burma could hold twenty-six Scotlands but all the to-ing and fro-ing mentioned minutes ago occurred in an area; this is by comparison, another wedge stretching from Loch Lomond down to Wigtownshire and the Mayu Range running eastwards of Glasgow down to Newton Stewart and the objective, always the objective of these advances was Akyab, Akyab Island, Akyab town, and Akyab airstrips from which Rangoon could be bombed. Akyab would be where the Mull of Galloway Lighthouse is

¹¹ 81st West African division

situated. Yes, I quite like that illustration and you could possibly find Akyab on a decent sized map although dear knows the names of that sub-continent have all been changed. Yes, because perhaps only on a pretty large-scaled map, certainly no atlas would help, but on a larger scaled map, my Arakan is just a little finger jutting south and down that coast; you'd eventually turn a corner, left hand down, and reach Rangoon. Whispers: "When's he going to stop talking and start shooting"!!!!

As far as operations against the Japs were concerned, you can easily imagine the difficulties of fighting in that climate, even in the dry season; the associated diseases, the jungle, occasional forays from the Japs of course, but probably one aspect which you wouldn't consider at all, and it was our biggest handicap, and that was a complete lack of roads. I am exaggerating, there was one road. There was one, what you might call a road across the range from Maungdaw to Calcutta. There were one or two other tracks but that was a great handicap for an army which had a lot of humans to transport. And so, before any advances, having planned, new roads had to be made. Certainly, roads that would take light vehicles. The men, hundreds and hundreds of natives, old men, women and children were employed sprinkling water on the dusty roads in order to keep them damp and using any container they could possibly get hold of syrup tins, beers bottles and what not. Mules were more commonly used but, admittedly, that shocking line of communications improved a lot by the time I started down to join the 1st RWF who were on their way back from the front! Lucky again, you see.

¹² The Allies were worried that Japan would use it as a naval base

Joined 1 Royal Welch Fusiliers (05/43)

Because they were part of an all-British 2nd Division - Crosskeys Division because of their badge - which had been trained in joint operations and part of which had taken Madagascar from the French¹² and now, four of their battalions were in the Arakan, and they'd been held up at a place called Donbiak. In fact, my lot, and the Royal Scots in particular, suffered badly in a place slightly north called Indin and actually their Brigade headquarters had been overrun. The Brigadier, Brigadier Cavendish and his staff, all killed. And I would not be a bit surprised to learn that even at this late date, there are arguments as to whether they had been shot by the Japs or they had succumbed to subsequent artillery fire from our own forces trying to help the situation¹³. So, four of us new officer reinforcements, joined the orderly retreat and eventually all the way back to India. I did actually get a bullet through, or a bullet hole in my bayonet scabbard, but that's not a lot for people to cheer about.

On that withdrawal, I remember two things very distinctly. Once when we were pretty well back, we'd been relieved, we'd gone through the relief forces, and I was detailed to take a bathing party. And what a pleasure that was, to get into the water and get all the dirt and mud of the slit trenches and foxholes wiped and washed away from us. So, I led this party down towards the beach and came to a barrier manned by Indian troops, who weren't going to let us through although it was the shortest way. I just barged through. And did the same on the way back but this time their officer was ready for us and he came charging out, waving his stick. As soon as he spoke, I knew that he was a Scotsman. Waving his stick like mad, so I

¹³ See www.worcestershireregiment.com

stepped to the side and waved my men on and I courted him. I grabbed hold of his stick and said 'Here, steady on.' Then I apologised in the first place, then pointed out to him that these men, these men marching away and not even looking back to see how I was getting on, had been badly knocked about at Indin and they surely deserved to get to bath without any further annoyance, then asked him where he came from and he said Dunoon. He was a former pupil of Dunoon Grammar and he knew a lot of the Islay pupils and he seemed to have been especially fond of one redhead, Jean Whitford, a lovely, well I don't know whether she was lovely because when I knew her, I was only twelve, and she about fifteen or sixteen, but I know that Murdo MacPherson remembers her very well. So, there you are. We shook hands heartedly, I saluted his sentry, and then doubled up the road to re-join my men.

We soon got back to Chittagong, which is just in India, and boarded a lovely Dutch ferryboat. Conditions were perfect on board especially as you might imagine having been down at the front. They had good food, plenty of beer, and that beer was served in lovely glass tankards. Tankards have handles to them you know. Ah marvellous! But as we were all lined up to go ashore at Calcutta, the C.O. over the tannoy announced that there were three hundred tankards missing from the bar and nobody, no-one was going to get on shore until they were returned Well, my God.....A minister's son.....and I slipped my prize out of my pack and left it on a shelf.... And I have no idea how many of these were recovered, but we eventually got off the boat, on to a train and to our barracks away in Ahmednagar in the middle of India.

At that barracks, still with the RWF of course, we were reinforced once more; a new C.O. and new Second-in-Command, new equipment. Apart from a lot of soccer there; I played for Scotland versus England, Royal Scots

versus RWF, and the Royal Scots had a grand left wing, Frank Joyner who had played for Raith Rovers; doesn't sound much nowadays, but he was a fine player. That new C.O. and his friend the second-in-command, they came from the same battalion, went through all the accounts and found that the Officers' Mess was in deficit, called a meeting and explained that they could not understand the civilian type method of accounting that had been kept in the past and, to make up the deficit, they recommended, they strongly recommended, i.e. they very well ordered that every officer forfeited one day's pay.

Again there, one day in the marvellous billets, I came in, undid my belt and so on to be comfortable, and there was a beetle flying around the room. It eventually landed on my table, or desk and, when its wings were folded, it looked exactly like, just about the size of a black golf ball. So, I watched it on the table for a wee bit and then I heard my roommate coming down the veranda. I knew his step perfectly. He'd been a lecturer at Dublin University; very efficient, very smart, but I had some doubts about his sense of humour. So, I got my own enamel mug out quickly and put it over the beetle and rested my hand on the top and I just feel it trying to move. Well, my friend, whom I could name, came in, threw his cap and cane on the bed and sat down opposite me and started telling me all about the things he had done that day. When he was well on, I made a pretence of scratching my head and moved my hand from the mug and it started to walk across the table! What a scream that fellow gave and pushed his chair back and ran out onto the veranda! I dare say he made a great success of university life, if he survived the war. I had to say good-bye to that officer and the RWF, possibly in August or September 1943, because I was sent up with a batch of other people to help reinforce the 2nd Suffolks, again in the Arakan, and again on that coastal plain.

Joined 2 Suffolks (10/43-04/44)

Now the 2nd Suffolks were part of the 5th Indian Division, whereas 2nd Division were all British – nine white battalions, one of the best in the whole army. 5th Indian Division was composed of three white battalions and six Indian ones. So, within the 5th Indian Division, there was 123 Brigade which were 2nd Suffolks, a battalion of the Dogras and a battalion of Punjabis. May as well add that the other two white battalions were the King's Own Royal West Kent (4th Queens) and the 2nd West Yorks, and that one of the three brigadiers was Geoffrey Evans, later Lieutenant-General Sir Geoffrey Evans who wrote a lot on the Western Desert and of the Burma War. Now how can I possibly explain the complicated and very fluid, now that's a word I will possibly have to explain, very fluid manoeuvres over the next few months. I have already tried to indicate that the distances were not great but conditions appalling.

We were actually XV Corps – in all 46,000 men - see Battle Organisation Chart - with Lieutenant-General Sir Philipp Christison in command of us and he was a wonderful old chap to live to be over a hundred. I attended birthday parties, memorial services for him last year and the unveiling of a plaque in his memory in St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral in Edinburgh; the Roman Catholic Cathedral in the East End of Edinburgh is also called St Mary's. Now General Christison's plan was for the 5th and 7th Indian Divisions to advance southwards, and you will remember that the only decent road led west-east. There was another by the way, there was another track across the Mayu Range. It was the Ngakyedauk Pass, you need to write that down, which we all called the Okeydoke Pass. Well, it was just a track; very dangerous, very precipitous, but it was gradually improved to become a mule track and then a jeep track. So, plan was 7th Indian Division to move southwards on the east side of that two-thousand-

foot high Mayu Range and our 5th Indian Division to move down the seaward side. That West-East road from Maungdaw to Buthidaung, and through the two tunnels, was our first main objective. The Japanese of course had turned it into very strong positions.

At that time, about mid-December, we had a visit from the Supreme Commander, Lord Louis Mountbatten who came down and visited even the most forward troops and shook hands with everybody. Fine, handsome guy of course, and he'd gather people around and stand on the bonnet of a jeep and talked. And he raised our moral considerably. I dare say it was the same speech every time and, one joke I remember distinctly, quite like it, and what he said that the British Radio in reporting night raids would sometimes unfortunately have to say ten of our bombers are missing, or three of our bombers are missing or none of our bombers are missing but the German radio would say, and this is the joke remember, would say after a heavy bombing raid, "One of our cities is missing".

B Company, 2 Suffolks

I joined B Company of the Suffolks and the O.C. was so typically English that he used to call his Platoon Commanders to his headquarters by means of a hunting horn. We are spread out admittedly over an area of about 300 yards square but that was typical of him. My platoon, to start with, were on a neat little hill only about thirty feet high but with some trees reaching to a greater height. A good position but painfully obvious because it was sticking up among the paddy fields. One night, a party of Japanese came up the river, the Naf River, and they fired a shot or two here and a few more there. We heard it of course and we stood to with every man at his emergency post and an arrangement which we did automatically at dawn and dusk every day, these being the most dangerous times although

Japanese attacks came in with wild shouting and shrieking at any hour of the night. Well, we stood to and almost immediately stood down because a Punjabi battalion behind us fired and we afterwards heard it reputedly fired thirteen hundred rounds of 303 and eighty mortar bombs and all we could do was to cower in our trenches.

Two days later when I was walking around visiting my day sentries one of them pointed out a large black pye-dog, three hundred, three fifty yards away. Now, they were an absolute pest because night movement was almost impossible without one of them barking and others took it up across the countryside. So, we had no compunction at all shooting them if and when we got the chance. That dog was a perfect target and I had a good rifle which I had zeroed carefully and, incidentally, Innes told me the last time he was in Bosnia he hadn't zeroed his rifle although they had plenty of ammunition and he might well have need to use his weapon. I took the average, I thought it was past three hundred, took the average distance of three or four chaps around me and made it three hundred, took careful aim and hit the bank on which that dog was standing, hit it right below its tummy. It gave one yelp and set off across the fields to the nearest village and I fired four more shots at it and missed every time! Five minutes later the phone went and it was the Punjabi battalion and they said "Please, very much firing. What is the trouble?" after their display of a couple of nights before!

Attack on Hill 124

All our units were carrying out lots of patrols, day and night, trying to determine the exact positions of the enemy, trying to estimate their strength and I will very shortly try to describe a couple of patrols I was on and which I will never forget for very good reasons. Meanwhile the high

hiedyins decided to launch the grandest offensive on the last day of December 1943 and again my lot were lucky because it was the Royal West Kents' brigade with Rajputs who were sent to clear a Hill 124. Hill 124, rising only to that height above the paddy fields. Imagine that! A hill only one hundred and twenty foot high and yet it held up that advance for eight days.

And that small hill held out for so long because of excellent Jap positioning and heavy fire and an incredible bunker system; timber and earth, and so effective our side thought they were made of concrete. I watched dive-bombers and tanks failing to clear them and then the Jap readiness to bring down artillery and mortar fire on their own positions if our troops and infantry got too close. Of course, the Japs would have fired a very light signal then dived underground and our chaps would be caught out in the open.

Jungle description

Perhaps I should try and clarify the term jungle as it applied to much of Burma and certainly to our part of the Arakan. I fear I may disappoint some young listeners. Nothing like the Amazon Jungle, or a tropical jungle. On our maps it was shown whitish, white jungle we called it, and it was composed of, and I don't know what the botanical term is, it was very thick shrub, perhaps about six to ten feet high and, although one could always see the sky and distances, if you were above these bushes, you could quite often patrolling, or marching, take two or three right angled compass bearings to be sure of maintaining your direct line. There was also a lot of bamboo on the hills and that was an absolute pest. Once you bent it to get through, it sprang back and trapped your pack. As I said, the jungle went all the way up to the top of that Mayu Range, and there were always

arguments amongst the Staff Officers as to whether our 7th Indian Division for instance, others troops too, could eventually and actually advance along the spine of the hills. Well enough of that. Time for a bit of excitement, what, and perhaps comic relief.

Slept amongst that scrub land and tents and other bivouacs were more common amongst headquarters staff and, of course, the medical people had to have proper accommodation. But I for one slept under the bushes and, one morning, I awoke and there was a snake immediately above me. The nearest branch was about two foot above and there was the snake lying along it. As carefully and as quietly, of course I couldn't have been too quiet for a snake, I rolled out of my blanket and got on my knees. I was fully dressed obviously, got on my knees, drew my bayonet and the snake watching me with his beady eyes, its tongue flicking out and in like mad, and that was the only movement it made when it watched me raising the bayonet above its body. Now I couldn't get a decent slash at it because of the other branches but I deliberately chose a spot, six inches behind its head, saying to myself that I would get it, whichever way it went. I then brought that bayonet done as hard and as fast as I could and I hit the branch. The snake wet into reverse in a flash and then glided forward beautifully, wonderful movement, and slid away out of sight. Now I dare say, well it was about three feet long I reckon, not as nearly as fat as a beer can or a Coke can, I dare say that it was perfectly harmless and I know that was a stupid thing to do.

36-hour patrol

Just after that, my company was ordered to attack a particular hill over 700 foot high¹⁴. It was to be an evening attack so the company moved forward by platoons the afternoon, hid up, and our own group climbed to a higher well wooded mound, lay down, and listening to the company commander's plan and orders. "We must get up that hill. We must get up that hill". Suddenly there was a distant "poop" and the company commander yelled "Get down!" We were flat on our bellies of course, and a couple of seconds later there was a tremendous bang to our right, and the company commander yelled "Back to your platoons and get out of here!" Some firing came our way as we re-joined our platoons where we, at last I, and my sergeant and section commanders had a quick discussion – "You must get up that hill."

Well, that was perfectly clear and it was playing on my mind, so I led the platoon forward along a dry, stream bed, found a perfect place to lie up, and then took my batman/runner, Casey from Dungannon, and cautiously eased forward towards the original observation point. There were a number of empty cases; brass bullet cases lying around so we moved up the hill more, slowly, and then suddenly froze for there was somebody at the top. Lying flat, his boots facing me. I saw at once that he was a British soldier, and after observing him for a minute, decided that he was either dead or asleep. It was the former. He was a guerrilla platoon sentry and he had caught the full blast of that mortar bomb and must have died instantaneously for he was lying there, his Bren gun still slung over his shoulder. Now with the evidence that the Japs had been around and might

¹⁴ It could have been a hill code-named "Bambou"

still be in the vicinity, I decided that that body, or gun, might have been booby-trapped. Perhaps I should have taken the chance and immobilised the Bren, I had certainly no intentions of carrying him back to our lines so, I left everything as it was and back down the hill to the deeper shadows and had a rest. Back-to-back, and rifles ready across our knees.

After about half an hour we set off back to re-join our platoon. Came to the exact spot and they weren't there! Disappeared! Without trace! But where too? And why? I afterwards learnt that in the general shambles, the guerrilla platoon, in retiring to our own lines, spotted my platoon and the officer ordered them to follow him back to camp. There I learnt that he had reported everything correct, all his men back safe and unharmed and all weapons intact. So much for us, the platoon officers. How my company commander explained to the C.O. the aborting of the mission I just do not know.

Well Casey and I, absolutely stuck, set off for our lines. It was now dark and we had great difficulty. It was only a question of a quarter of a mile to go; did it with much effort and, in fact, in climbing up to our positions of the last hundred feet or so, we had to stop because grenades were being thrown down at us. Understandably perhaps because our morale was not all that high, especially that of Indians, not only them but British troops, any noise at night was liable to bring reprisals and apparently there were in that area, it was jungle after all, although I never actually saw any, wee bears. I don't mean baby bears, species, maybe like koalas I don't know, bears, but anyway, any movement at all and any strange noise was liable to alert the whole front. So, we dropped further down the hill and waited till daybreak. When climbing once more we were recognised for what we were.

I went straight to the C.O. - Lt-Col H.R. Hopking - which was a mistake. I should have gone to my platoon where I'd sent Casey and found out the whole story. However, reported to the C.O. and told him of the guerrilla platoon private and the Bren gun and he said "Well done, Duncan". And that, I thought, was that. Back to the company and the company commander had very little to say except the C.O. had approved of his action. Now, five days later, the C.O. sent for me again and said to me "Duncan, I want you to take out a 36-hour patrol. Go out at night, observe to whole of the next day and come back the following night. Take as few men as you like". Well, my goodness. There were no, admittedly, continuous Front Lines, but the Japs were only a couple of hundred yards away. 36 hours! Perhaps the C.O. had been impressed by what I had done before or perhaps he wanted to get rid of me once and for all.

Well now, if I can bring in Rose Ann, daughter in law, because she has told me Adrian swears that I am frightened of nothing. Well, I don't know about that. I certainly wouldn't like to and, in fact, I would not walk around the rear end of a horse because I've seen them kick. There was a girl living beside us in Islay, pretty girl, but she was sort of hunchback because she, as a child, had been kicked by a horse and she was lucky that the stable door was open because she went straight threw it. I don't know, but after that C.O. dismissed me, I was worried enough to go to the M.O. - Medical Officer - and get my ears syringed. "36 hours. Take as few men as you like". Very sensible indeed.

I put the matter to Casey, my batman runner; we were good friends, we used to argue as to whose wife was the prettiest. Ah, no, no? I'm talking rubbish. Rubbish! That was Hunter in Bathgate in 1945 back in this country. Not Casey. Casey from Dungannon, good friends, and of course I was married to an Irish woman. I dare say that brought us together a bit closer.

So, I put the matter to Casey and told him that I'd like him to come with me. He was a good shot. Anyway, he and I teamed up again once more, went out one night, found a very reasonable position, observed the whole of the next day and saw practically nothing. A couple of Japs. Of course, we couldn't see what was going on the reverse side of the hill. But there was nothing really to speak of. Nothing to report on and we came back the following night without any difficulty and reported "Negative" although I don't think that term was used in those days.

Sam Hackett

There is now a gap, a void in my knowledge of what went on at that front because I took malaria again and was sent back, only a matter of a hundred miles or so. At the being of the War, there were hardly any precautions against the taking of malaria. Those who had it, we were given quinine, by Jove it made your insides clean and a barley sugar sweet¹⁵ and you could go back a thousand miles or more. There were almost as many people going backwards and forwards from hospital as there were at the front. So this time I went back only about a hundred miles and, on recovery, I spent the night in an officer's rest house in Chittagong. And that night I walked out of the front door, lovely summer evening, the sea fairly clear and there silhouetted against this night were a pair of legs that I would have recognised anywhere. You see, at boarding school, eight or nine years

¹⁵ Because the quinine tasted bitter and caused diarrhea

¹⁶ Ernest Edward Hackett is on the Roll of Honour of Emmanuel College, Cambridge,
College Notes: Came up in 1931 to study Classics and History. BA 1934.

before, four or five single teachers were living in the big house with the boys. We were accustomed to watch and follow their movements along the corridors and here, in front of me now, a pair of bandy legs, and a stocky body, shock of fair hair. Unmistakeable! That chap heard me approach and when he turned around I saw he was a Lieutenant, I was a Captain, and I said, "Mister Hackett, Sir"Poor Sam, as decent a chap as you could ever wish to see and he was killed not long afterwards¹⁶.

FIRE! (a bush fire)

I just remembered, and I should have mentioned it earlier, that before catching that malaria, one day there was a fair amount of Jap shelling, which didn't often happen, and we were quite amused to find that the shells not only were landing short, but not much of a bang, no terrain damage, and what sort of shells they were using or not, I do not know but, very soon afterwards, the bush, scrubland, went on fire to a width of about 60 or 70 yards. And as it was obviously coming towards our lines, our booby-traps, wiring, we didn't have a lot of wire actually, and slit trenches, we had to get out and fight it. And there you had the extraordinary spectacle of 40 or 50 white men, stripped to the waist, running about and beating out these flames. Extraordinary sight and a perfect target and the Japanese fired not one other shoot or shell.

Military Service: Lieutenant King's Own Royal Regiment (Lancaster), attached 1st Battalion West Yorks Regiment Died 12 March 1944 whilst serving with 17th Division (India) in fighting around Tiddim, the beginning of the Battle of Imphal.

Admin Box Battle

While I was briefly in hospital, all sorts of Jap attacks and British withdrawals were circulating and, on my way south, after meeting Sam Hackett, there was definitely something drastic had happened for the sky was full of Dakotas and some hills, formally jungle to the very top, were bare of trees and brown, although the stumps were visible. What had happened was, the Jap's main plan to cross the Chindwin River and aim for Imphal, Kohima, eventually India, was about to take place and a smaller force in the Arakan was to attack, ahead of our planned attack just 4 days before 5th and 7th Indian Divisions were to move. The Japs stuck to their usual strategies of deep encirclement, subsequent infiltration which had been so successful throughout South East Asia. They quickly overran 7th Indian Division headquarters, with General Messervy, and he got captured but lost his hat. No longer able to communicate, let alone control his units, he eventually managed to make his way down to 15th Corps Headquarters in what became to be known as the Administrative Box. Or a Box, or the Admin Box. I have also heard it referred to as the Okeydoke Box.

Here in an area of about twelve hundred yards square I suppose, composed of paddy fields and small hills and here had been stocked all our ammunitions, petrol, rations, everything necessary for our advance. Into this area were collected, or were called in, various Headquarter troops, clerks, signallers, engineers, mule carriers, hardly fighting men but it also included our 9th Brigade with the West Yorks, some artillery and anti-aircraft guns and, most of important of all as it transpired, a squadron of Lee tanks manned by the 25 Dragoons. In fact, it has been said that the box was so crowded that it was practically impossible for the Japs not to hit their target, be it man, mules, petrol or ammunition dump. What a blessing that the Japs never had any really big guns, or anti-tank guns, and the Jap

Air Force was quickly chased away. Completely surrounded, and day and night subject to fierce attacks, this Admin Box for the very first time ever was supplied from the air. And that was the Dakotas that I'd seen, so they were able to stand their ground and eventually forced the Japs to abandon their efforts, leaving 5,000 dead.

Mind you, just to mention one or two contrasting events. Without anti-tank guns as I say, the Japs were obliged, as it happened further North, to send in three or four troops, Japs suicide chaps, with grenades against the tanks and there was a Jap who picked up that General's hat and wore it. He was killed in a subsequent attack and the hat was returned to its owner. There was one night, 7th or 8th of February and the Japs got as far as the hospital and killed four doctors and 30 wounded in the bed were bayoneted.

The Admin Box Battle was the turning point in our war. It was the first time that a sizeable Japanese force had been beaten and it showed that its troops just stood firm, even although their lines of communication were cut and, incidentally, this was also shortly going to happen on a much bigger scale up North at Imphal. A turning point, the command of the air, then the supposed invincible enemy to be beaten, immensely raised the moral of all our troops. As for the Suffolks and the 5th Indian Division, of course the Jap's failure to wipe out 7th Indian Division meant that their next plan collapsed and I then I did more digging and patrolling.

On my very last patrol in the Arakan¹⁷, I went out one night with two men. We didn't know what to expect of course, so we had a bullet up the spout, and we had our safety catches forward. We were climbing up a rather steep, stony path with dark bushes on either side and, just as I came to a sharp bend, there was a blinding flash and a colossal bang right in front of me! And I thought "I'm dead. I'm dead". Felt no pain. Turned around and there was one man spread-eagled on the path, arms and legs out, and I thought "My God, what a mess". No signs of the other fella for he had taken a header into the bushes. Well, before two or three seconds I realised that I was pressing a trigger and it was I who had fired the shot and I can only suggest that my foot, having slipped that there was a little extra pressure on the trigger. So, I went down on this chap on the path and buried my face in his chest. Not to listen for his heartbeat but to smother my laughter and to assure him that everything was all right. And he didn't want to get up, so I had a look for the other guy whose feet were up and his head was down in a ditch and tried to pull him up but failed, and had to get the first fellow and the pair of us hauled him out by the legs. But they didn't see the funny side of it at all! But of course, that one shot would have alerted both fronts, the whole area, and so the last part of the story, and homeward journey, were taken much more slowly, and much more cautiously.

123 Brigade flown to Imphal (19/03/44)

The Japanese threat in the North developed quickly in March and so it was out of the question that the last reserves there had been committed to

¹⁷ According to the Suffolks' War Diaries, it was the 1st March 1944

ferry reinforcements up from the Arakan in the normal manner. But thanks to the insistence of Lord Louis Mountbatten, who borrowed 20 Dakotas; American crewed Dakotas, which were being used to carry supplies over The Hump for the Chinese; thanks to them, our 5th Indian Division was able to fly up¹⁸ there and it is on records that some units, in action in the Arakan, were within 24 hours back in action on the Imphal Front. We had to do a lead of course in Arakan and I well remember the last we had when our relieving unit, the 8th Bn Yorks & Lancs; absolutely spotless, 100% fit, 100% up to strength, took over our position and tried to crowd into the fox holes which were dug for about half the number. However, we withdrew, had a 100 or 110 mile journey by truck up to the airfield at Dohazari and then on to the Dakotas. Men, vehicles, guns, mules the first time ever a whole division had been flown off and it was a magnificent piece of Staff work as it was reckoned that it could only have been done with lots and lots of practice.

Kohima

Now, our 123 Brigade were the first to fly North to Imphal, the capital of Manipur State, with a Maharajah of its own. A great plain, 20 miles by 30 and 2,600 feet above sea level and Imphal, with that plain, surrounded by higher hills up to 9,000 feet. I certainly myself was on a hill at 4,500 feet. Well, on arrival at Imphal from the airdrome, we were put into trucks and driven the 80 or so miles north to Kohima where we occupied the Naga Hospital. My company were in a nurses' quarters, Indian nurses certainly,

¹⁸ Flights started on 19th March and lasted ten days. 123 Brigade was the first to go and certainly Murdo's first time in a plane.

shouldn't say that because their accommodation was exceptionally poor, wee square stone walls, completely infested with rats. But at least we had a roof above our heads. That was a blessing and you can imagine our disgust, anger when, after less than a week, we were put back into the trucks and taken back to Imphal. Yet once again, we were the lucky ones because only hours afterwards, the Japs cut that road, the only road from India to Imphal, which was in a state of siege and, for the next 88 days, over twelve weeks, all logistics between Imphal and India had to be done by air.

A few days later, the Japs in considerable strength besieged Kohima and a small garrison only, including our Royal West Kents, were trapped and, for a fortnight desperate, often hand to hand fighting, day and night, took place until 2nd Division from the North was able to break the line and lift the siege. But even that was just the end of the siege. The battle for Kohima lasted another couple of months, these fanatical Japs holding on to their strong points on the various ridges. Probably the most publicised incident of that battle for Kohima was the D.C.'s Bungalow and tennis court. Deputy Commissioner. I've seen it as District Commissioner one tends to say, but the Deputy Commissioner's tennis court across the width of which, both sides were hurling grenades at each other. As close as that. Well, so long was that battle so intense, so great the fire power that, at the end of it all with its pop-marked walls and ruined buildings, shattered, leafless trees, churned up earth, I read that it looked more like a First World War battlefield than any other in Burma.

Imphal

Japs got within about ten miles of Imphal, with its Headquarters, vital supply dumps and airfields. And our division guarded it to the North and the East. Now one hill dominated the northern part and it was called

Nungshigum. Not actually a hill but a four-mile-long ridge, several peaks rising to thirty-seven hundred. Now remember the base of that peak would be about 2,600 above sea level. So up to thirty-seven hundred and very steep near the summit. The Japs took it but couldn't be allowed to stay on it and, after a couple of failed attempts, a full-scale attack was planned. Now, the Suffolks and I were about 4 miles away across the paddy fields and we heard, we didn't see, we heard an awful lot. First the Vengeance dive-bombers came along, and then machine-gunning, Hurri-bombers and then the mass artillery of 5th Indian Division all softened the Japs up. Then our Dogras, climbing up behind tanks, although with the steepness, the tanks could only go in low gear at 1 mile and hour. But the hill was finally cleared although every tank commander, for they had to observe from their turrets, every tank commander and infantry officer was either killed or wounded in the taking of the hill. Overwhelming strength and firepower. But much earlier, the Japanese Chief-of-Staff decided no tank could climb such hills so they hadn't taken any anti-tank guns.

From our positions, we carried out many patrols eastwards into the hills. One I was on, picked up a lot of Japanese money but nothing else to be seen there so, we got back down onto the plain and headed straight for our lives across the paddy fields. The Iril River ran along this. Now you couldn't possible find this on a map but was important to that area. I had five men, there was no danger at all, so we went on the home straight, dead straight for our lines, and came to the river and crossed it. Down muddy banks, wading across, there wasn't really any current, the water was only up to slightly more than waist height, waist depth for me, up steepish muddy banks again and, do you know, we had to cross that river six times in about a mile and it almost killed us. And to make matters worse, three of our light tanks appeared from goodness knows where about two hundred yards to

our left, going in the same direction and they kept level with us the fools!
And so, as happened, drew some artillery enemy fire.

Led my platoon and a dawn attack up on a conical hill and it looked very dark and forbidding in the half light. However, got up to the top without a single shot being fired and within about thirty seconds I wirelessed back asking for permission to vacate the hill because we were ankle deep in diarrhoea and that was the state that these poor Japs, or maybe dysentery, had got.

Easter Sunday 1944

A few days later, and by the way, I ask you if you're firing at the enemy, can you be sure you've killed someone, in case they killed you. Can you be sure even if you saw them falling? Well, two days later I had to be sure because a Jap, only about the width of the room, ten yards away perhaps, came at me so I had to be sure of getting him. And to this day, I can still see the surprise and agonised look on his face. He was ahead of others but my men accounted for them, three of them, afterwards. This incident occurred near hill 4057 from which we'd seen the attack on Nungshigum.

Saturday, 15th April 1944

I was ordered to take over a completely new position on a rounded mole, topped with some trees. So, we had to start digging in again and it was practically solid rock. I had some Gurkhas with me, I don't know why, but they were soon burrowing down with their entrenching tools. I did what I could and got down maybe twelve or fifteen inches, with one or two rests I admit, and sat in my new slit trench trying it out. Very comfortable, I was

in a bath, I could rest elbows and forearms on the level ground, so I sat there looking round.

Gurkhas still burrowing away, some other Suffolks doing what they could, some had given up, one soldier obviously writing a letter and of course there had been no firing of any sort from either side. It was peaceful. So, I turned around as best I could, sat down facing the other way, looking in that direction, when BANG! A mortar bomb hit the tree above me and I felt my left leg go. What excitement and what digging thereafter!

The stretcher bearers excited as well, had to treat a casualty, not too messy a casualty at that, although no real need for me to point out that that mortar had come just seconds, say fifteen seconds earlier, the piece of metal would have come down somewhere around my right ribs. One of the stretcher-bearers asked me if I could waggle my toes, and I could, and he said "well so your leg isn't broken anyway". My tibia smashed. After a bit of an argument because I didn't think it would hinder me too much, I handed over the platoon, said cheerio to the chaps and then began a very painful descent of the hill on my bottom holding my gammy leg up as best I could.

And down there, an even more painful journey standing on the back of a truck while it belted across the dried paddy fields and associated bunds to the casualty clearing station. From there, perhaps three days to when I was comfortably in a hospital in India and subsequently downgraded from A1 and that was the end of my active service in the Burma War.

Now this actually happened on the 15th of April 1944 for Norah received a War Office telegram 10 days later saying Lieutenant Duncan had been

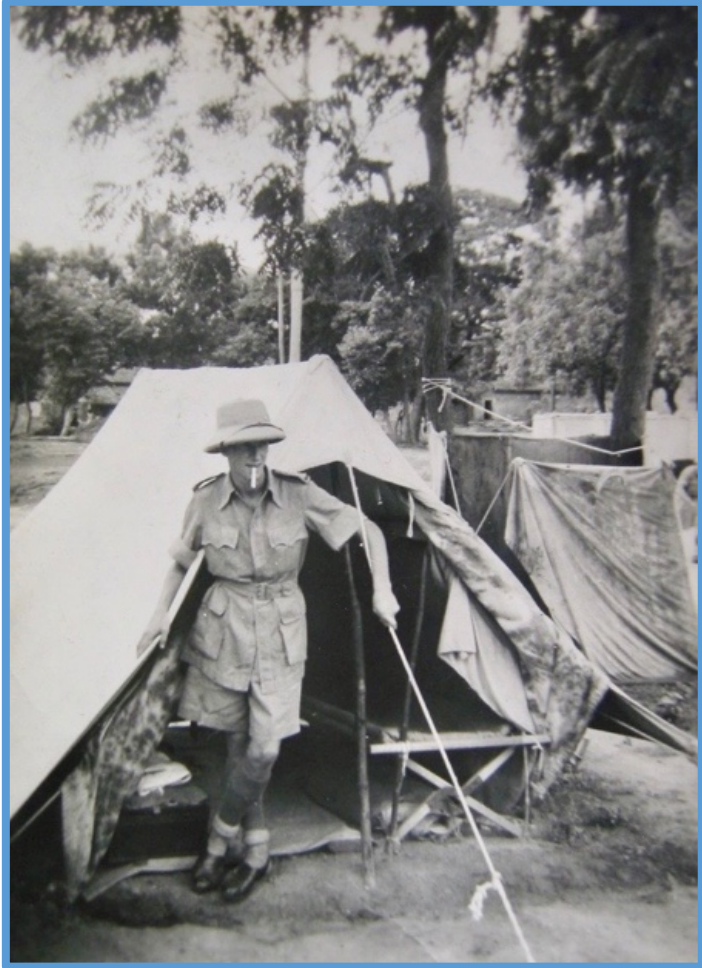
wounded and so on, and she kept it, and it is still in our photographic album.



Above: Murdo's quarters in the requisitioned palace and room marked with a X.



Murdo in Bangalore 1941-2 and probably after a first attack of malaria.



Left: Murdo in perhaps Conjeeverum 1942-3. Above: When Murdo joined the 1st Royal Welch Fusiliers

Charges to pay _____ s. _____ d. RECEIVED

POST OFFICE TELEGRAM

No. 10 OFFICE STAMP

Prefix. Time handed in. Office of Origin and Service Instructions. Words.

7.40 P.m. 6.50 Liverpool 52

From 87 To BANBRIDGE TELEGRAPHS

(Priority cc) Mrs. S. M. Duncan 10 Hillfort Ave. Banbridge, Co. Down N. Ireland.

Report received from India that Lieut H Mack Duncan Welch Regt serving with Suffolk Regt was wounded in Burma on 15th April 1944 stop The Army Council

For free repetition of doubtful words telephone "TELEGRAMS ENQUIRY" or call with this form at office of delivery. Other enquiries should be accompanied by this form and if possible, the envelope B or C

Charges to pay _____ s. _____ d. RECEIVED

POST OFFICE TELEGRAM

No. OFFICE STAMP

Prefix. Time handed in. Office of Origin and Service Instructions. Words.

From To BANBRIDGE TELEGRAPHS

express sympathy stop letter follows shortly stop Under Secretary of State for War =

For free repetition of doubtful words telephone "TELEGRAMS ENQUIRY" or call with this form at office of delivery. Other enquiries should be accompanied by this form and if possible, the envelope B or C

Write Army Records Office, Bourne Ave, Hayes Blue UVE4

Telegram: Murdo's handwriting at foot of telegram received ten days after he had been evacuated

BE MADE UP TO AND FOR SATURDAY IN EACH WEEK. Army Form W-3008. (Page 1.) ORIGINAL (Modified for India.)

FIELD RETURN OF OFFICERS OTHER THAN VICEROY'S COMMISSIONED OFFICERS.

Suffolk (Unit.)

W.B. No. 1/28-U.1

Part A.—STRENGTH, SURPLUS OR REINFORCEMENTS REQUIRED.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|--|---|---------------------------|---|
| Ranks. | Posted strength counting against authorised establishment (excluding attached). | Surplus to Establishment. | Reinforcements required (i.e., deficit on establishment.) |
| (a)* | | | |
| (a)* | | | |
| (a)* | | | |
| 1 Lieut.-Colonels | 1 | | |
| 5 Major | 5 | | |
| 9 Captains | 7 | | 2 |
| 16 Lieutenants | 10 | | 6 |
| 2nd Lieutenants | 4 | | 2 |
| 1 Quartermasters | 1 | | |
| Departmental Officers, Assistant Ordnance Mechanical Engineers | | | |
| TOTALS | (b) 28 | | 4 |

(a) Insert detail of higher ranks as necessary (e.g., Major-General, Brigadier, etc.)

(b) Consists of Brit. Ser. 28 Br. I. A. K. C. I. Os. D. Os. and I. C. Os.

Part B.—PARTICULARS OF OFFICERS JOINED OR QUITTED DURING WEEK.

Officers JOINED during week.

| Rank. | Name. | Corps. | Date | Cause. |
|-------|-------|--------|------|--------|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

Officers QUITTED during week.

| Rank. | Name. | Corps. | Date | Cause. |
|-------|---------------|---------|---------|---------------------|
| Lieut | Lawrence H.P. | Suffolk | 14-4-44 | Admta 45 Ind Rd 4th |
| " | Duncan M.M. | " | 15-4-44 | do |
| 2/Lt | Gilbert P.M. | " | 15-4-44 | do |

Part C.—DESCRIPTION OF OFFICERS WHOSE RETURN TO THE UNIT IS PARTICULARLY REQUESTED.

| Rank. | Name and Initials. | Corps. | Remarks (e.g., present whereabouts, if known). |
|-------|--------------------|---------|--|
| Lieut | Glover C.W.S. | Suffolk | Off B.S.R.C., Deal |
| | | | |
| | | | |

Evacuation: Murdo was admitted first of all to the 43rd Indian Field Ambulance area along with two other officers

War Diary 6th, 7th & 8th April: Mile Stone (M.S.) 12.5 was a village called Sejang or Seijang to the East of Pimple. The Japanese starting attacking B Company at around 5 o'clock in the afternoon on April 8th 1944 and which lasted until about 1 am the following morning.

SECRET.

WAR DIARY
FOR APRIL 1944.

Army Form C-2119
Page 3.

Instructions regarding War Diaries and Intelligence Summaries are contained in F. S. Regs, Vol. I
Titled pages will be prepared in manuscript.
Bn HQ location 83 L N/W 1" / 483712

INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY.
(Erase heading not required.)

2nd Bn The Suffolk Regiment.
VOL IV.

| Hour, Date, Place. | Summary of Events and Information. | Remarks and references to appendices. |
|--------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| Thursday April 6 (Contd) | 1300 hrs Capt. D LEE HUNTER and G(R) returned from ambush area 587225. Shot 2 bullocks belonging to civilians suspected of helping the enemy. Lt. DUNCAN briefed for ambush party at SEJANG 12 1/2 M.S. UKHRUL Road. Arty activity on right flank in DOGRA area. Heavy rain during the night. Bn front all quiet. | |
| Friday April 7 | Raining hard until 0800 hrs. A.M. Lt. YONGE'S pl relieved by 2/1 Punjab Pl. A.M. Air strafing and bombing of enemy positions area NUNGSHIGUM 4476 by Hurri-bombers - heavy casualties suffered by the enemy. 3/9 Jat Regt recaptured their positions without opposition. 2100 hrs S.A. and grenade firing heard in area NUNGSHIGUM. Arty later. Later at night S.A. firing heard from direction of DOGRAS on our right flank. Approx 1600 hrs 1 Tp Tks from 7 Cav arrived to protect the Tp of 3.7 Hows. 0630 hrs Sgt. STEWARD C Coy took out recee patrol to Pt 4997. Lt. DUNCAN returned from patrol to Pt. 4997 - N.E.S. | |
| Saturday April 8 | 0630 hrs Sgt. BUNCE D Coy took recee patrol Pt 4997. Drizzle early in the morning. Roads in bad condition owing to tanks. Repts from Bn under O.C. HQ Coy went to SEJANG village area 12 1/2 M.S. UKHRUL Road to collect rice from forward villages in M.T. Firing heard intermittently throughout day from 3/9 Jat area. 1645 hrs Sgt. STEWARD'S patrol returned - N.E.S. 3-75m/m enemy shells fell in area B Coy approx 1700 hrs - suspected ranging shots - no damage or casualties. 2100 hrs B Coy reported that 2 of their booby traps had been exploded. 2105 hrs B Coy reported that 2 enemy discharger shells had burst on their positions. 2114 hrs 3.7 Hows. D.F. brought down on B Coy front area. 2121 hrs report received from Bty HQ 28 (J) Fd Regt that B Coy were now being attacked from the North. 2133 half the D.F. brought down again on B Coy front. Report from B Coy of 1 slight casualty through enemy discharger shells, which were falling in larger numbers by this time. 2140 hrs more D.F. called for from B. 2253 more D.F. called for from B on right flank. O.C. B reported movement to his right - says that attacking party consisting of 20 Japs of which 3 | |

R. P. W.—217/G-1548—17-8-43—50,000 Paid.

War Diary 8th & 9th April: At 14:45pm on Easter Sunday 1944, Murdo was given orders to take a patrol (Captain added "fighting") of 21 men to hunt out and engage the enemy who had been harassing the battalion since the 8th afternoon. The enemy strength was estimated at 150 Japanese. He arrived back safely with no casualties to his own platoon but severe casualties to the enemy after nearly 4 hours in the jungle. The Japanese often used tactics of shouting out names in English to confuse the defenders. In this instance it was McKinnon.

SECRET.

WAR DIARY
FOR APRIL 1944.
INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY.
(Erase heading not required.)

Army Form C-2118
Page 4.
2nd Bn The Suffolk Regiment.
VOL IV.

Instructions regarding War Diaries and Intelligence
Summaries are contained in F. S. Regs, Vol. I
Titled pages will be prepared in manuscript.
Bn HQ location 83 L N/W 4"/483712.

| Hour, Date, Place. | Summary of Events and Information. | Remarks and references to appendices. |
|--------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| Saturday April 8 (Contd) | <p>had approached the barbed wire, also that some Jap bodies were visible, dead or wounded, enmeshed in the wire. 2259 hrs B say 1 man killed and 1 more wounded. 2307 B report enemy quiet on their front. 2321 hrs B report total casualties to present 1 Killed - 6 wounded, also that sounds of enemy digging-in could be heard approx 200 yds away to N.E. behind a small feature. 2330 hrs Arty (25 Pds) began to engage the enemy again. B Coy say they can see 10 enemy enmeshed in the wire - now say that probably 50 Japs attacked their position using plenty of discharger shells. 2350 hrs R.A. report 25 Pds successfully engaged target - enemy digging ceased, though noises of slithering down hill were heard some time after. 0010 hrs B report slight movement on right flank, otherwise all quite, also that during the attack the cry (McKinnon) was heard. 0100 hrs B report movement fading away to NORTH. 0205 hrs B report "all quite". Bn continued with 50% stand-to.</p> | [REDACTED] |
| Sunday April 9 "EASTER DAY" | <p>0630 hrs Capt. FORREST and Capt. COWARD went out on route recce party ordered by Bde area NORTH of Bn area. B Coy reported that 2 killed were PTE. W. WIGGER 5782683 and PTE. D. HAYNES 14523393, and that 1 N.C.O. and 2 Ptes were evacuated beyond R.A.P. Booty from enemy included 5 bodies i.e. Lieut, 1 Sgt, 2 Superior Ptes and 1 L/Cpl, also 1 L.M.G., 6 rifles, respirators and miscellaneous kit - a diary was obtained from the Officer's body. Identifications so far show the enemy to be 1 Coy, 51 Regt, Bn unknown. Recce patrol to CHINGDAL by Cpl. TURNER of A and 3 men set off A.M. I.O. visited B Coy area to check more captured equipment etc. 5 enemy dead buried in Coy area, own dead buried in IMPHAL by Bn Padre. 1445 hrs Lt. DUNCAN took fighting patrol of 21 men to area NORTH and N.W. of B Coy, claims 19 enemy definitely killed, 1 probably and 6 wounded - no casualties to own men. Spotted 1 heavy M.G. on wheels - returned approx 1830 hrs. 1145 hrs 2/Lt. GAULD'S patrol returned - N.T.R. 1400 hrs Sgt. BUNCE returned from CHINGDAL area patrol.</p> | <p>Patrol Lt Capt.</p> |

R. F. W.—317/G-1568—17-5-43—80,000 Paid.

War Dairy 9th & 10th April: Two escapees from 152nd Parachute Battalion confirm that the Japanese were initially 150 men but that the enemy had many casualties, certainly due to artillery fire. They also stated that they all belonged to the same company Murdo came up against.

SECRET.

Army Form C-2118

WAR DIARY
FOR APRIL 1944.
INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY.
(Erase heading not required.)

Instructions regarding War Diaries and Intelligence Summaries are contained in F. S. Regs, Vol. 1
Titled pages will be prepared in manuscript.
Bn HQ location 22 L N/W 1"/483718

Page 5.
2nd Bn The Suffolk Regiment.
VOL. IV.

| Hour, Date, Place. | Summary of Events and Information. | Remarks and references to appendices |
|------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| Sunday April 9 (Contd) | Brought in 2 stragglers from 50 Bde, otherwise N.E.S. 1653 hrs B Coy report that enemy were seen 200 yds to the N.E. of them on a small feature - brought down Arty D.F. - no results seen. B Coy brought down D.F. three times during night 9/10 on their front owing to movement being heard to their NORTH and N.E. 2/Lt. GILBERT took a section on reconce patrol to area YAINGANGPOKPI and track junction to NORTH of THAMNAPAKPI village. Fatigue parties still engaged in collecting rice from granaries left by the villagers as far as 14 M.S. on UKHRUL Road. Padre held a C. of B. service (Easter) in Bn HQ area 1430 hrs. | |
| Monday April 10 | 0245 hrs heavy storm blew up from the WEST obscuring the full moon. Sound of much firing @ of L.M.G. and grenades etc., from 2/9 Jat area to our NORTH. 0310 hrs heavy rain and thunder storm commenced. Jap Officer's sword found in B Coy area. 1 Gunner killed last night brought down by stretcher party. 1220 hrs G(R) Pl left of patrol to area 5071 A.M. Fighting patrol under 2/Lt. GAULD left to patrol area NORTH of B Coy. 0900 hrs 3 men from Cpl. TURNER'S patrol arrived in Bn area, saying party had been fired on and split in two, no casualties. 0930 hrs Cpl. TURNER and 2 men returned. Capt. FORREST and Capt. COWARD returned off patrols - N.E.S. 1300 hrs two stragglers from 152 Parachute Bn who had been captured by the Japs at SHANSHAK and had escaped yesterday, were sent by Bde to Bn. They stated that the Jap Coy which attacked B Coy on night 8/9 and the enemy which were shot up on the 9th by Lt. DUNCAN'S patrol were the same coy - which had originally started the attack with 150 men and was now 20 fighting men in strength, they stated that there were 80 casualties in area 5074 guarded by 14 sentries with 1 M.M.G. 1430 hrs the Commanding Officer with the I.O. went out in a carrier to area 4676 to have the enemy features pointed out by the escaped P.O.s. 2 Secs from D coy left for an ambush in area 4680. Cpl. WHEELER A Coy took reconce patrol to Pt 4997 area - 1530 hrs met 2/Lt. GAULD's fighting patrol returning - said enemy strength approx 40 to 50 area feature 495747. | |

R. F. W.—117/G-1568—17-8-43—80,000 Pad.

War Diary 13th, 14th & 15th April: Preparation for a new attack on Pimple for the 15th April 1944 and after the stark tragedy of several attempts resulting in the loss of too many men, especially on the 13th. From this War Diary entry of the 15th, the start of the operation had not been a propitious one and the first hint of trouble occurred when the first shots fired were by the tanks situated on either side of the hills. After only four minutes, the tanks were ordered to switch their fire 6° to the left. Of those killed on the 13th, Only Sgt Steele was Mentioned in Despatches for his action. Posthumously.

SECRET.

WAR DIARY
FOR APRIL 1944.

Army Form C-2118

Instructions regarding War Diaries and Intelligence
Summaries are contained in F. S. Regs, Vol. 1
Titled pages will be prepared in manuscript.
Bn HQ location 88 L N/W 1"/483712.

INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY.
(Erase heading not required.)

Page 8.
2nd Bn The Suffolk Regiment.
VOL. IV.

| Hour, Date, Place. | Summary of Events and Information. | Remarks and references to appendices |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| Thursday April 13 (Contd) | C Coy pushed to PIMPLE feature, failed, owing to Jap L.M.G. fire from base of PIMPLE - Sgt. STEELE'S Pl put in main attack, C Coy withdrew to area ELBOW 487728 and dug in for the night. 1 Tp Tks from 7 Cav protected Bn right flank where C Coy had vacated their positions. C Coy's total casualties:- All Missing - Believed killed, 5826128 Sgt. D. STEELE, 6295654 Cpl. C. JAMES, 14595779 Pte. B. DOWELL, 14345619 Pte. J. EBBAGE, 14534020 Pte. W. FALLOWFIELD, 3066850 Pte. E. MATTHEWMAN, 14865004 Pte. G. PIGDEN, 14357349 Pte. A. TORRENCE. Quite night on Bn front, though noisy from 1/17 DOGRA area on NUNGSHIGUM. | |
| Friday April 14 | Bn HQ and HQ Coy packed A.M. to move to area 486728 - Commenced moving approx 0930 hrs. Lt. LAWRENCE seriously injured while lifting booby traps in D Coy area A.M. Bn HQ established in new area approx 1400 hrs - 1800 hrs "O" Group conference at Bn HQ for new attack by A and D Coys on RING and PIMPLE. 2000 hrs Red and White very lights seen due WEST of Bn HQ, automatic fire and tracer seen to the WEST, otherwise night all quite on Bn front. Rain last from 1200 hrs till 1500 hrs making the mule track extremely slippery. | APPX 'A' <i>had capt.</i> (with SKETCH) |
| Saturday April 15 | 0030 hrs A and D Coys commenced moving around Westerly edge of feature Pt. 4057 towards RING. Tac HQ opened up in B Coy area approx 0700 hrs. 0704 hrs R.A. reported A and D Coys on RING feature 494741. 0709 hrs message sent to tanks to switch their fire 6° left. 0722 a message from D Coy - established on feature 492736. 0733 hrs R.A. reported D Coy on feature 492732 preparing to make a final assault on PIMPLE. 0744 fire Pl. D Coy opened up - nothing seen of flanking Pl. 0750 hrs small Jap L.M.G. burst answered by ours. 0805 hrs D Coy report N.T.R. and N.E.S. 0808 hrs A Coy on RING passed a message to D Coy that they had seen 1 Jap enter a bunker on the SADDLE below PIMPLE. B Coy 3" Mortar O.P. reported D Coy on PIMPLE 0828 hrs. | |

R. P. W.—317/G-1548—17-8-43—50,000 Pad.

Appendix "A" is misleading as, for example, the distances between 'Mound' on the right (otherwise known as Pt 4057) and Pimple is about 100 yards, however the distance between Pt 4057 and Sausage is nearly 2.5 miles. The tanks of 7 Cav were firing on Saddle, in the middle of the sketch, but this area must have been invisible from the East. Murdo may have been on Ring III as D Coy's reserve/fire platoon. Dawn would have been around 5am.

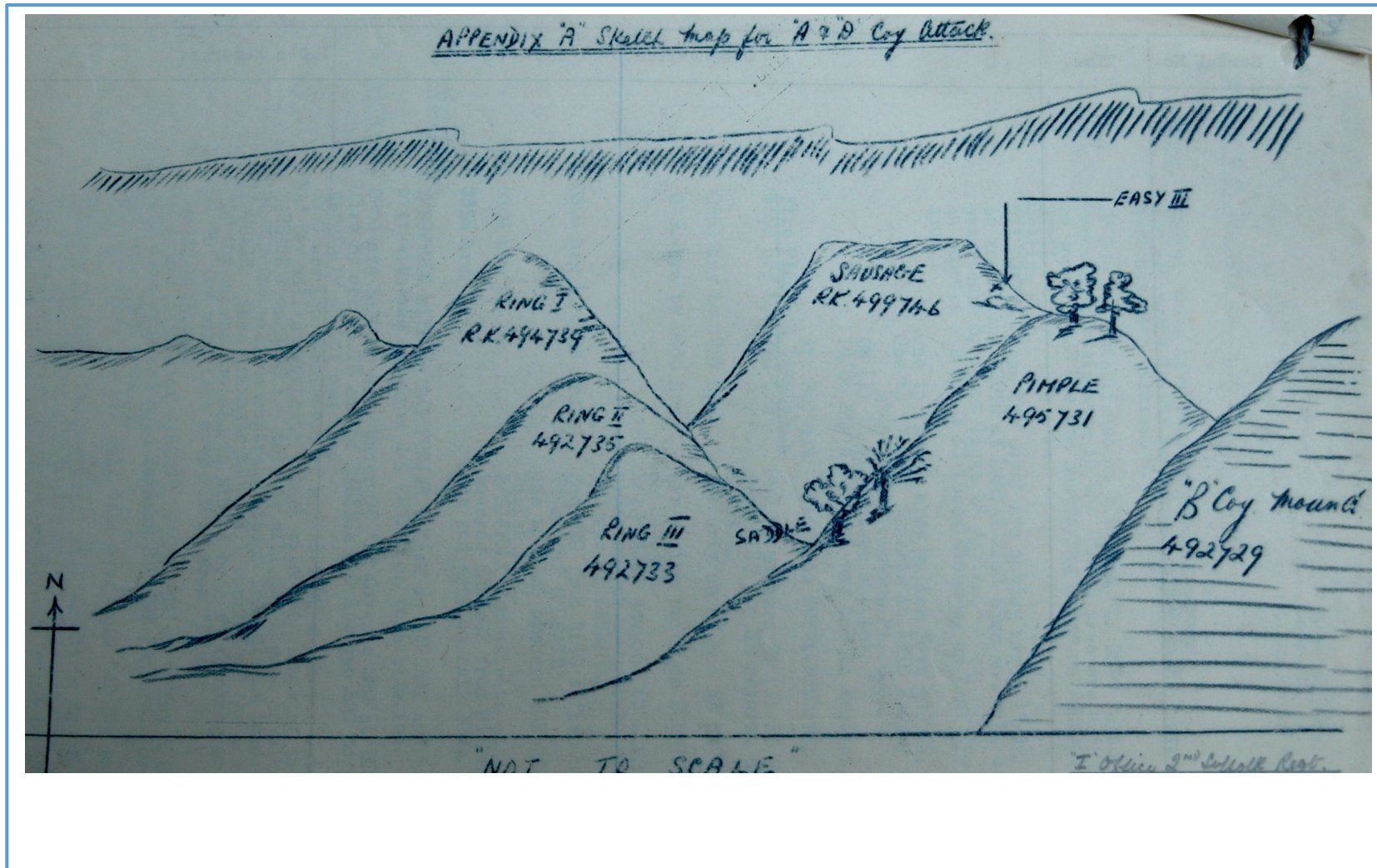
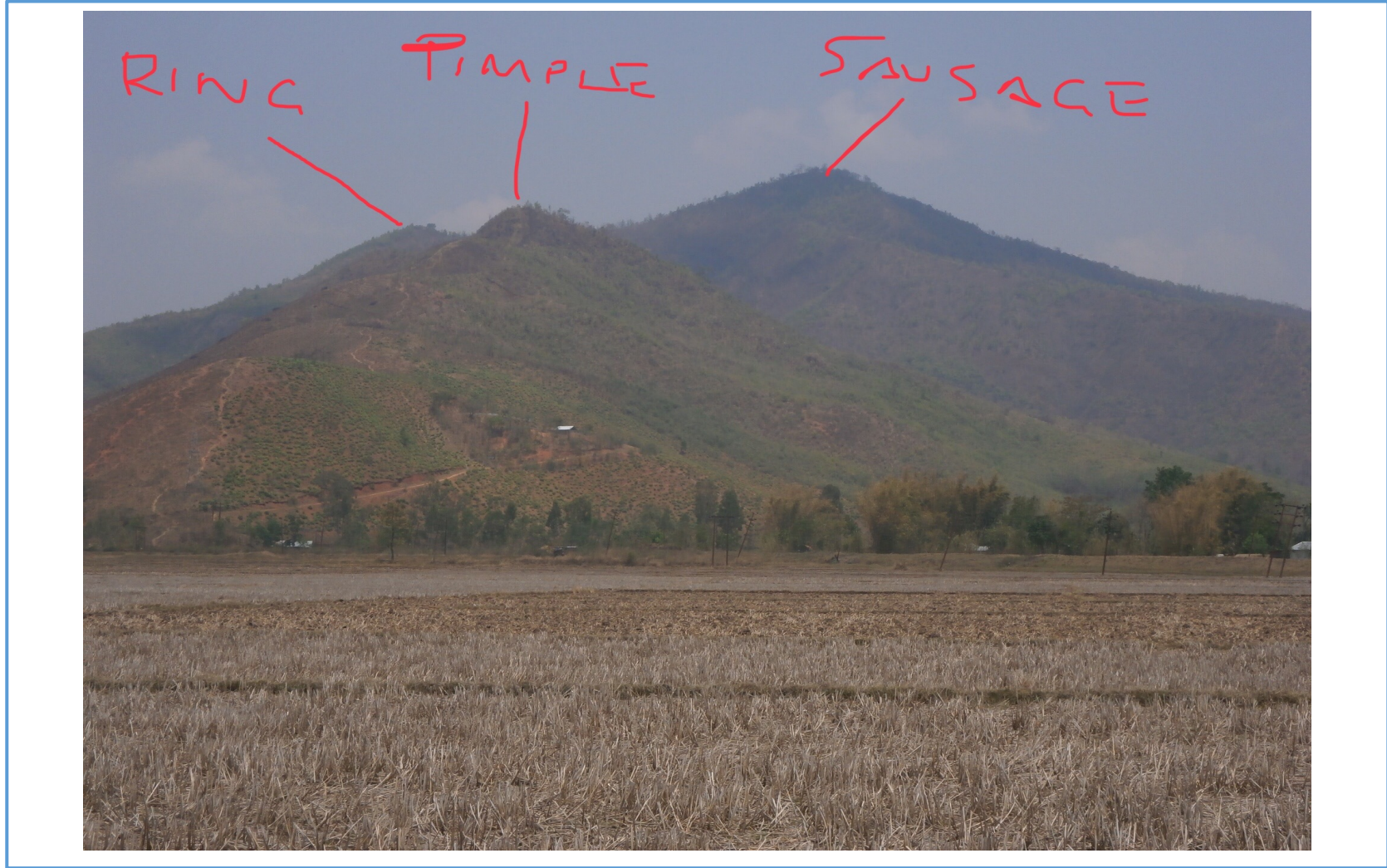
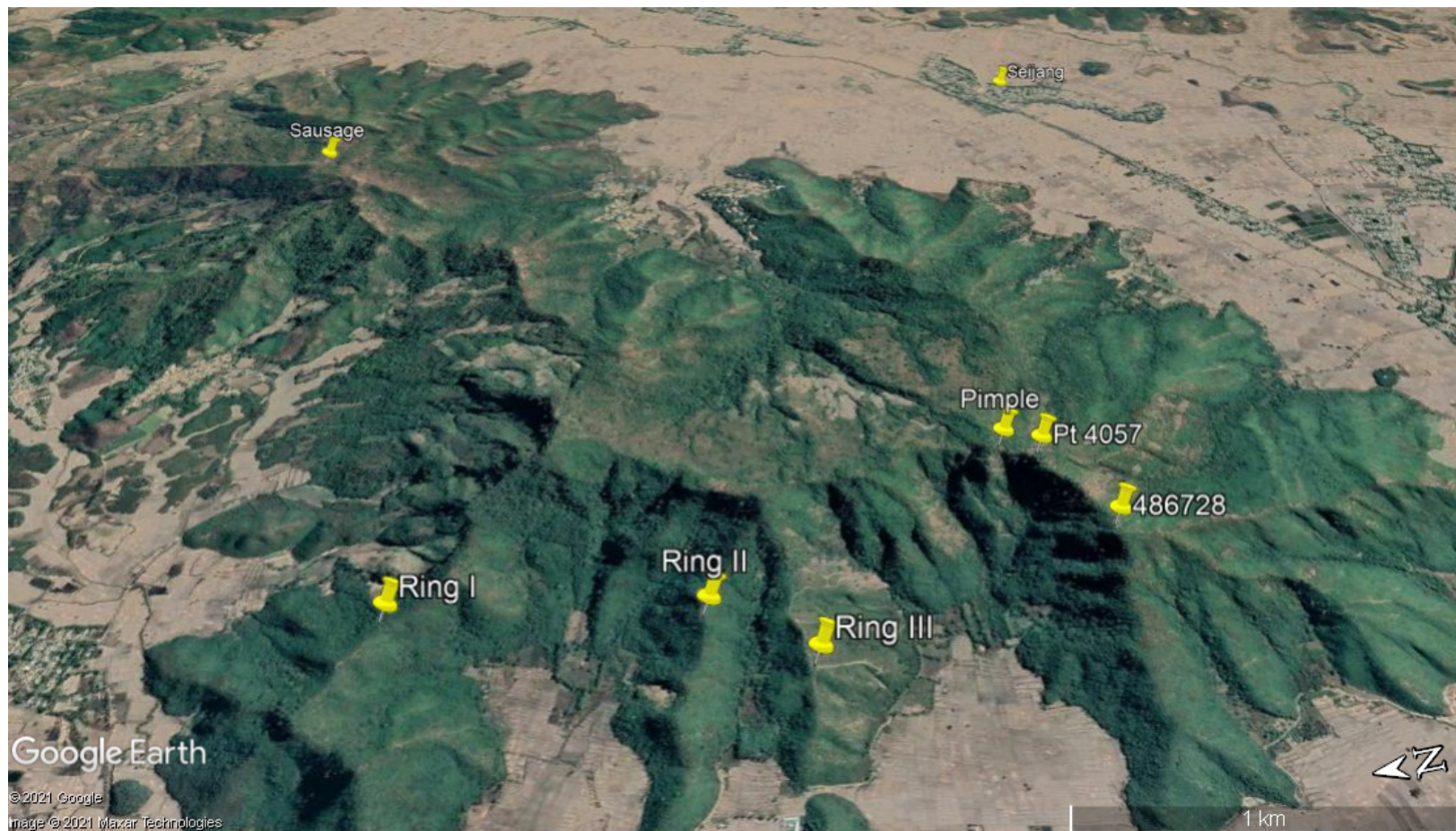


Photo of Pimple by courtesy of www.WW2Talk.com looking North. Imphal is out of the picture but in the direction of the bottom left-hand corner. The road track seen at the foot of the hills probably did not exist in 1944. It requires little stretch of the imagination to understand the difficulties any ascension involved in the complete darkness, and after the ordeals of long sleepless nights, along with one's thoughts and fears, and where every hour was a struggle, and every day packed with incident.



Google Earth Photo of Pimple taken from the West. Imphal, the capital of Manipur, the birthplace of the game now called polo, is out of the picture on the right and so 123 Brigade's HQ about 3 miles away from the action. The Tac Bn HQ was on feature 486728. The Google Earth equivalent positions have been given by Raj in IMPHAL and who is a local authority of the battlefields. The distances were very short but difficult terrain indeed to attack. The village on the top right, Seijang was where Murdo (and others) were ordered to mount ambushes. Point 4057 was near to where Murdo came across the Japanese on Easter Sunday 1944.



War Diary 15th April: Simple mention that Murdo was wounded on the 15th April 1944 along with another officer, S/Lt Gilbert who had attacked Pimple. Slow mortar fire from B Company in support of S/Lt Gilbert's platoon. 09:32 A Company were fired on and replied. At 10:25 one of D Company wounded but no mention who it was. At 10:37, S/Lt Gilbert being evacuated. It is difficult to understand why the writer of the War Diary in the last two lines wrote D Coy and A Coy and not the other way around and S/Lt Gilbert before Lt Duncan.

| SECRET. | | WAR DIARY | Army Form C-2118 |
|---|--|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Instructions regarding War Diaries and Intelligence Summaries are contained in F. S. Regs, Vol. I | | FOR APRIL 1944. | Page 9. |
| Titled pages will be prepared in manuscript. | | INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY. | 2nd Bn The Suffolk Regiment. |
| Bn HQ location 83 L N/W 1" / 483718 | | (Erase heading not required.) | VOL IV. |
| Bn HQ location 83 L N/W 1" / 486728 w.e.f. 15 April. | | Summary of Events and Information. | Remarks and references to appendices. |
| Hour, Date, Place. | | | |
| Saturday 15 April (Contd) | <p>0831 hrs O.P. reported D Coy moving down western flanks PIMPLE with fixed bayonets. 0836 hrs D Coy reported throwing grenades from PIMPLE. 0845 hrs bunker containing an enemy L.M.G. reported on NORTH face of PIMPLE. 0844 hrs heavy A.A. fire heard due WEST over IMPHAL AERODROME area - and sound of air combat over same area. 0849 D Coy occupied enemy trenches on PIMPLE and reported that they were being fired at by Jap 75 m/m gun from NORTH. 6 Zero fighters escorting 6 Jap bombers flew over head in an Easterly direction. 0852 hrs Major LEACH came into the Bn HQ to report that he had established 2 Pls on PIMPLE and 1 Pl on feature 492726, and reported that the Jap was in bunkers on NORTH face of PIMPLE approx 30 yds from crest. 0853 Arty. shelled to area 500746. 2/Lt. GILBERT'S Pl attempted right flanking on to bunkers supported by slow 2" Mortar fire from B Coy area 0907 hrs to 0920 hrs spasmodic L.M.G. firing reported. 0925 hrs Capt. FORREST reported enemy seen evacuating to P.O.W. ground in N.E. direction. 0926 hrs D Coy report 1 Jap definitely killed whilst escaping, by L.M.G. fire. 0932 A Coy drew enemy fire from bunkers and returned their fire. A Coy report 1 enemy discharger firing on their area causing 2 casualties. 1009 hrs 18 Vengeance Dive-bombers bombed Northern end NUNSHIGUM feature. 2 of own bodies seen lying EAST of PIMPLE. 1025 hrs 1 of D Coy wounded. 1037 hrs Major LEACH reported to Tac HQ that several casualties had been sustained by 2/Lt. GILBERT'S right flanking Pl including 2/Lt. GILBERT, who was being evacuated to the R.A.P. 1105 hrs Hurri-bombers bombed feature SAUSAGE. D Coy preparing to assault Jap bunkers. 1413 hrs Capt. FORREST reported that the assault had failed and that the leading 3 men had been killed, together with 2 wounded and 2 missing - and that they encountered 50 yd range accurate enemy L.M.G. fire from bunkers - he estimated as many as 3 L.M.Gs. 1432 hrs Commanding Officer ordered Capt. FORREST to pass message to Major LEACH to withdraw D Coy, so that 1 Pl reinforced RING with A Coy and the remainder with C.C. D on PIMPLE. Total casualties for the day for D Coy and A Coy 2 Officers wounded i.e., 2/Lt. GILBERT and Lt. DUNCAN, 9 O.Rs wounded</p> | | |

K. P. W.—317/G-1548—17-8-43—80,000 Pads.

War Diary 15th, 16th & 17th April: On the 15th April there is no mention of any Japanese mortar fire, only a discharger fired sometime around 09:32 when A Coy "drew enemy fire but replied" and two men were wounded. A Japanese Model 10 (1921) Grenade Discharger had a range of 65-175 yards. The Brigadier made the first of his three visits to the Bn HQ in the afternoon of the 16th. Pte. Tod was from Edinburgh.

| Hour, Date, Place | Summary of Events and Information | Remarks and references to appendices |
|---------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| Saturday April 15 (Contd) | <p>5 O.Rs killed i.e. 5807888 Pte. DeFue A, 1456245 Pte. Mott C, 5393263 Pte. Narduzzo S, 14563495 Pte. Bennett D, 14595719 Pte. Tod D; Missing 3 ORs. 1950 hrs heavy L.M.G. firing and grenade explosions heard from area RING, which was reported by A, as a listening post from A laying a booby trap and were heard by a Jap patrol of approx 8 men - the Japs chased our patrol as far as A Coy's defences, where they were met by our own L.M.G. fire. Arty D.F. was brought down. Later in the evening slithering noises as though bodies were being dragged away, were heard. 2 wounded in A Coy - enemy casualties not known. Approx 2200 hrs a suspected Jap position situated on SOUTH end of SAUSAGE feature were seen to throw grenades down the Western slopes of the feature - much shouting was also heard.</p> | |
| Sunday April 16 | <p>0715 hrs A Coy sent out 1 Sec towards SAUSAGE as part of a deception to help 2/1 PUNJAB Regt who were putting in an attack on SAUSAGE, coming in from feature Pt. 4066. HQ Coy and BnHQ spent day digging and wiring. 1100 hrs dust, followed by rain storm arose and finished approx 1300 hrs. Fire programme APPENDIX "B" issued. Zero hour 1655 hrs - Japs reply with continuous L.M.G. fire towards PIMPLE - 12 Japs seen to run out from Bunker. D Coy assault unsuccessful - Nil casualties. Brigadier visited Bn HQ and B Coy areas A.M. Approx 2100 hrs L.M.G. fire and grenade explosions heard from C Coy area - reported movement on NORTH slopes of feature. - otherwise night all quite on Bn front.</p> | APPENDIX "B" |
| Monday April 17 | <p>0115 hrs heavy rain storm commenced lasting till approx 0220 hrs. 1100 hrs Capt. LEE HUNTER and some of the G(R) Pl shot at 1 of the Jap bunkers, at the foot of PIMPLE with a Springfield Rifle, no retaliatory fire from the Japs. Heavy L.M.G. fire heard from PIMPLE area at 1420 hrs and many rounds of 3" Mortar fire. On investigation proved to be first phase of D Coy mock attack to find out whether any enemy still occupied the bunkers? 1550 hrs D Coy reported that enemy positions on PIMPLE had been evacuated.</p> | |

War Diary 17th & 18th April: At 06:45 hrs the Artillery programme commenced fatally when one gun was tragically firing short on the Ring feature causing 5 killed and 8 wounded in the Suffolk and R.A. ranks. The Commanding Officer had a long interview with his Brigadier.

| Hour, Date, Place | Summary of Events and Information | Remarks and references to appendices. |
|---------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| <p>Monday April 17. (Contd)</p> | <p>Commanding Officer, 2nd In Command and Intelligence Officer with 2 men examined area - 5 Jap bodies lying near "Foxhole" positions, several of own mens bodies found in area. Jap positions were well concealed "Foxholes" for one or two men - at sited to cover the re-entrant leading to PIMPLE. Much equipment was recovered, including a Jap discharger, several rifles, grenades, and diaries, with an assortment of clothing. 1930 hrs Jap fighting patrol attempted to penetrate A Coy's defences, repulsed with L.M.G. and rifle fire, also at 0230 hrs and 0430 hrs - 3" Mortar D.F. was brought down - NIL casualties to own troops.</p> | <p>APPENDIX "C"</p> |
| <p>Tuesday April 18</p> | <p>Recovered 2 Jap bodies - 1 Sgt and 1-1st Class Private. D Coy sent out a fighting patrol and recovered the Sgt's body - One Officer's sword was found, with signs of a body having been dragged away, leaving a blood trail. 0645 hrs Arty programme commenced in support of 2/1 PUNJAB'S attack on SAUSAGE feature - the mediums had 1 gun firing short, the shells landing on A Coy's positions on RING, causing 4 killed and 8 wounded, and 1 gunner from the 28 (J) Fd Regt R.A. killed, names of killed:- Pte. Doyle J 7891495, Pte. Pittard E 14386239, Pte. Young G 5680994, Pte. Reeve A 6020100 - names of wounded:- Pte. Sayfritz F. 5125392, Pte. Hart J 5833012, Pte. Last D 5832691, Pte. Cannell R 14406076, L/Cpl. Presland L 5777841, Pte. Perkins H 5570884, Cpl. Wheeler E 2753549, 0730 hrs Pte. Hanslip J 14534862 of C Coy wounded by a 36 Grenade, which exploded whilst being cleaned. 0950 hrs report from A Coy that 2/1 PUNJAB had taken SAUSAGE feature 497748. Own weapons recovered from bodies of own men, near Jap positions on PIMPLE, including L.M.Gs, T.S.M.Gs and Rifles. 1300 hrs G(R) Pl under Capt. LEE HUNTER went on patrol to Pt. 4066 feature 5276 to see whether enemy occupy feature, and to hold feature for 24 hrs. Reports received that 2/1 PUNJAB Regt failed to capture SAUSAGE feature and were digging in with 2 Coys on the feature for the night to resume their attacks to-morrow. Commanding Officer had interview with the</p> | |

War Diary 18th, 19th & 20th April: Following more fatalities on the 18th April, and the arrival of three 2/Lts posted to A, B & D Coys, presumably replacements for Lt Lawrence, S/Lt Gilbert and Murdo, the Battalion was relieved and the Commanding Officer relinquished his command.

| Hour, Date, Place | Summary of Events and Information. | Remarks and references to appendices. |
|---------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| <p>Tuesday April 18 (Contd)</p> | <p>1930 hrs warning order from Bde received that A Coy on RING were to be relieved by 2/1 PUNJAB Regt. 2000 hrs 2 Coys of Japs attacked 63 Bde Box at SENGMAI 2978, and were repulsed. Padre buried the bodies of the following men: recovered after the capture of the Jap positions on NORTH face of PIMPLE:- C Coy men - Pte. BLAKE reported as Missing-Believed killed on 11.4.44, Sgt. STEELE, Cpl. JAMES, Ptes. DOWELL, EBBAGE, TORRENCE, PIGDEN - reported as Missing-Believed killed on 13.4.44 - D Coy men - Ptes. DEPUE, MOTT, NARDUZZO, BENNETT, TOD, and Cpl. GOUDIE W 30533489, Pte. KNOX F 14541024, Pte. SAVAGE R 14515513 - who were reported as Missing on the 15.4.44. - A Coy men - Pte. MACE - reported as Missing-Believed killed on 13.4.44. 2/Lts. RICHARDSON, GUNTON and ELLIS posted to this Bn.</p> | |
| <p>Wednesday April 19</p> | <p>1100 hrs A Coy on RING relieved by 2/1 PUNJAB Regt. 1130 hrs Lt-Col. H.R. HOPKING relinquished his command of the Bn, and proceeded to Div HQ - MAJOR. K.C. MENNEER assumed command A.M. 4/5 MAHRATTA Regt of 37 Bde relieved this unit on Pt. 4057. 1230 hrs L.Cpl. RAYSON A 6029119 HQ Coy, injured by a mine, while lifting booby traps, B Coy area. 1300 hrs Bn HQ closed present location and reopened at PUNGDONBAM Village 464710, where Bn took over from 1/17 DOGRA Regt - whole Bn in by 1730 hrs. 2/1 PUNJAB continued attacking Jap positions on SOUTH end of SAUSAGE and put 2 L.M.Gs. out of action, feature not yet completely captured - night all quiet on Bn front.</p> | |
| <p>Thursday April 20</p> | <p>A.M. 2/Lts. RICHARDSON, GUNTON, ELLIS, posted to A - D - B- respectively. Sgt. CROPLEY and a slaughtering party slaughtered some cattle for the Bn, including 4 cows, brought in by Sgt. PARR, which were killed on a mine field. 1430 hrs Commanding Officer's conference for Coy Commanders. Bn spent day in general maintenance and bathing. Telegram received A.M. that Pte. DAVIDSON C.5722770 of A Coy died of wounds received on 15.4.44. Night all quiet on Bn front.</p> | |

Capture of Pimple: This report on the capture of Pimple feature was compiled almost 10 days after Murdo was evacuated.

2nd Bn The Suffolk Regt.

CAPTURE OF PIMPLE FEATURE.

Map 83 L N/W 2" Ref 495731.

Topography. The PIMPLE consists of a feature approx 30x X 20x on the summit. To the EAST the feature drops away steeply into a re-entrant, with reasonably well wooded slopes interspersed with undergrowth consisting of small bushes and tall grass and small bamboo clumps. To the NORTH a spur runs from the WEST end of this feature to two small features thence to a ~~ridge~~ feature known as RING ref RK 493738 - the NORTH face of PIMPLE being steep and again wooded as the EASTERN slopes and running into a re-entrant. To the WEST the PIMPLE runs in a broad spur to Pt 4057 ref RK 491729. The WESTERN spur of PIMPLE running away to NORTH had extremely steep and bare WESTERN slopes. Therefore the only possible approach under cover being either from the EAST or N.E. or the spur from the NORTH, or approaching directly over the top of the feature.

Assaults. On 11th April a fighting patrol of one platoon came under heavy LMG fire as they came around the EASTERN slopes of PIMPLE. At approx 1500 hrs the patrol withdrew after having inflicted 4 casualties on the enemy and suffered one killed and one wounded. The enemy had previously been identified as 1 Coy, 1 Bn, 51 Regt of 15 Div, who had recently attacked our Coy posns on Pt 4057 and had attempted to dig in on PIMPLE.

On 12th April one platoon temporarily occupying the top of PIMPLE were fired by an enemy LMG from the area on the NORTH slopes and by a discharger - suffering 5 casualties including 2 killed - this platoon was then withdrawn to the main Coy posns on Pt 4057.

April 13th. - One coy attempted to capture PIMPLE. They first of all occupied RING 493738 without opposition and proceeded SOUTH along to the other two smaller features on the spur leading to PIMPLE.

Orders. Orders at RING feature 493738 were for the Coy to advance in a SOUTHERLY direction, pls leapfrogging past each other to the objective. On the last small feature just NORTH of PIMPLE a pl was held up by heavy LMG fire from the NORTH face of PIMPLE; also discharger fire - This pl then left flanked two sections leaving one sec to cover as fire section. The Coy Comd then came forward to the Pl Comd and having been told the situation, told the Pl Comd that he would left flank with the reserve pl and bring the other pl forward and reinforce the fire section - The movement commenced and failed, the Coy having suffered several casualties in killed and wounded. The Coy Comd then asked the C.O.'s permission to reorganise and get into a defensive posn for the night as it was now about 1700 hrs and this was done.

A plan was now made by the Commanding Officer to attack PIMPLE feature with 2 Coys - the enemy strength now believed to be approx one coy.

Orders. - That 2 Coys were to approach RING feature from the WEST - thence one coy to take RING and the second coy to pass through and take the two smaller features SOUTH along the spur and finally to take PIMPLE.

Supporting arms. - One Sec MGs - three tps LEE tks - sqn STUART tks (J) Fd Regt less one Bty - One bty Fd Regt - One tp Fd Regt.

The move of the two coys took place night 14/15 April, with the first coy to be in posn on RING feature by 0515 hrs 15 April and the second coy to pass through to objective.

The tks fired from the EAST and the WEST flanks on to the enemy posns on PIMPLE - and the Arty harassed and neutralised the surrounding enemy held features though they were unable to neutralise the objective owing to the steep nature of spurs and features surrounding the NORTH face of PIMPLE.

RING feature was again reached without opposition, the leading coy - it sent two pls round to the EAST and a wide left flanking movement eventually arriving at PIMPLE

-2-0

feature without opposition having approached from the S.E. - with one pl doing fire pl on small features to the NORTH of PIMPLE on the RING-PIMPLE spur.

The Coy Comd was with the left flanking pls and gave the success signal to his fire pl, who then commenced to move SOUTH along the ridge to PIMPLE, but came under intense LMG fire. Heavy LMG fire was also coming up the NORTH face of PIMPLE.

The fire pl, was ordered to stay in posn, together with one pl on top of PIMPLE feature, while one pl worked around the EAST side to assault from the EAST - which they did in waves slightly echeloned to the WEST. This platoon changed the posn but came under very accurate and low range LMG fire, suffering 50% casualties including the Pl Comd and two Sec Comds. This pl then withdrew to the EAST under cover and the casualties were sent back. The Pl Comd then brought the remainder of his pl back to PIMPLE and reported to the Coy Comd. The fire pl were then ordered under the Coy 2nd i/c to attack down the ridge in a SOUTHERLY direction; this was done with two secs, the third sec acting as fire section. Again this assault was repulsed by the enemy with accurate LMG fire and the pl suffered more casualties and had to withdraw. The Commanding Officer then ordered this coy to hold the summit of PIMPLE feature and to dig in for the night.

On April 16th the Commanding Officer put into operation a new plan at 1700 hrs.

Plans. - One 3.7 How firing from the plain to the WEST on to the NORTH face of PIMPLE. One Sec MGs firing from RING feature together with one det 3" mortars on to the enemy posns - 20 minutes later two drums containing inflammable mixture with fuzes attached were rolled on to the enemy posns followed in quick succession by 6 tins of petrol and 48 '36' grenades from the crest of PIMPLE; at the same time 3" mortars put down a smoke screen over the enemy posns which drew intense LMG fire. An assault was not put in as the enemy LMGs were still active - the posn was harassed throughout night 16/17 April.

On 17th April there was intermittent firing from the NORTH face of PIMPLE by the enemy until approx 1200 hrs. At 1400 hrs a fighting patrol from the NORTH came SOUTHWARDS and found the enemy posns unoccupied - many bodies of our own and of the enemy's lay around - with an assortment of kit including abandoned 4 LMGs which the enemy had taken from the bodies of our own men - one fox-hole contained many .303 empty cases where an automatic weapon had obviously been (see sketch 'A'). Many bodies of our own men lay within 20 - 30 yds of the enemy posns. The 'Molotov Cocktail' and the 3" mortar fire had definitely caused most of the damage - many of the Jap bodies lay charred near their posns. The fact that the enemy had occupied single foxholes had obviously cut down his casualties where nothing but direct hits would have damaged him.

Field
24/4/44
In Ch. Brindell
Capt.
Int. Officer 2nd Bn The Suffolk Regt.

Strength Report: Murdo may not have been the only Scottish officer and, of this nominal roll of officers list dated the 5th March 1944, sadly S/Lt Stephens was killed on the 19th May 1944 in Burma. There were several Other Ranks who may have been Scottish since the Royal Scots, the Black Watch and the K.O.S.B. had men seconded to the battalion, but all were certainly bonded together by the determination to survive.

Part D.—NOMINAL ROLL OF OFFICERS ON STRENGTH. (Modified for India.)

(i) Officers posted to Unit (Total to agree with column 2 of Part A.)

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|---------|--|--|
| Subsidiary Rank. | Higher temporary rank, if held. | Name and Initials. | Corps. | Whether present with Unit (Post No or No). | Must present with Unit as to leave employed. |
| Major | Lt.Col. | Hopking H.R. | Suffolk | Yes | |
| Capt. | Major. | Hemmer K.C. | " | " | |
| " | " | Leach O.K. | " | " | |
| " | " | Henderson K.B.J. | " | " | |
| " | " | Rendon T.A.D. | " | " | |
| " | Capt. | Hill P.J. | " | " | |
| " | " | Browne E.G.T. | " | " | |
| Lieut. | " | Aldred V.O. | " | " | |
| " | " | Hildersley R.J. | " | " | |
| " | " | Forrest P.B. | " | " | |
| " | " | Mitchison G.A. | " | NO | Leave - New Delhi |
| " | " | Squirrell G.W.C. | " | YES | |
| " | " | Gurney A.H. | " | " | |
| " | " | Coward B.B. | " | " | |
| " | " | Hunter D.L. | " | " | |
| " | Lieut. | Kelf J.B. | " | " | |
| " | " | Arrindell M.C.M. | " | " | |
| " | " | Calger J. | " | " | |
| " | " | Box G.H. | " | " | |
| " | " | White F.H. | " | " | |
| " | " | Gray R.S.A. | " | " | |
| " | " | Thuraby P.D.F. | " | " | |
| " | Lt (Qn) | Allum E.A. | " | " | |
| " | Lieut. | Watt T.B. | " | " | |
| " | " | Hastis D.H. | " | " | |
| " | " | Duncan M.H. | " | " | |
| " | " | Ellis J.W. | " | " | |
| 2/Lieut. | 2/Lieut. | Gilbert P.H. | " | " | |
| " | " | Tomkinson R.A. | " | NO | Course - Sevoke. |
| " | " | Stephens C.W. | " | YES | |
| " | " | Bradley D.R. | " | " | |
| " | " | Gould K.H. | " | " | |

(ii) Officers attached from other Corps.

| Subsidiary Rank. | Higher temporary rank, if held. | Name and Initials. | Corps. | Date of attachment. | Nature of attachment. |
|------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|----------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Captain | Captain | Feldman I.A. | R.A.M.C. | 7.12.43 | Permanent. |
| 7/Chaplain | | Moffet W.B. | | 16.8.43 | do. |

2 suffolk. (Unit.)

5th March 1944. (Despatch.)

Signature of Commanding Officer: *[Signature]*

123 Ind Inf Bde. (Force, Division, Bn., etc., with which Unit is serving.)

Detail of Surplus or Reinforcements required, with rates.

| Appropriate headings by ranks to be inserted below in manuscript. | British. | | Indian. | | Remarks. (Cases of Indian to be shown.) |
|---|----------|--------------------------|----------|--------------------------|---|
| | Surplus. | Reinforcements required. | Surplus. | Reinforcements required. | |
| W.O. II | | 4 | | | 4 acting promoted made |
| C/Sgt. | 2 | | | | 4 acting promoted made |
| Sgt. | | 18 | | | 11 acting promoted made |
| Cpl. | | 28 | | | 16 acting promoted made |
| Pte. | | 51 | | | |

Reinforcements in the rank of W.O. II, except GSM Randall, referred to overleaf, are NOT required.

Personnel on leave.
NIL.

Personnel on Courses.
Sgt. 1 Cpl. 1

Personnel due for repatriation.
C/Sgt. 1 Ptes. 2

Personnel rejoined from hospital.
Cpl. 1 Ptes. 26

Drafts received.
NIL.

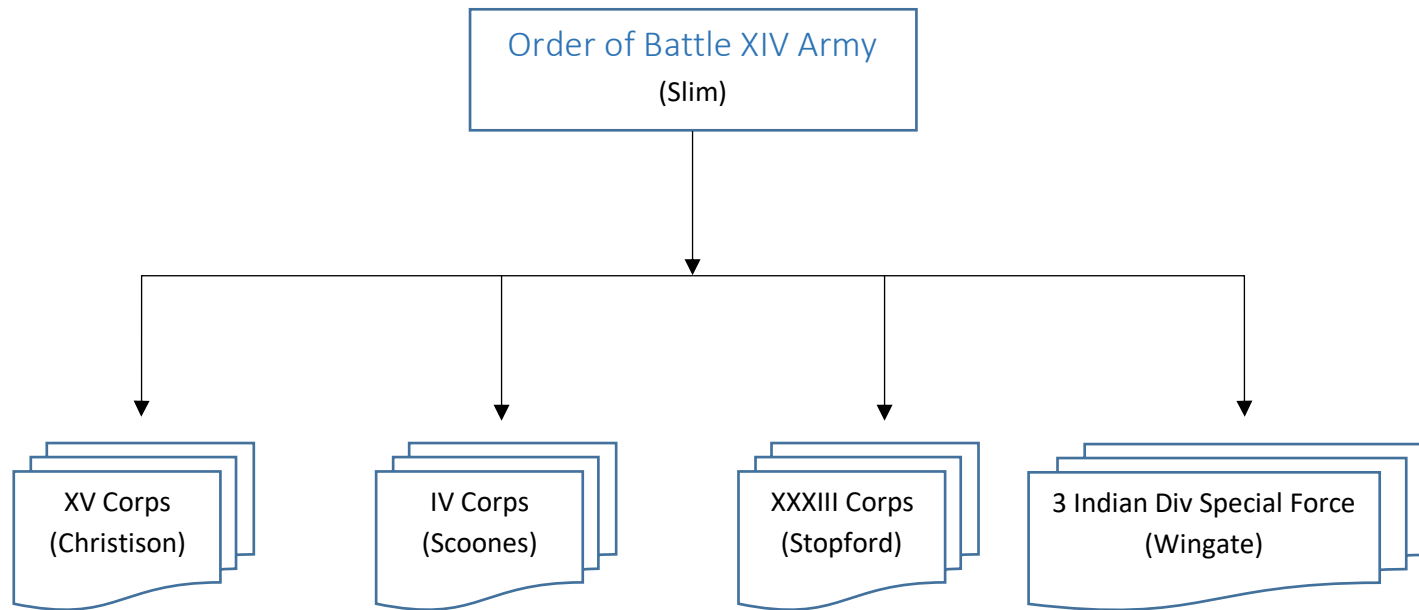
Regtl. composition of Battalion.

| 2 - Suffolk | 713 | | |
|---------------------|-----|------------------|-----|
| consists of Suffolk | 674 | | |
| Royal Warwick | 6 | Black Watch | 2 |
| Beds & Herts | 2 | Essex | 1 |
| Kings Liverpool | 1 | East Durrey | 1 |
| Border Regt. | 1 | West Yorks | 2 |
| Pioneer Corps | 2 | R.A.(Light A.A.) | 1 |
| G.B.L.I. | 1 | K.O.S.B. | 1 |
| Royal Scots | 15 | Royal Norfolk | 1 |
| R.A.C. | 1 | | |
| Somerset L.I. | 1 | Total | 713 |

2 - Suffolk Unit.

Signature: *[Signature]* Capt.

123 Ind Inf Bde.

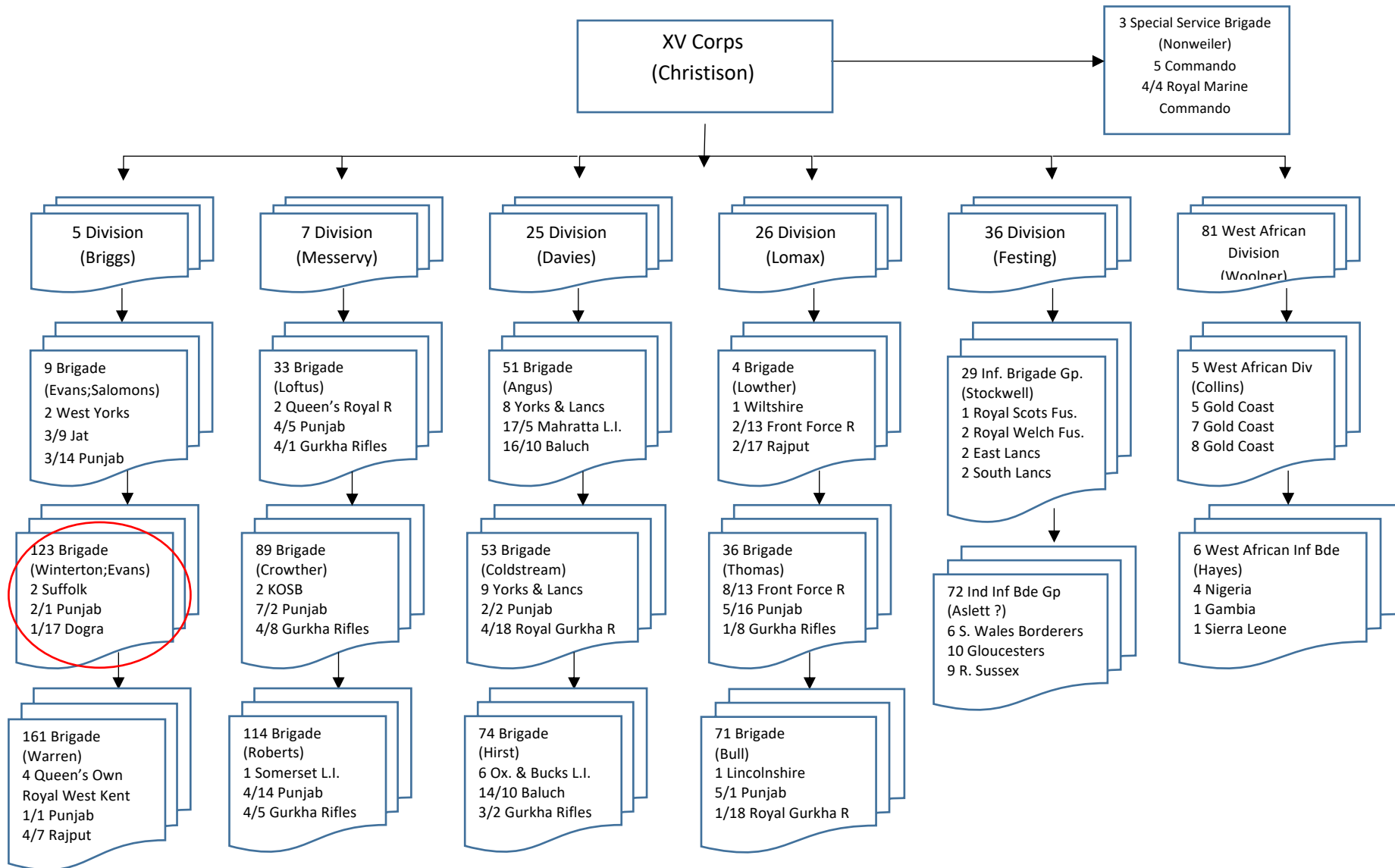


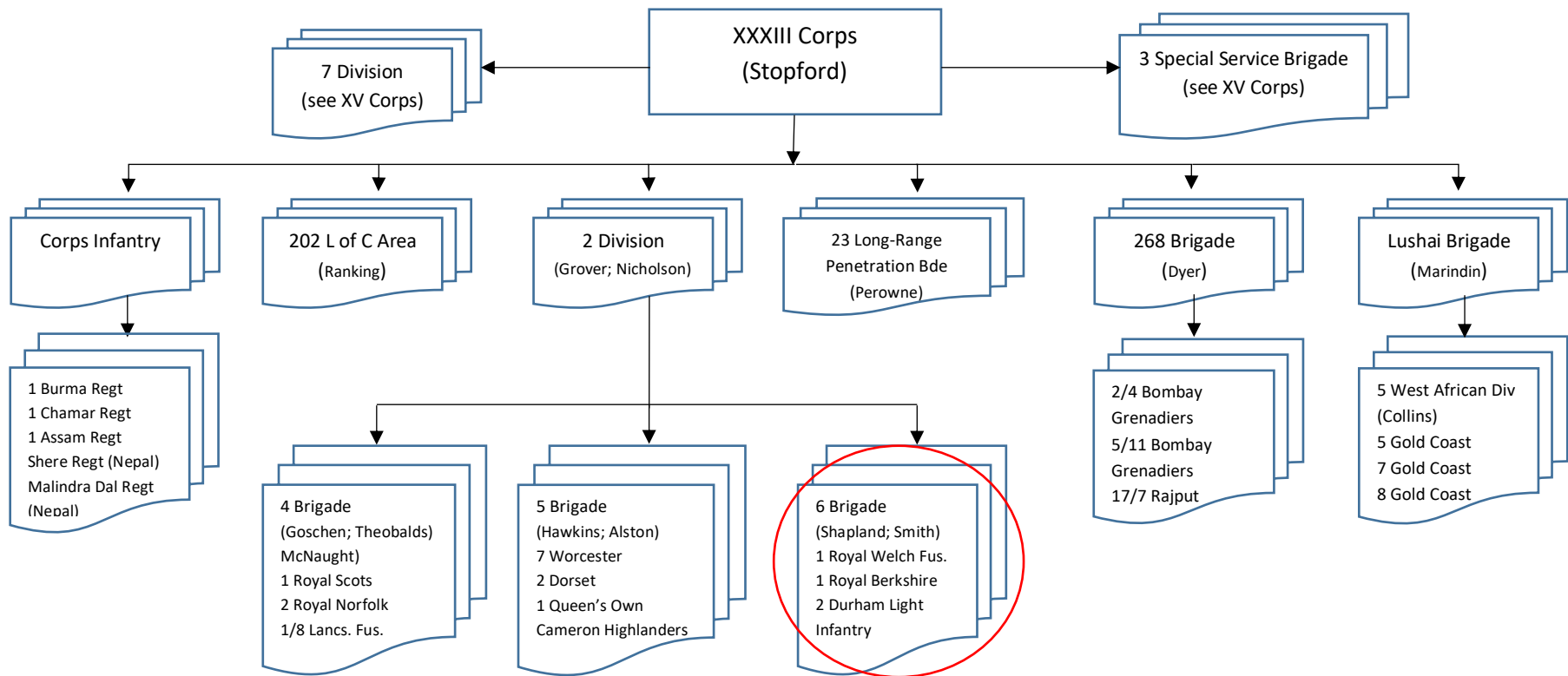
Theoretical Strengths

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Army: | 60,000 – 100,000 |
| Corps: | 30,000 – 50,000 (an army has three corps) |
| Infantry Division: | 13,700 (a corps has three divisions, but there were great variations) |
| Infantry Brigade: | 2,500 (a division has three brigades, a light division might have two) |
| Infantry Battalion: | 800 (a brigade has three battalions) |
| Infantry Company | 127 (a battalion has four companies) |
| Infantry Platoon: | 32 (a company has three platoons, plus ancillary troops) |
| Infantry Section: | 8 (a platoon has three sections) |

Higher formations, divisions and upwards, contained artillery, engineers, signals and occasionally armoured components.

A British division's battalions would be entirely British troops. In an Indian division, a third would be British, the rest Indians and Gurkhas.





Murdo's Notes :

On a long, lonely night I was prompted to record one of my War Experiences, and in the course of the next ten weeks I've added to that first episode--easy enough to do that, but very difficult for me with little expertise in taping/editing to extract, far less correct, blatant mistakes all of which along with slips of the tongue and mispronunciations you will easily spot and, I hope, as readily overlook; incidentally, or to be more accurate, additionally, from fifteen absolutely new Cassettes there is a very distinct 'hum' (my machines or speakers?) AND quite often background speech that to my poorly-attuned ear sounds like Gaelic--perhaps Japanese, Gosh!--conversation in reverse.

I must correct an early statement that I've done no research, for I was fortunate to obtain--albiet latish--the 686 page book "BURMA: The Longest War-1941-45" (Dent, London, 1984) by Louis Allen among whose impressive List of Acknowledgments appears "Ball of Fire", the story of 5 Indian Divn, by Antony Brett-James, also borrowed for a short time.

Again, anyone even vaguely familiar with that Burma War might justifiably raise their eyebrows at my assertion that 'the Admin Box Battle was the first time EVER.....supplied by air.' I base that claim on the grounds ~~that~~ Wingate's First Expedition (Feb-MAY '43 i.e. months earlier) admittedly largely dependent on Supply Drops, was composed of mobile, moving columns, NOT 'bogged down' and completely surrounded as at SINZWEYA.

Once or twice I remark that I've got all the time in the world for I'm seldom out in the evenings and 'entertain' practically nobody (though I trust I do make visitors welcome!) and yet, with "MY WAR" finishing in April '44 with Side B of the second Cassette, I decided I couldn't 'face' a third one despite serving--still in India--with an Anglo-Indian Bn at the east coast port of Vizagapatam (English spelling!) until mid-'45, and not being 'demobbed' in Britain until the summer of 1946 so some later aspects must remain 'closed', NOT merely in abeyance....a pity though, for I've fond memories of those latter years, and then there are reminiscences from almost 20 years as a T.A. Officer, But no. NO!‡

"MY WAR" (by MMD)

Tape 1

Side A:-

(And PLEASE don't allow the first five minutes put you off entirely!)

Introduction of sorts;

Warnings re memory, etc

Our Edinburgh Burma Star Meeting and my initial contribution re Calcutta trip.

6-10/39-Black Watch depot, Sport, War!DRINK!

To O.C.T.U. until

10/2/40 when commissioned WELCH..in my kilt!

2/40-mid 41-with 4 Welch in N.Ireland;

P.B.I. all my service-mention of Innes-
met Norah-a first-time Confession-Courses,
(incl B. of Britain)

Side B:-

Mention of Norah's family

Bn moves from Banbridge to Keady, Co. Armagh

Our Wedding Day!! AND NIGHT!!!!!!!!!!!!

A flat in Keady-Rugger-"A shot into the air"!

Weekly weapons check and "Seven Days C.B."

4/41-Depot and aerodrome in Norfolk; there

I lose (!) a K-Country race and quickly return to Cardiff on draft for India.

"Goodbyes" to Norah-voyage out-T-Tennis

5/41-landed Colaba Bks, Bombay-peacetime!!

to Deolali--high Temp & Norah's photos with mention of Sharon

6/41-5/42-Bn moves to, stays in Bangalore;

I.O. and W.T.O.-Sport-billets in palace;

(Referring back to my first story)

5/42-5/43-under canvas further east where as

O.G. "D" Coy received more C.B!!!

"Ordered to volunteer for Burma"!!!!!!

"MY WAR" (by MMD)

Tape 2

Side A:-

Intro-Apologies-Pests out east-trials of having malaria

Divisional Battleschool at Chingleput with tragedies feigned and actual; Innes again

Attempted description Burma incl Chittagong mention-comparison with Scotland

(N.B:-SORRY there is a long screed here ending with complete lack of roads).

5/43 approx-joined 1 R.W.F.'s retreat after their Brigadier killed-a bathing party

and beer tankards-barracks in India; where more soccer, 1 Day's Pay, Beetle!!

10/43-joined 2 SUFFOLKS in Arakan-Divisional composition-~~XIV~~ Corps Grand Plan-visit

from Lord Louis Mountbatten-his joke;

'B' Coy-hunting horn-my Pl position-when we 'stood to'-Punjabis-Native dogs.

30/12/43-attack on Hill 124

Side B:-

31/12/43 to 15/4/44 and FINISH:-

Hill 124 and Jap defensive tactics

Jungle description-Snake-Evening Attack!!!!!!

36 hour patrol-mention of Adrian -Hospital

Sam Hackett-FIRE! (a bush fire)

Jap Grand Invasion Plan-'U-GO' in north;

'HA-GO' (Operations 'C' and 'Z') in Arakan

Japs strike first-Admin Box Battle-'turning-point of our war'-my last Arakan patrol.

19th March when 123 Bde fly north-I describe Imphal area-to Kohima and return;

mention of Kohima battle-the Tennis Court.

Battle for NUNSHIGUM- two incidents

My last day with 2 Suffolks so tape ends.

BRANCH ISSUED EDINBURGH Date 16 MAR 1989

Form of application for Membership or Associate Membership of the **BURMA STAR ASSOCIATION**

I hereby wish to apply for (Associate) membership of the Burma Star Association.

I am entitled to wear the Burma Star (or alternatively, the Pacific Star with clasp, "Burma"), having served with

1st Royal Welch Fusiliers in the Arakan
2nd Suffolks Imphal area

Applicants for Associate Membership to state theatre of S.E. Asia in which they served

My rank was Captain (Welch Regt); Major (TA), KCGB.

My Service Number was 117688

and I hold (decorations) Nil Gallantry

Please send me particulars of the nearest Branch, and forward my name and address to the Branch Secretary.

(Please complete in BLOCK LETTERS)

Surname MURDO DUNCAN

Christian Name(s) MURDO, MACLEOD

Address (to which all communications will be sent):

55 ARDEN STREET
EDINBURGH
SCOTLAND

Post Code EH9 1BT

Date 13.3.89 Signed John Duncan

1989 0

The last two pages are Murdo's notes which he left and the above reminiscences strictly follow his audio tapes. The Burma Star Association application opposite, typed and signed by Murdo mentions "Nil Gallantry". Since Murdo could not face continuing his memoirs and it may be for that reason that his description on the events of the 9th and 15th April 1944 are curtailed and particularly that of the later compared to the Intelligence Report of that day. Wikipedia says

to be mentioned in dispatches (or despatches, MiD) describes a member of the armed forces whose name appears in an official report written by a superior officer and sent to the high command, in which their gallant or meritorious action in the face of the enemy is described. It was established in 1919 and certainly based on WW1's standard of bravery – charging the enemy with fixed bayonets.

It must be noted that the War Diaries recorded the activities of units and, although names are mentioned, they do not normally deal with the circumstances or fate of individual personnel. However, it leaves the reader in doubt as to where he actually was when he was wounded and why the circumstances were not clearly recorded by the Suffolk Regiment. Murdo initially said that he joined B Company but may have switched to another company on his return from a bout of malaria in early 1944 ending when he met his former teacher, Sam Hackett. Cambridge University is in doubt that Ernest and Sam are the same person but Sam was probably an affectionate name given to him by the Keil School boys. Of the three officers evacuated on the 15th April 1944 – Lawrence, Gilbert and Murdo - S/Lt Gilbert was with D Coy who attacked with bayonets fixed the enemy positions on Pimple and sustained several casualties. A few months later he was Mentioned-In-Despatches for this daring act and which was in line with the Army's standard of showing gallantry. Sgts. Bates and Steele both received posthumous MID's for similar actions during the second week of April. Lt Lawrence had been seriously injured while lifting a booby trap in D Coy area on 14th April.

As far as family war casualties are concerned, the editor is only aware of two and both from WW1. Both were called John. Both were killed in France. Both of them belonged to battalions who were fighting the same enemy and within a kilometre of each other but they did not know one another. One was called Sergeant John Preston of the 2nd Battalion Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers who died on the 23rd November 1916. The other Private John Duncan of 15th Battalion the Royal Scots who died on the 28th April 1917.

The following is a surprising reply from the [Friends of the Suffolk Regiment](#) who, in their own words on their website «are a truly unique band of people dedicated to keeping alive the history and traditions of The Suffolk Regiment. The Friends ensure that the men of The Suffolk Regiment and the deeds they performed, will never be forgotten.»

13 décembre 2020, 11:37:37

Objet : Re: New Form Entry: Contact Form

Dear Murdo,

Thank you for your message via the Friends of The Suffolk Regiment website.

Regretfully we cannot find any details on your father, Lieutenant M.M. Duncan, wounded as you say on 15th April 1944, during the attack on the 'Mound' and its fortified northern perimeter around the 'Pimple'. The Regimental History is regretfully not detailed when it comes to the 2nd Battalion, and the details of the action are sketchy to say the least. Lieutenant Duncan is listed as a casualty from 1st November 1943 to 17th August 1944, but the history is no more specific than this.

For actions on the Mound itself in early April, the history notes: *“The position which the Second Suffolk held was a high feature named the “MOUND”; a steep and rather bare mountain consisting of a large mound with a small pimple on its northern perimeter. “B” Company under Major P.J. Hill, had constructed an elaborate system of defenses, with communicating trenches fire bays and dug in sleeping quarters. The company held the mound excluding the pimple, which lay some 100 yards outside the perimeter. Extensive belts of wire from 15 to 25 yards in depth*

surrounded the whole position and crossed the small saddle separating the mound from its neighbouring pimple.”

On 9th April 1944, the Japanese first attack on the position came quite unexpectedly. Making no reconnaissance, the enemy found the barbed wire and 'B' Company saw them caught in it. Opening fire with Brens, their attack was immediately driven back. Further attacks were made during the night, but all met with a similar fate. Later the Japanese dug themselves in on the northern side of the pimple, and remained there for some days, before trying unsuccessfully to outflank the position. On 13/14th April, 'A' Company under Major E.G.W. Brown, moved out in the darkness to attempt to occupy an enemy-held hilltop position to the north about 4 miles away. Carrying enough ammunition and provisions for three days, they approached the hill in single file, and climbing through the early hours, they reached its unoccupied summit at first light.

'C' Company now followed and made a flank attack on the Japanese positions close to the Mound, supported by 'A' Company in their new position. They inflicted heavy casualties on the Japanese who were attacking 'B' Company at the Mound, but they failed to dislodge them and later that night, the Japanese attacked 'A' Company in a frenzy of wild yelling and shouting. They met however with heavy fire and were beaten back.

Second Suffolk's stolid determination to hold their rocky outcrop was a turning point in the battle of Imphal. Sensing that their path was now blocked via the Mound, the Japanese switched their attack to the northeast towards Kohima. The battle was described at the time as *“the turning point of the fight for Imphal”*. Now the Japanese were forced to take the defensive, whilst the British and Indian forces, now took the offensive.

At present, there is regretfully little else, I can offer you. Compared to the 1st Battalion fighting in Europe, precious little survives in the form of

documentation and records from the 2nd Battalion. We have now all but a couple of known veterans who served there but the Battalion War Diaries do survive in the National Archives and I understand that they are in parts, quite detailed as I have been corresponding with a team that have been excavating the pimple this year to try and find the remains of 4 Suffolk soldiers buried there.

Interestingly, every man who was buried was a recent reinforcement to join the battalion in March 1944. men came from the Royal Scots, the Buffs, the Hampshire and the Ox and Bucks Light Infantry. As I can find no other mention of your grandfather having served in the battalion before the action, I suspect that he may have been one of these reinforcement drafts to join the Battalion before the action at the Mound.

When the National Archives is open again, it may be prudent to visit them and see if the Diaries mention your father. If you have anything else, that could assist us, no matter how small; a photograph, piece of documentation, his full name, any previous service records, please do send it to us and we will try to investigate further.

With best wishes from the Friends of the Suffolk Regiment

Over the years Murdo may have erased unconsciously some recollections of this period although some must have remained indelibly etched in his memory.

A reader may get the impression that there was no ominous quiet hanging over the air on the 15th April 1944 when Murdo and his men were digging in and, as he had been on several patrols ever since joining the Suffolks in October 1943 when the battalion was mobilised, he was forever cautious. He was always reluctant to talk about the War and what must have been appalling conditions, but he surely could vividly remember every detail of

when he was wounded and even appears to have been reluctant to leave the scene, seemingly quite unperturbed, as he had time enough to say "Cheerio to the chaps"! Although his departure had been somewhat dramatic, had this incident not occurred when it did, it could have been conceivable that subsequently Murdo would have been ordered to lead his platoon to attack another well defended feature. Murdo believed in leading by example and he may have been more seriously wounded, not for gallantry, but for being courageous.

There is no mention on the Commonwealth War Graves website or the Dungannon War Memorial that a Casey of the 2 Suffolks was killed during WW2 so hopefully he returned to his native town where Norah's parents were married on the 20th February 1903.

It appears that a coherent appraisal of the situation of the 15th April 1944 cannot be made from the information available but it seems odd that the C.O. was moved on to Divisional HQ when the Battalion was relieved, but the battalion was again in action shortly afterwards.

In conclusion, as Murdo had repeated several times, he had been extremely lucky all through his active service and wasn't it an amazing stroke of good fortune that Murdo decided to turn around in his self-made bath when he did and lived to tell his tale?

The author



Murdo (Murdo MacLeod, after his Lewis Grandfather), was born on the 1st of July 1918, at 9 Sutherland Street, Patrick, Glasgow and only a few streets away from where his mother was brought up in 4 Vinicombe Street. His parents had also met there on the staircase as his mother was coming home one day and his father was visiting a friend from Scarp.

His father, Angus Duncan had been invalided out of WWI in May 1918 after catching a severe dose of pneumonia at an officer's training course in Stafford. At that time, Spanish Flu was killing millions worldwide and perhaps the Army didn't want to take any risks. Angus worked in Edinburgh for the Navy & Army Canteen Board winding down all their facilities in



Scotland post WW1 and before the NAAFI was created in 1921 as a replacement. The photo on the left is from this period. After a brief spell in Lewis and Harris where Murdo's sister Anna was born, the family moved to 119 Don Street, Old Aberdeen, while his father was studying at the University 1920-26 (1984 photo to the right). His brother Angus MacInnes, aka Innes, was born here. His paternal grandfather, William Smith Duncan, originated from Aberdeen.



The photo opposite was taken in 1925 of Murdo with his mother, sister Anna and younger brother Innes. It was probably taken on a Sunday and it looks like Anna is holding a Bible.



Old Free/United Free Church Manse, Sorbie, was Murdo's next home between 1926-29. Sister Morag and brother Angus were born there 1926 and 1928 respectively, but brother Innes also died there of gastro enteritis in January 1927.

This manse photo below was taken by brother Angus in 2002 when it was owned by an English Blair family. Like the Kilmeny Manse in Islay later, the Sorbie Manse had no electricity or running water when Murdo lived there. The Manse was built in 1848 and is roughly 300 yards from the small church



in the town. The Ordnance Gazetteer of Scotland wrote: "Sorbie is a village and a coast parish of SE Wigtownshire. It has a post and railway telegraph office, a neat little Free church, with belfried gable to the street, and a handsome school, erected in 1875-76 at a cost of more than

£1000" (Reference and thanks to "A Survey of Scottish Topography, Statistical, Biographical and Historical", edited by Francis H. Groome and originally published in parts by Thomas C. Jack, Grange Publishing Works, Edinburgh between 1882 and 1885). Murdo's The primary school was just



around the corner and now converted into a Camping Club stopover by a couple from Manchester whom "stumbled on this gem".

Islay was Murdo's next home from 1929 to 1937 before his father moved on to



Ladybank, Fife. The Kilmeny Church and Manse (above) were built by Thomas Telford. The lovely little church was just behind the manse in a small wood. In Islay Murdo attended firstly Ballygrant School before going to Bowmore High School, cycling there daily on his new Raleigh bicycle (photo on the left). He subsequently went off to board at Keil School, Dumbarton, where he proved to be a leader and outstanding at all games, being captain of rugby (holding the ball in this photo below right) and

cricket. In 1936 he became the school 'Chief' (photo below). He matriculated at St Andrews University in 1937, at the same time playing for the then Ladybank-based Howe of Fife Rugby Club. The Fife News of 2 October 1937 said: 'A newcomer to League Rugby (not the 13-a-side rugby league, as we know it today, but teams were structured in leagues) was M. M. Duncan. This lad is the most useful acquisition the Howe have had for a long time. He played the game of his life on Saturday, and looks like developing into a fine player'. This was probably his first game as a senior. Another match report, of 15 January 1938, says: 'Duncan dodged right through the whole defence to touch down between the posts.'; and a 26 November 1938 report says 'The first score came from a brilliant piece of work by Murdo Duncan. From a line-out Rae got the ball to the three-quarter, who 'ghosted' through the defence to touch down near the posts.



Duncan's run was well worth watching; he dodged past the defence so swiftly that he appeared literally to leave the Morgan (Morgan Academy) men standing.' He normally played at stand-off and took part in the full Howe team and in 'sevens'. He later played rugby, and sometimes football, for his regiment while in the army. He was in the university Officers' Training Corps (the OTC) at St Andrews. In the summer of 1939, he was called up as a

Militiaman with the Black Watch in Perth. Murdo is on the extreme left in the photo opposite. None of Murdo's family were able to attend Murdo's marriage in Northern Ireland as wartime travel restrictions were in force. This took place on 17 January 1941. Two years before his death, while nearly housebound, Murdo audio-taped, for his immediate family and a



few friends, his memoirs, entitled 'My War'. Murdo had been commissioned into the Welch Regiment on 10 February 1940 - he noted that his parents had been married at Stafford on 10 February 1917.



In April 1944 Norah, as his next-of-kin, received a dreaded War Office telegram saying that Murdo had been wounded in action (see page 35). She immediately let his parents know, and everyone had to wait anxiously till further word came by way of letters from Murdo himself. 'His left tibia had been smashed' by shrapnel and was hospitalised again in India.

After his discharge in mid-1946, he returned to St Andrews University, where he and Norah lived. Following his war wounds, he was no longer fit for rugby, but played hockey and cricket at the University and for the Howe of Fife Rugby Club —a May 1946 match against Bell-Baxter Ladies' F.P. XI saw the men winning, with Murdo scoring one of the three goals. Norah and Murdo also participated in the University's dancing competitions and they were on the podium on this evening on the right.

He gained his degree in 1948 and taught geography in Earlston High School; then Stranraer Academy for 20 years, and where he was also Captain of the local Army Cadet Force finally resigning his commission on the 1st January 1974 and was granted the honorary rank of Major. Murdo is third from the right on the second highest row in the below photo with his colleagues from the 'old' Stranraer Academy when it first arrived at the brand-new London Road site in the early



1970's. Murdo finished his teaching career at James Gillespie's High School in Edinburgh, retiring in 1982. Becoming a widower in 1986, he lived on in his parents' former home in Arden Street, Edinburgh, which he had purchased on their deaths. In his Edinburgh days he learnt Gaelic, his father's native language, and joined a 'Gaelic conversation group' which



met in various houses, including his own one. Although he had not taken piano lessons, Murdo had good rhythm and a sound ear for melody, and could entertain on the piano in the right circumstances.

Although taking up golf later than most people when he was in Stranraer, and never taking a lesson, he quickly became a talented golfer, finally becoming a member of Prestonfield in Edinburgh. At the age of 78, he still maintained a 13 handicap and did so well in Seniors' Open competitions, including one at Ladybank - a sometimes used qualifying course for the British Open when held at St Andrews, which he won - that other players seeing that he was participating opted to play elsewhere. The photo on the right was taken in 1995 as Murdo was about to attend the Military Tattoo at Edinburgh Castle to mark the 50th Anniversary of VJ Day. He later failed rapidly, spending his last few months in the then new Edinburgh Erskine Home for ex-Servicemen. Murdo died in April 2002 at the age of 83. A military piper and a Burma Star veterans' guard of honour attended his funeral.



The author's wife

Sarah Norah Preston, aka Norah, was born in 1914 and youngest child of a mill family from Banbridge. Between her grandfather, father, eldest brother and his son, four generations of Prestons were managers at the F.W. Hayes Mill which unfortunately closed down definitively in 1962. All of her brothers were good hockey players and the author said that had it not been for the war, two may have played hockey for Ireland. All four played in



the same Banbridge team which won the 1938 Irish Junior Cup and are all seated in the middle row in this photo. Hockey played a large part of the social lives of the local population and

one great players for both club and country was Kenneth Shooter whose sister, Margaret Wilson Shooter, married Norah's eldest brother William Robert, aka Bertie. Margaret was named after her Scottish mother's side,

who descended from Margaret Wilson, one of the Wigtown Martyrs. Norah is on the left in this family photo along with sister Lily, her mother, brother Stanley standing and brother Walter sitting.



While Murdo served in India and Burma, Norah continued working as a nurse in Banbridge before leaving her native town to live the rest of her life in Scotland. Norah was appreciated everywhere she went and the following extract from the Wigtownshire Free Press proves:

"The death in Edinburgh Royal Infirmary of Mrs Norah Duncan will be deeply

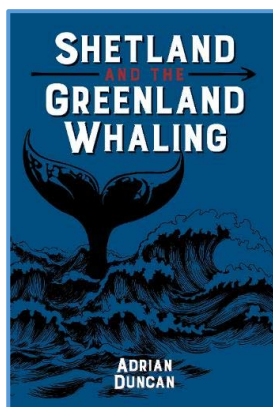
felt by many in Stranraer, for she was a loving and much-loved lady. Mrs Duncan was a member of the High Kirk Choir, Stranraer and District Choral Society and the local Operatic Society. She was a gifted soloist – a gift enhanced by her warm personally on stage and off". She was also very



enthusiastic about all sports and usually only disagreed with Murdo when Scotland entertained Ireland at Murrayfield and she would wear green to Murdo's blue.

Murdo and Norah had three children. The eldest Adrian, who was born just after the War and when Norah and Murdo were still in St Andrews, turned to the family passion for writing and published in 2019 a book describing Shetland's vital contribution to the Greenland – Spitsbergen and Davis Strait Whaling activities (and ISBN-13: 987-

1919977253). More recently, a change of style, and a whodunit entitled *Dead Men Walking*, reference ASIN: B08HYZYNV3, was released. Sharon was born in Galashiels when Murdo was teaching in Earlston. She decided to follow her father and paternal great-grandfather into teaching, finally retiring in 2010 in Edinburgh. Lastly, Murdo Innes, aka Innes, born when the family were in Stranraer, at the suggestion of his father, wore a Black Watch tartan kilt at his wedding in honour of the regiment Murdo had



wished to join after OCTU in 1940. The photo on the left is of Innes wearing the same "best civvy outfit" his father wore when he arrived at The Welch Regiment Depot in Cardiff in early 1940 – Innes's grandfather's Seaforth Highlanders WWI kilt and the Harris Tweed jacket and waistcoat woven by his Scarp great-grandmother, Marion MacInnes.



The author's father



Angus Duncan was born in the schoolhouse at Obbe, South Harris, on 25 September 1888. His father, William Smith Duncan, was schoolmaster at Obbe Public School from 1886 to 1889, when he was reappointed to Scarp Public School. Angus was ten months old when the family returned to Scarp, the home of his mother. On the left are Angus's parents and perhaps their wedding photograph. His childhood there, on an island containing many close relatives, must have been a carefree one, protected from some of the hardships experienced by less fortunate children of that time. On census night 1891 the schoolhouse held his parents, himself, and his four sisters. On the same date he had nineteen first cousins in Scarp, as well as seven more at nearby Luachair, at the head of Loch Resort.



At the age of fourteen he went as county bursar to Inverness Royal Academy, under W.J.Watson, the Rector of the day. Angus is third from the right on the top row in the photo on the left. Watson was then in

the final stages of preparing his classic work *Place-names of Ross & Cromarty*. Angus Duncan was among the senior pupils who helped prepare the alphabetical place-names index for the book. This was the first volume he ever bought with his own money and he was never without a copy thereafter. This, along with his bilingual upbringing on Scarp, laid the foundations for a lifelong interest in Celtic matters.

During the First World War he served in the 4th (Ross Highland) Battalion, the Seaforth Highlanders, being invalided out with the honorary rank of lieutenant in May 1918 (photo right). The 4th Battalion was a Territorial Force battalion and remained on alert in the UK for the whole period of the War.

After short periods working with the Supply Department of the Navy and Army Canteen Board in Edinburgh, and with Lord Leverhulme in Harris and Lewis, he matriculated at Aberdeen University in the autumn of 1920. He graduated MA in 1923, with Celtic as one of his subjects. In 1925 he was awarded an Honours Diploma with High Distinction at United Free Church College, Aberdeen. He gained a BD degree in 1926.



He was licensed by Aberdeen U.F. Church Presbytery in 1925. After serving as Assistant in Aberdeen South U.F. Church, he was ordained and Inducted



to his first charge, Sorbie U.F. Church, Wigtownshire, in March 1926 (see recent photo on left which shows that the church is now a residence). In 1929, just after the union of the United Free Church and the established Church of

Scotland, he was called to Kilmeny Parish, Isle of Islay, where Gaelic services formed a major part of his preaching commitments, Gaelic being at that time the everyday language of most of his parishioners. The photo on the right and below are of Kilmeny Church built in 1828 as part of the

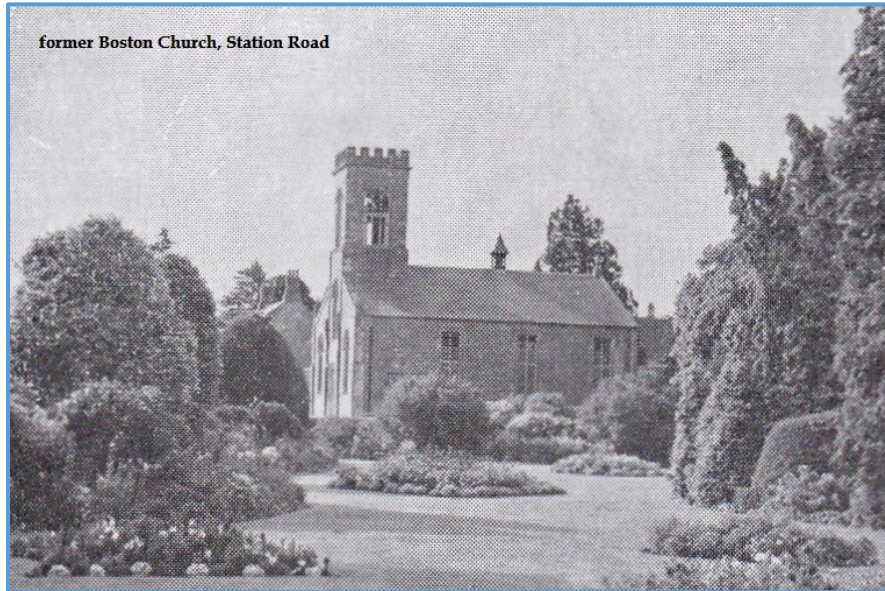


parliamentary Church building scheme whose architect was Thomas Telford. It was one of three 'Telford' churches built on Islay and one of two still in use today. The original Telford plans were altered by the heritor, Walter Campbell of Islay, although essential elements of the original remained.

In 1936 he was inducted to Kerr Memorial Church, Ladybank, Fife, where Angus served until 1947. The photo above, c/o Canmore.org, one of the very few which exist on the internet and is published with thanks from the Scottish Church Heritage Research Ltd in Cupar, Fife and Canmore. The



church was demolished around 2000. During this period he prepared the greater part of the manuscript 'Our Island'. He also gave a series of Gaelic talks on the radio, and a Gaelic play — *An t-Suiridhe Thubaisteach* or 'The Elder's Wooing' — written by him shortly after the First World War, was broadcast in 1946.



former Boston Church, Station Road

His final charge was at Boston Church (see photo above), Duns, Berwickshire and, similar to the Kerr Memorial Church, it was demolished for housing. The Drumclog Bell opposite once tolled in the Boston Church in Duns which later left the fold to join the Free Kirk in 1843. In 1929, it returned to the fold of the established Church of Scotland but closed for worship in 1953. So called in reference to the Battle of Drumclog fought out near Strathaven in Lanarkshire in 1679.

Angus was a contributor, in English and Gaelic, to a number of newspapers and magazines, usually under the initials 'A.D.' or the name *Eileanach*. Only occasionally - for a friend sometimes used that name - did he adopt the pseudonym *Scarpach* when writing on matters relating to Scarp.

On his retirement Angus took part-time employment, dealing with Scots and Gaelic folklore manuscripts, in the fledgling School of Scottish Studies at Edinburgh University, at the same time extending his connections with



scholars of the other Celtic cultures through membership of the Celtic Congress, which met in turn in each of the six Celtic nations. He was an active member of a number of Celtic societies, and was in his later years a Council Member of the Royal Celtic Society.

In a tribute in *The Scotsman* following his death on 19 September 1971, Hamish Henderson, a School of Scottish Studies colleague, wrote:

The foundation of the school in 1951 enabled Angus Duncan to devote several years of his retirement to the cause dearest to his heart - namely, the recording and placing on permanent record of the folk-song and folklore of his native country. As his father's family came originally from Aberdeenshire, he was as interested in Lallan lore as in Gaelic. Nobody who knew him during the years he worked with us could fail to be impressed by the wide range of his knowledge of comparative ethnology, but even more impressive was the devotion (and the word is not used lightly) which he brought to his pioneer task in Scotland's first university folklore institute.

Modest and diffident to a degree, he nevertheless had a keen and ironic eye for the comedy of the academic scene and when he needed to be could employ an infinitely gentle deflationary humour.

The author's mother

In February 1917, the author's father married Jane Mary MacLeod - *Sineag* - a daughter of Murdo MacLeod, the popular Lewis evangelist and bard *Murchadh a' Cheisdeir*, whose best known song *Eilean an Fhraoich* tells of an exile's longing for his native Lewis.

Born in Tobermory, she was brought up in Glasgow before joining the Civil Service in London. Throughout her marriage she was the typical minister's wife of those times, bringing up a family of four (a fifth child had died aged two in 1927), and supporting her husband and the church in all possible



ways — Sunday School, Woman's Guild, sales of work etc., and during the early years of the second world war setting up, with the Guild, a Forces Canteen and emergency Rest Centre in the church hall. In addition, the day before the outbreak of WW II, three Edinburgh evacuees were allocated to the manse in Ladybank, and after they had gone home, twelve Polish soldiers were billeted with the family. During the latter period, evenings and supper at the manse — cocoa and toast spread with dripping — became an all corners' tutorial in English, in which the children played a full part,

sometimes with comical results — the Poles, most of whom had lost all trace of their families, were invariably kind and affectionate towards the local children. All this was a heavy burden which Sineag bore with her usual

equanimity. Her husband had a serious and scholarly demeanour, but she invariably had a warm-hearted and good-natured mien. While his library was a heavily theological and Celtic one, her bookcases showed her liberal interests, containing many of the classics, 'safe' current fiction, and the best of children's literature.

In 1962, along with her husband, Sineag published *Bardachd Mhurchaidh A' Cheisdeir* — 'The Songs and Hymns of Murdo MacLeod'.

When she was in the Postmaster General's Department of the Civil Service in London in 1916 and her future husband was in the army, serving with the Seaforth Highlanders in Ripon, Yorkshire, she wrote him in verse, as follows. The fact that he kept these verses, and she his reply, as they did Anniversary poems exchanged up into their late seventies, gives a flavour of a relationship which was not always apparent to others beyond their own family. (e.g. A birthday card she gave him in his seventies read: 'A sweetie to suck and another to share. That's all you are getting from the Auld Grey Mare.' We suspect that pandrops — mint imperials — were the gift.)

(1916 lines from London to AD senior headed: 'Aint I a comic?')

I shall not sing no song to you
Else you might grow so vain
and to your own sweet self, say you,
"I'm worth more all the same."
I won't even write no rhyme for you
For you would criticise,

and say with envy in your heart,
"Humph, that ain't worth no prize!"
Nor shall I pen even prose for you
For then you might reply
"What prosy prose you do compose,
What fluttering flights you fly!"
So now a natty little note
I'll send you just to tell
How rain and mud are common here
And I am keeping well.

His reply, on Seaforth Highlanders headed paper, from South Camp, Ripon, dated 19 March 1916, read:

`My Dearest Sineag,

You're the goods to send such happy rhyme. I've read it o'er and o'er again, and like it more each time. Now then, you should not be afraid to sing a song to me. It would not feed my vanity, not in the least degree, but rather, it would feed the flame Love kindled in my breast, and, thus replenished, it would burn like Etna's glowing crest! Nor should you fear to woo the Muse and send some runic rhyme; it sounds to me like silver bells when they begin to chime. And as for prose (congrats. my dear, your third verse is a treat, it is, upon my conscience, an alliterative feat!) well, prose is partly poetry whenever Love's the theme, the same as loving truths are oft like fragments of a dream. So send me prose that's poetry, and I shall be

content. My heart thus cheered will love you more. Your time won't be mis-spent.

So Sineag mine, take up the harp and sing to me a lay. I'll close my eyes and listen — yes, for ever and a day, and let it be a song of love — not sad nor yet too gay — to keep us in remembrance of "the bonny, bonny, days." When that day comes, my heart shall sing, and yours will echo mine. Such harmony has never been nor earth can e'er design.

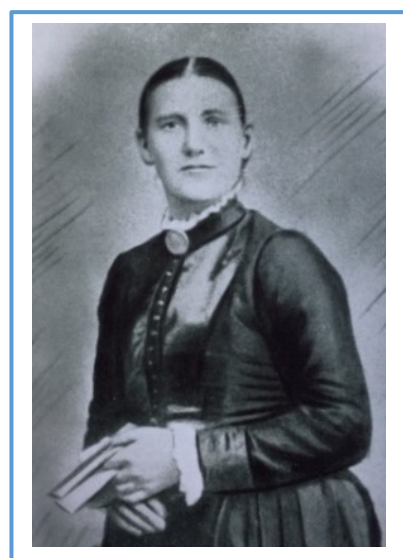
So now I'll close with all my love to you, my heart's delight, and, as this spasm is all bosh, I'll write tomorrow night.

Your sweetheart, Angus.

P.S. You will observe I've borrowed your metre, love, this time, and this I did in complement to your good choice of rhyme. I hail you as a poetess. Your worth I recognise, and, for your trouble please accept this scribble as your prize. A.'

Sineag's brother, Murdo MacLeod, was a teacher at the outbreak of WWI and enlisted in the Cameron Highlanders in September 1914. Transferred to the Tank Corps he saw action in France in 1915-1916 and was one of the first ever tank drivers. He survived the War, reaching the rank of Acting Regimental Sergeant-Major.

They had five children, one of whom survives; their first daughter Anna in the photo below left (born Ann Stewart after her Lewis Grandmother – photo opposite Anna in her ATS uniform), two years younger than Murdo, was born in Drinishader schoolhouse, South Harris. In 1935 she was runner-up for seniors' pianoforte in the Islay Local Mod and, when called upon, could man the church organ for her father's services. She joined the ATS early in the War and rapidly became a subaltern (lieutenant), served in Wiltshire and London, where she met her husband, Major Charles Higgins of the Sherwood Foresters who had been a POW in Italy. Charles had attended the Royal Military College as a Gentleman Cadet and had been commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant to the Foresters on the 31st January 1935. Anna published a small volume of poems in 1980, *Private Thoughts Made Public* (ISBN 0 902616 64 1) and is buried opposite her parents in



Kingskettle, the cemetery for Ladybank in Fife.

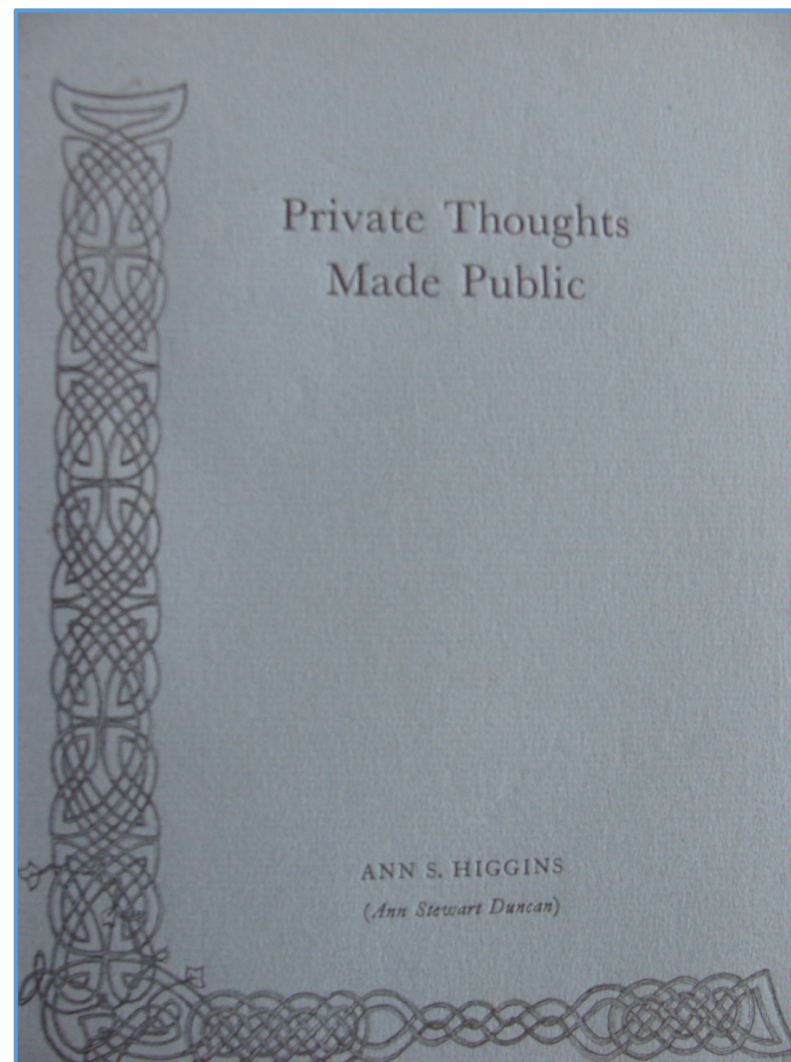




Photo above: The Camp PG29 opened on 1st May 1942 in the former stately home called Villa Alberoni in Italy between Parma and Pavia. In 1943 there were 268 prisoners, of whom 206 were officers. 62 'Other Ranks' were their 'batmen' – valets. In all, 254 were British.



Murdo in the photo on the left beside his sister Anna, their mother *Sineag*, Norah and Charles, Anna's husband.

Murdo in the photo on the left beside his sister Anna, their mother *Sineag*, Norah and Charles, Anna's husband.

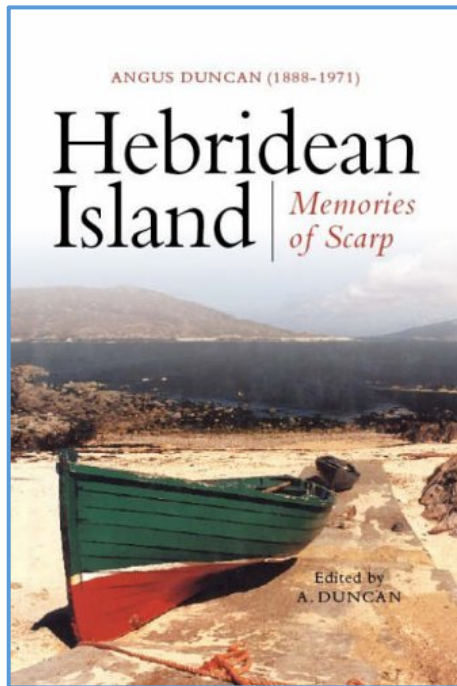
Daughter Morag, who was born in Sorbie, was attending Jordanhill

photo at the end) who was born into a missionary family serving in Malawi. Gordon was accepted for service with the Church of Scotland Missionary Society and was posted to the Livingstonia Mission in the North of Malawi. The family returned to Glasgow in 1966. On the advice of her Majesty's



Malawi Minsters, Gordon was awarded an O.B.E. in January 1966 in recognition of his services he had rendered to the health of the country. Gordon died in 1983. Photo above of Morag with her two brothers, Murdo on the left and Angus on the right. Morag died in 2000.

The surviving son, Angus, was Deputy Chief Quantity Surveyor for the Scottish Development Department for many years and became a critical member of a small select Cold War team of Civil Servants who would have

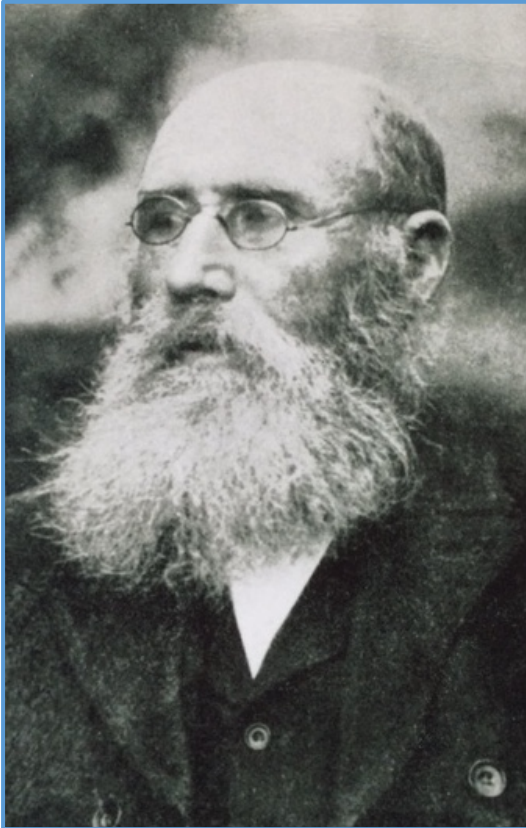


worked out from the famous 'Secret Bunker' in Troywood, Fife in the event of any nuclear attack. His responsibility would have been the rebuilding of Scotland's road infrastructure afterwards! Angus, comparable to his borther-in-law, Gordon twenty years earlier, was conferred an O.B.E. in January 1986. The editor wishes to take this opportunity to thank Angus for his kindness in providing most of what is written above about the family with the exception of the Norah's Irish side. There is probably much more he can

remember and tell but unfortunately outside the scope of this exposé. In 1995, Angus, with the help of his brother Murdo, had published his father's manuscript, *Hebridean Island, Memories of Scarp* – a paperback version, with some additions, was published in 2005 (ISBN10 1 84158 394 4) and a

new edition will shortly be available again this year. Angus became an amateur ornithologist ever since young his days on Islay. Photo below: Norah and Murdo in New Zealand 1982-3.

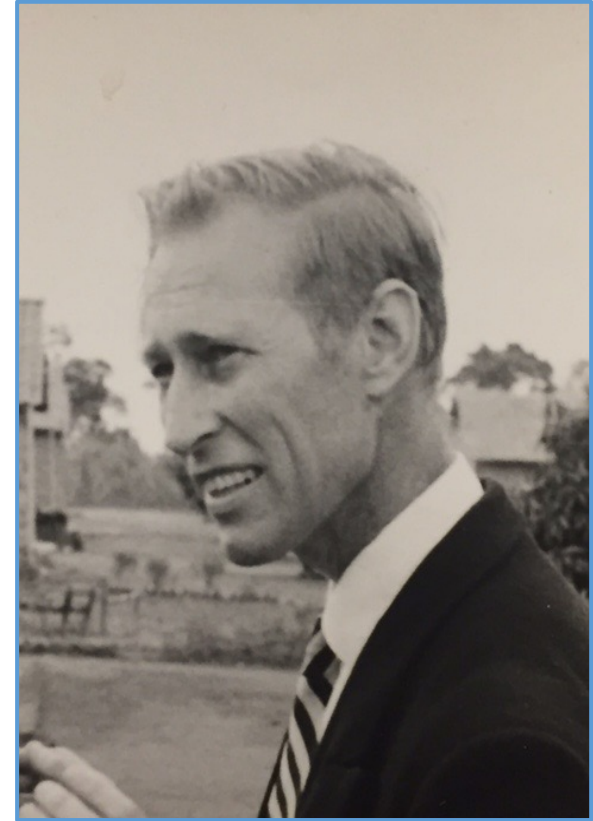




Murdo MacLeod, Murdo's maternal grandfather after whom he was named



Murdo MacLeod, Murdo's uncle who returned to teaching after being a tank driver and RSM in WWI



Gordon Currie, Murdo's brother-in-law

Acknowledgements

A number of people have helped with this book and deserve thanks. First of all, Angus Duncan, Murdo's brother, who was the family photographer for years and living memory of the Duncan family. Tom Honeyman of www.WW2Talk.com for sending the War Diaries of 2 Suffolk from 1st March 1944 onwards. He didn't have the first part which would be from October 1943 when Murdo joined them and the battalion was mobilised. Yumnam Rajeshwor, aka Raj, in Imphal who voluntarily assists many British, Indian and Japanese other families find their ancestors' graves near Imphal. He also helped with the Google Earth identification of features mentioned in the various War Diary entries - <http://imphalcampaign.blogspot.com/> - The editor would also like to thank Lt-Col (Retd.) Colin McGrory, Secretary to the Trustees, Scottish National War Memorial for the encouragement to put all of this booklet together and will be certainly added to their website (www.snmw.org) - <https://www.scotsatwar.org/content/reminiscences/6/> We would like to thank Ian Porter, also of WW2Talk.com, who helped find Sam Hackett. Julie Greenhill of St Andrews University, who corrected a University error and inserted Murdo in their Roll of Service, and by providing additional information which may be used at a later date. There is a link to her blog which relates the research she was obliged to make - <https://special-collections.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/2021/03/09/the-anatomy-of-an-enquiry-part-1-unlocking-answers-in-the-archive/> Lastly, www.unithistories.com for adding Murdo to this excellent list of British Officers who served in WW2.

Picture Acknowledgements

All photographs of Murdo and the Duncan family have been kindly provided by Angus Duncan, except those listed below. The photos of the Preston family were provided by the family. Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders; those overlooked are invited to get in touch with the editor.

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Sorbie U.F. Church c/° Leslie xx of www.geography.org.uk

Kilmeny Church - Marsali Thomson but also www.geography.org.uk

Kerr Memorial Church – Frank Reynolds of www.ScottishChurches.org.uk

and Canmore.org.uk

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Boston Church, Duns - Kenneth McLean, Duns

Drumclog Bell, Duns - Kenneth McLean, Duns

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Ann Stewart – Donald MacLeod, Tarbert

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Camp PG29 – WWW.WW2Talk.com

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Murdo Macleod, Murdo's grandfather – Donald MacLeod, Tarbert

Murdo MacLeod, Murdo's uncle – Donald MacLeod, Tarbert

Appendices

WAR DIARY OR INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY

| Hour, Date, Place | Summary of Events and Information | Glossary |
|-------------------|---|--|
| Saturday April 1 | <p>0730h hrs two Tps Tks under comd 2/1 Punjab Regt and 1 Coy proceeded to GUANTHABI to make a recce in force. 0700 hrs Capt. FORREST'S patrol returned, N.E.S. Recce patrol under 2/Lt. GAULD and 8 O.Rs. plus 48 W/T Set to area SADDLE. 1230 hrs G(R) pl left to form an ambush on YENGDOUPCK 5382. – THAMNAPAKPI 5576 track. Bn HQ moved to new sight, only 50 yds to NORTH. 0700 hrs I.O. proceeded to area WAKHONG 4480 to contact Capt. FORREST'S patrol, failed to do so. 1245 hrs runner from Lt. DUNCAN's patrol at CHINGDAL 5280 came in with evidence of Jap movement in the area, consisting of slips of paper with markings on, on tracks, and food packets with Jap markings. Road patrol to SALOMANG – N.T.R. Vehicle lights reported area YAINGANGPOKPI by 1/17 Dogra – area engaged by mediums at 2100 hrs.</p> | <p>Hrs – hours; Tps Tks – Troop Tanks; Comd – Command; Regt – Regiment; Coy – Company; recce – reconnaissance; Capt – Captain; N.E.S. – No Enemy Sighted; 2/Lt – Second Lieutenant; O.Rs – Other Ranks; W/T – Wireless Transmitter; G(R) PI – Guerrilla Platoon; Bn HQ – Battalion Headquarters; I.O. – Intelligence Officer; N.T.R – Nothing To Report; mediums – Medium artillery guns</p> |
| Sunday April 2 | <p>0845 hrs “Air Warning” received at Bn HQ. 1200 G(R) pl returned from ambush – N.E.S. – only 14 refugees seen coming up the track to YENGDOUPOK at 2000 hrs on night 1/2. 0630 hrs 2/Lt. GILBERT took an ambush patrol to CHINGDAL – consisting of 12 O.Rs. plus 2 signallers and 48 W/T Set. Stragglers seen coming through own F.D.Ls. Night all quiet – except Dogra Regt. Ambush party GUANTHABI where grenades, L.M.G. and S.A. firing were heard during the night.</p> | <p>F.D.Ls. – Forward Defence Lines; L.M.G. – Light Machine Gun; S.A. – Small arms</p> |
| Monday April 3 | <p>0815 hrs Capt. GURNEY took patrol of 16 N.C.Os and men plus 2 sigs and 48 W/T Set to ambush track between KHONGPAN 5282 and DONGSUM 5485 at an area 550849. Road patrol to SAGOLMANG took an interpreter and questioned villagers, who stated Japs were within our patrol area. 2/Lt. GAULD returned from patrol 1245 hrs – N.E.S. Sq Tks (less 2 Tps) and Coy 2/1 Punjab Regt reced in force area GUANTHABI to find results of Dogra ambush, only blood stains found. Villagers cleared out of Bde area. 2130 hrs 1 Jap bomber bombed IMPHAL, fires started 1 Tp 6 Pds attached under comd.</p> | <p>N.C.Os – Non-Commissioned Officers – sigs – signallers; Sq Tks – Squadron of Tanks; Bde – Brigade; Tp 6 Pds – Troop 6 Pounders (artillery)</p> |

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| <p>Tuesday April 4</p> | <p>0315 hrs force of Japs attacked Dogra Regt. positions area 5069, L.M.G., rifle, grenade and mortar heard throughout night 3/4 April. 0700 hrs 2 Tps Tks came up main road to assist DOGRAS, few casualties on DOGRA side, 7 Japs were seen to be lying dead in front of their F.D.Ls. together with 2 wounded – the battle continued throughout the day with the DOGRAS attacking with 1 Coy – 1 P.O.W. taken, who gave plenty of information including the fact that he was from 15 DIV – the battle ended approx. 1600 hrs. Reports in from Lt. LAWRENCE over the wireless reported location of enemy mortar – Arty activity in area. 2/Lt. BRADLEY took recce patrol of 5 O.Rs. plus 2 Sigs and W/T Set to PT. 4997 area 5281. G(R) PI under Capt. LEE HUNTER set out for an ambush in area AISHAN 6086. 1300 hrs Capt. GURNEY's patrol returned – N.E.S. 1310 hrs 2/Lt. GILBERT's patrol from area CHINGDAL returned with papers marked with Japanese inscriptions etc. Road patrol to SAGOLMANG reports N.T.R. – stragglers still coming through. Lt. BOX took Sec of carriers out in front of Bn F.D.Ls. and rounded up stray cattle, collecting over 150 head. Preliminary reports from DOGRAS at 2000 hrs say that 45 casualties were sustained by them whilst 50 Jap dead had been counted. Plenty of equipment captured including marked maps. Arty harassing fire throughout night by mediums and 25 Pds area GUANTHABI and SOUTH of Bn positions. All quiet on Bn Front. 3 stragglers from SHANGSHAK box came through C Coy F.D.Ls. – P.M. 20 Reinforcements including CSM Duffy joined the Bn.</p> | <p>P.O.W. – Prisoner Of War; DIV – Division; PT – Point; Sec – Section; PM Post Meridian; CSM – Company Sergeant-Major</p> |
| <p>Wednesday April 5</p> | <p>0930 hrs Lt. LAWRENCE's patrol returned – N.E.S. Lt. LT. YONGE'S took out recce patrol 0900 hrs to area track junction 5578. 1100 hrs orders from Brigadier to set an ambush area 12 M.S. on IMPHAL – UKHRUL Road in SEJANG village. Lt. YONGE'S patrol was reinforced to 28 men and withdrawn to area 12 M.S. Commanding Officer went to scene of DOGRA battle to see booty etc. A.M. Cpl DAVIS B Coy took recce patrol to Pt. 4997 area 5281 of 5 men. 2/Lt. BRADLEY returned from CHINGDAL patrol – found some old trenches area Pt. 4997 – 5281.</p> | <p>M.S. – Mile Stone; A.M. Anti-Meridian;</p> |
| <p>Thursday April 6</p> | <p>Rain early in the morning. Stray cattle were driven into F.D.L. area by a party from the Bn. 2 Tps Tks went down to GUANTHABI to open up the road – N.E.S. 1300 hrs Capt. D Lee Hunter and G(R) returned from ambush area 587826. Shot 2 bullocks belonging to civilians suspected of helping the enemy. Lt. DUNCAN briefed for ambush party at SEJANG 12½ M.S. UKHRUL Road. Arty activity on right flank in DOGRA area. Heavy rain during the night. Bn front all quiet.</p> | |

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| Thursday April 6 (Contd) | Raining hard until 0800 hrs. A.M. Lt. YONGE'S's pl relieved by 2/1 Punjab Pl. A.M. Air strafing and bombing of enemy positions area NUNGSHIGUM 4476 by Hurri-bombers – heavy casualties suffered by the enemy. 3/9 Jat Regt recaptured their positions without opposition. | PI – platoon; Cav – Cavalry (tanks); Hows – Howitzers; Sgt – Sergeant |
| Friday April 7 | 2100 hrs S.A. and grenade firing heard from direction of Dogras on our right flank. Approx 1600 hrs 1 Tp Tks from 7 Cav arrived to protect the Tp of 3.7 Hows. 0630 hrs Sgt. STEWARD C Coy took out recce patrol to Pt 4997. Lt. DUNCAN returned from patrol to Pt. 4997 – N.E.S. | |
| Saturday April 8 | 0630 hrs Sgt. BUNCE D Coy took recce patrol to Pt 4997. Drizzle early in the morning. Roads in bad condition owing to tanks. Reps from Bn under O.C. HQ Coy went to SEJANG village area 12½ M.S. UKHRUL Road to collect rice from forward villages in M.T. Firing heard intermittently throughout day from 3/9 Jat area. 1645 hrs Sgt. STEWARD's patrol returned – N.E.S. 7-75m/m enemy shells fell in area of B Coy approx 1700 hrs – suspected ranging shots – no damage or casualties. 2100 hrs B Coy reported that 2 of their booby traps had been exploded. 2105 hrs B Coy reported that 2 enemy discharger shells had burst on their positions. 2114 hrs 3.7 Hows. D.F. brought down on B Coy front area. 2121 hrs report received from Bty HQ 28 (J) Fd Regt that B Coy were being attacked from the NORTH. 2133 hrs half of D.F. brought down again on B Coy front. Report from B Coy of 1 slight casualty through enemy discharger shells, which were falling in larger numbers by this time. 2140 hrs more D.F. called for from B. 2253 hrs more D.F. called for from B on right flank. O.C. B reported movement to his right – says that attacking party consisted of 20 Japs of which 3 had approached the barbed wire, also that some of the Jap bodies were visible, dead or wounded, enmeshed in the wire. 2250 hrs B say 1 man killed and 1 more wounded. 2307 hrs B report enemy quieter on their front. 2321 hrs B report total casualties to present 1 killed – 6 wounded, also that sounds of enemy digging-in could be heard approx. 200 yds away to N.E. behind a small feature. 2330 hrs Arty (25 Pds) began to engage the enemy again. B Coy say they can see 10 enemy enmeshed in the wire – now say that probably 50 Japs attacked their position using plenty of discharger shells. 2350 hrs R.A. report 25 Pds successfully engaged target – enemy digging ceased, though noises of slithering down hill were heard some time after. 0010 hrs B report slight movement on right flank, otherwise all quiet, also that during the attack the cry (McKinnon) was heard. 0100 hrs B report movement fading away to NORTH. 0205 hrs B report “all quiet”. Bn continued with 50% stand-to. | Reps – Representatives; O.C. – Officer Commanding; M.T. – Motor Transport; D.F. – Defensive Fire; Fd – Field; N.E. – NORTH East; Arty – Artillery |

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| Saturday April 8 (Contd) | <p>0630 hrs Capt. FORREST and Capt. CAPT. COWARD went out on route recce party ordered by Bde area NORTH of Bn area. B Coy reported that 2 killed were PTE. W. WIGGER 5782683 and PTE. D. HAYNES 14523393 and that 1 N.C.O. and 2 Ptes were evacuated beyond R.A.P. Booty from enemy included 5 bodies i.e. Lieut, 1 Sgt, 2 Superior Ptes and 1 L/Cpl, also 1 L.M.G., 6 rifles, respirators and miscellaneous kit – a diary was obtained from the Officer’s body. Identifications so far show the enemy to be 1 Coy, 51 Regt, Bn unknown. Recce patrol to CHINGDAL by Cpl. TURNER of A and 3 men set off A.M. I.O. visited B Coy area, own dead buried in IMPHAL by Bn Padre. 1445 hrs Lt. DUNCAN took fighting patrol of 21 men to area NORTH and N.W. of B Coy, claims 19 enemy killed, 1 probably and 6 wounded – no casualties to own men. Spotted 1 heavy M.G. on wheels – returned approx. 1830 hrs. 1145 hrs 2/LT. GAULD’s patrol returned – N.T.R. 1400 hrs Sgt. BUNCE returned from CHINGDAL area patrol. Brought in 2 stragglers from 50 Bde, otherwise N.E.S. 1653 hrs B Coy report that enemy were seen 200 yds to the N.E. of them on a small feature – brought down Arty D.F. – no results seen. B Coy brought down D.F. three times during night of 9/10 on their front owing to movement being heard to their NORTH and N.E. 2/Lt. GILBERT took a section on recce patrol to area YAINGGANGPOKPI and track junction to NORTH of THAMNAPAKPI village. Fatigue parties still engaged in collecting rice from granaries left by the villagers as far as 14 M.S. on UKHRUL Road. Padre held a C. of E. service (Easter) in Bn HQ area 1430 hrs.</p> | <p>PTE – Private; R.A.P. – Regiment Aid Post; L/Cpl – Lance-Corporal; Cpl – Corporal; M.G. – Machine Gun; C. of E. – Church of England;</p> |
| Sunday April 9 “EASTER DAY” | | |
| Monday April 10 | <p>0245 hrs heavy storm blew up from the WEST obscuring the full moon. Sound of much firing of L.M.G. and grenades etc., from 3/9 Jat area to our NORTH. 0310 hrs heavy rain and thunder storm commenced. Jap Officer’s sword found in B Coy area. 1 gunner killed last night brought down by stretcher party. 1220 hrs G(R) PI left on patrol to area 5071 A.M. Fighting patrol under 2/Lt. GAULD left to patrol area NORTH of B Coy. 0900 hrs 3 men from Cpl TURNER’s patrol arrived in Bn area, saying party had been fired on and split in two, no casualties. 0930 hrs Cpl TURNER and 2 men returned. Capt. FORREST and Capt. COWARD returned off patrols – N.E.S. 1300 hrs two stragglers from 152 Parachute Bn who had been captured by the Japs at SHASHAK and had escaped yesterday, were sent by Bde to Bn. They stated that the Jap Coy which attacked B Coy on night 8/9 and the enemy which were shot up on the 9th by Lt. DUNCAN’s patrol were the same coy – which had originally started the attack with 150 men and was now 20 fighting men in strength, they stated that there were 80 casualties in area 5074 guarded by 14 sentries with 1 M.M.G. 1430 hrs the Commanding Officer with the I.O. went out in a carrier to area 4676 to have the enemy features pointed out by the escaped</p> | <p>M.M.G. – Motorised Machine Gun</p> |

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| <p>Monday April 10 (Contd)</p> | <p>P.O.Ws 2 Secs from D Coy left for an ambush in area 4680. Cpl. WHEELER A Coy took recce patrol to Pt 4997 area 1530 hrs met 2/LT. GAULD's fighting patrol returning – said enemy strength approx. 40 to 50 area feature 495747. Claimed 3 enemy killed – more wounded – own patrol Nil casualties. P.M. one gunner from attached 6 Pdr A/Tk Tp injured, while cleaning a 36 Grenade. Cpl. WHEELER's recce patrol returned having seen 20 to 30 Japs area LAMBOIBA KHUL – stated he inflicted 2 casualties before withdrawing. Lt. WATT took a PI to Pt. 4241 area to harass any enemy in area. Feature area 5074 engaged successfully by R.A. 1805 hrs B Coy reported enemy approaching from the NORTH and D.F. brought down. 1850 hrs B Coy say L.M.G. position spotted and engaged by Arty. Japs commenced engaging B with discharger shells. 1832 hrs B report W/T contact with G(R)s who reported enemy movement on S.E. Spur of B Coy. 1845 hrs reports of enemy digging on small feature to N.E. G(R)s report enemy in area 507742. Arty engaged area. 2020 hrs reports of enemy coming round B Coy's S.E. flank. 2028 hrs Bn telephone communications with B Coy cut. 2050 hrs reports from R.A. O.P. with B that situation in hand. 1900 hrs G(R)s returned – 2104 hrs B report much quieter.</p> | <p>A/Tk Tp – Anti-Tank Troop; R.A. – Royal Artillery; S.E. – South East; O.P. – Observation Post;</p> |
| <p>Tuesday April 11</p> | <p>0600 hrs line party and A Coy patrol proceeded through D Coy up to B Coy. 0730 hrs both R.A. and own telephone communications repaired. 0815 hrs 2/Lt. BRADLEY took his PI as a fighting patrol to contour 794736 thence to feature 500745 thence WEST and back to Bn. Sgt BUNCE came into Bn at 1100 hrs and said that they had killed some Japs near LAMYENCHING on way to Bn. Organised three carriers with G(R) pl and Sgt. BUNCE as a guide to collect bodies for identification. 1200 hrs GRs returned with 1 body of a 1st Class Private. No Regimental identifications were available. 1100 hrs Lt. WATT came into Bn HQ to report that he had taken Pt. 4941 feature without opposition. Hurricanes strafed SADDLE are. 1300 hrs report from B Coy that S/Lt. BRADLEY's patrol are engaging the enemy. 1615 hrs 2 Pls A Coy rushed out to help S/Lt. BRADLEY. 1800 hrs S/Lt. BRADLEY PI returned, said that they were engaged by Jap L.M.Gs from area 495732. Suffered 1 Missing – believed killed – Pte. A. BLAKE 5827015 and Pte. A. WARD 5837730 – Injured, Pte. SINCLAIR 14456415 and Pte. CARR 14586511 also wounded. 1 PI under Lt. HASTIE escorted Lee Tks to GUANTHABI area, had Jap M.M.Gs and mortars and 3.7 A/Tk gun fired at them. Lt. BOX took 1 Sec of carriers for escort purposes. Night 11/12 quieter on Bn front. Enemy digging reported on B Coy front – Arty harassing fire on Bn front. 3/9 Japs driven off NUNGSHIGUM features at 1600 hrs.</p> | |

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| Tuesday April 11 (Condt) | <p>0615 hrs local patrol from B fired at 1 Jap. A Coy less 1 PI supported by 1 Tp Lee Tks went to area LAMYENCHING 4875 as 35 to 40 Japs were reported by 2/1 Punjab patrol last night in this area. Sgt. STEELE C Coy took patrol of 12 to just NORTH of B Coy positions. 1 N.C.O. and 6 from D Coy too small fighting patrol to area 5273 to harass the enemy if any. A.M. Sgt. BATES PI A Coy fired on by Jap L.M.G. etc, from area of features 200 yds N.E. of B Coy – few casualties – Sgt. BATES, Cpl. FINCH, Cpl. STEWRT – including three missing. 1545 hrs C Coy left area to attack feature 492739 from the WEST. 1430 hrs Hurri-bombers bombed and strafed Japs on NUNGSHIGUM feature. 1600 hrs C Coy set out to occupy RING feature area 494739, reached position to within 400 yds WEST of B Coy and had to stay the night. G(R) PI and one Tp of Lee Tks harassed area 525740, returned 1900 hrs – N.E.S. Night all quiet on the Bn front. 2400 hrs 4 stragglers admitted to F.D.Ls.</p> | |
| Wednesday April 12 | <p>0900 hrs RING feature 494739 occupied by C Coy without opposition. 1 PI pushing on towards B Coy Southwards along SPUR. 4 stragglers sent to Bde for questioning. 1000 hrs Vengeances Dive-bombers bombed NUNGSHIGUM feature area 435766 in preparation for the operation to recapture the feature. 1030 hrs Arty including Mediums, 25 Pds and 3.7 Hows. Opened up. 1100 hrs Hurri-bombers bombed and strafed feature 435755. 1 Tp Lee Tks climbed up feature area 4473. Attack being put in by 2 Coy 1/17 DOGRAS. 3 missing reported yesterday now reads: - 5833891 Pte. J. WORLLEDGE – Wounded and 14601163 Pte. R. MACE – Missing – Believed killed – Sgt. J. BATES 5771526 – Died of wounds received on 12.04.44. C Coy pushed to PIMPLE feature, failed, owing to Jap L.M.G. fire from base of PIMPLE – Sgt. STEELE’s PI put in main attack. C Coy withdrew to area 487728 and dug in for the night. 1 Tp Tks from 7 Cav protected Bn right flank where C Coy had vacated their positions. C Coy’s total casualties:- All Missing – Believed killed, 5826128 Sgt. D. STEELE, 6295654 Cpl. C. JAMES, 14595779 Pte. B. DOWELL, 14345619 Pte. J. EBBAGE, 14534020 Pte. W. FALLOWFIELD, 3066850 Pte. E. MATTHEWMAN, 14865004 Pte. G. PIDGEN, 14357349 Pte. A. TORRENCE. Quiet night on Bn front, though noisy from 1/17 DOGRA area on NUNGSHIGUM.</p> | |
| Thursday April 13 | <p>Bn HQ and HQ Coy packed A.M. to move to area 486728 – Commenced moving approx. 0930 hrs. Lt. LAWRENCE seriously injured while lifting booby trap in D Coy area A.M. Bn HQ established in new area approx. 1400 hrs – 1800 hrs “O” Group conference at Bn HQ for new attack by A and D Coys on RING and PIMPLE. 2000 hrs Red and White very lights seen due</p> | |

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| Friday April 14 | WEST of Bn HQ, automatic fire and tracer seen to the WEST, otherwise night all quiet on Bn front. Rain last from 1200 hrs till 1500 hrs making the mule track extremely slippery. | "O" Group – Orders Group; |
| Saturday April 15 | <p>0030 hrs A and D Coys commenced moving around Westerly edge of feature Pt. 4057 towards RING. Tac HQ opened up in B Coy area approx. 0700 hrs. 0704 hrs R.A. reported A and D Coys on RING feature 494741. 0709 hrs message sent to tanks to switch their fire to 6° left. 0722 a message from D Coy – established on feature 492736. 0733 hrs R.A. reported D Coy on feature 492732 preparing to make a final assault on PIMPLE. 0744 Fire Pl. D Coy opened up – nothing seen of flanking P1. 0750 hrs small Jap L.M.G. burst answered by ours. 0805 hrs D Coy report N.T.R. and N.E.S. 0808 hrs A Coy on RING passed a message to D Coy that they had seen 1 Jap enter a bunker on the SADDLE below PIMPLE. B Coy 3" Mortar O.P. reported D Coy on PIMPLE 0828 hrs. 0831 hrs O.P. reported D Coy moving down western flank of PIMPLE with fixed bayonets. 0836 hrs D Coy reported throwing grenades from PIMPLE. 0845 hrs bunker containing an enemy L.M.G. reported on NORTH face of PIMPLE. 0844 hrs heavy A.A. fire heard due WEST over IMPHAL AERODROME area – and sound of air combat over same area. 0849 hrs D Coy occupied enemy trenches on PIMPLE and reported that they were being fired at by Jap 75 m/m gun from NORTH. 6 Zero fighters escorting 6 Jap bombers flew over head in an Easterly direction. 0852 hrs Major LEACH came into Bn HQ to report that he had established 2 Pls on PIMPLE and 1 PI on feature 492736, and reported that Jap was in bunkers on NORTH face of PIMPLE approx. 30 yds from crest. 0853 Arty. shelled to area 500746. 2/Lt. GILBERT'S PI attempted right flanking on to bunkers supported by slow 3" Mortar fire from B Coy area 0907 hrs to 0920 hrs sporadic L.M.G. firing reported. 0925 hrs Capt. FORREST reported enemy seen evacuating to P.O.W. ground in N.E. direction. 0926 hrs D Coy report 1 Jap definitely killed whilst escaping, by L.M.G. fire. 0932 hrs A Coy drew enemy fire from bunkers and returned their fire. A Coy report 1 enemy discharger firing on their area causing 2 casualties. 1009 hrs 18 Vengeance Dive-bombers bombed Northern end NUNGSHIGUM feature. 2 of own bodies seen lying EAST of PIMPLE. 1025 hrs 1 of D Coy wounded. 1037 hrs Major LEACH reported to Tac HQ that several casualties had been sustained by S/Lt. GILBERT'S right flanking PI including S/Lt. GILBERT, he was being evacuated to the R.A.P. 1105 hrs Hurri-bombers bombed feature SAUSAGE. D Coy preparing to assault Jap bunkers. 1413 hrs Capt. FORREST reported that the assault had failed and that the leading 3 men had been killed, together with 2 wounded and 2 missing - and that they encountered 50 yd range accurate L.M.G. enemy fire from bunkers – he estimated as many as 3 L.M.Gs. 1432 hrs</p> | Tac HQ – Tactical Headquarters; 6° - Six degrees; Fire Pl – Fire Platoon; 3" – three inch; A.A. – Anti-Aircraft |

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| <p>Saturday April 15 (Contd)</p> | <p>Commanding Officer ordered Capt. FORREST to pass message to Major LEACH to withdraw D Coy so that 1PI reinforced RING with A Coy and the remainder with O.C. D on PIMPLE. Total casualties for the day for D Coy and A Coy 2 officers wounded i.e., S/Lt. GILBERT and Lt. DUNCAN, 9 O.R. wounded, 5 O.R. killed i.e. 5807888 Pte. Defue A, 14545245 Pte. Mott C, 53932633 Pte. Narduzzo S, 14563495 Pte. Bennet D, 14595719 Pte. Tod D; Missing 3 ORs. 1950 hrs heavy L.M.G. firing and grenade explosions heard from area RING, which was reported by A, as a listening post from A laying a booby trap and were heard by a Jap patrol of approx. 8 men – the Japs chased our patrol as far as A Coy’s defences, where they were met by our own L.M.G. fire. Arty D.F. was brought down. Later in the evening slithering noises as though bodies were being dragged away, were heard. 2 wounded in A Coy – enemy casualties not known. Approx 2200 hrs a suspected Jap position situated on SOUTH end of SAUGAGE feature were seen to throw grenades down the Western slopes of the feature – much shouting was also heard.</p> | |
| <p>Sunday April 16</p> | <p>0715 hrs A Coy sent out 1 Sec towards SAUSAGE as part of a deception to help 2/1 PUNJAB Regt who were putting in an attack on SAUSAGE, coming from feature Pt. 4066. HQ Coy and Bn HQ spent day digging and wiring. 1100 hrs dust, followed by rain storm arose and finished approx. 1300 hrs. Fire programme APPENDIX “B” issued. Zero hour 1655 hrs – Japs reply with continuous L.M.G. fire towards PIMPLE – 12 Japs seen to run out from Bunker. D Coy assault unsuccessful – Nil casualties. Brigadier visited Bn HQ and B Coy area A.M. Approx 2100 hrs L.M.G. fire and grenade explosions heard from C Coy area – reported movement on NORTH slopes of feature – otherwise night all quiet on Bn front.</p> | |
| <p>Monday April 17</p> | <p>0115 hrs heavy rain storm commenced lasting till approx. 0220 hrs. 1100 hrs Capt. D LEE HUNTER and some of G(R) PI shot at 1 of the Jap bunkers, at the front of PIMPLE with a Springfield Rifle, no retaliatory fire from the Japs. Heavy L.M.G. fire heard from PIMPLE area at 1420 hrs and many rounds of 3” Mortar fire. On investigation proved to be first phase of D Coy mock attack to find out whether any enemy still occupied the bunkers. 1550 hrs D Coy reported that enemy positions on PIMPLE had been evacuated. Commanding Officer, 2nd In Command and Intelligence Officer with 2 men examined area – 5 Jap bodies lying near “Foxhole” positions, several of own men’s bodies found in area. Jap positions were well concealed “Foxholes” for one or two men – sited to cover the re-entrant leading to PIMPLE. Much equipment was recovered, including a Jap discharger, several rifles, grenades, and</p> | |

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| <p>Monday April 17 (Contd)</p> | <p>diaries, with an assortment of clothing. 1930 hrs Jap fighting patrol attempted to penetrate A Coy's defences, repulsed with L.M.G. and rifle fire, also at 0230 hrs and 0430 hrs – 3" Mortar D.F. was brought down – NIL casualties to own troops.</p> | |
| <p>Tuesday April 18</p> | <p>Recovered 2 Jap bodies – 1 Sgt and 1-1st Class Private. D Coy sent out a fighting patrol and recovered the Sgt's body – One Officer's sword was found with signs of a body having been dragged away, leaving a blood trail. 0645 hrs Arty programme commenced in support of 2/1 PUNJAB's attack on SAUSAGE feature – the mediums had one gun firing short, the shells landing on A Coy's positions on RING causing 4 killed and 8 wounded, and 1 gunner from the 28 (J) Fd Regt R.A. killed, names of killed:- Pte. DOYLE J 7891495, Pte. PITTARD E 14386239, Pte. YOUNG G 5680994, Pte. REEVE A 6020100—names of wounded:- Pte. SAYFRITZ F 5125392, Pte. HART J 5833012, Pte. LAST D 5832691, Pte. CANNELL R 14406076, L/Cpl. PRESLAND L 5777841, Pte. PERKINS H 5570884, Cpl. WHEELER E 2753549.</p> <p>0730 hrs Pte. HANSLIP J 14534862 of C Coy wounded by a 36 Grenade which exploded whilst being cleaned. 0950 hrs report from A Coy that 2/1 PUNJAB had taken SAUSAGE feature 497748. Own weapons recovered from bodies of own men, near Jap positions on PIMPLE, including L.M.Gs, T.S.M.Gs and Rifles. 1300 hrs G(R) Pl under Capt. LEE HUNTER went on patrol to Pt. 4066 feature 5376 to see whether enemy occupy feature, and to hold feature for 24 hours. Reports received that 2/1 PUNJAB Regt failed to capture SAUSAGE feature and were digging in with 2 Coys on the feature for the night to resume their attack to-morrow.</p> <p>Commanding Officer had interview with Brigadier, lasting all afternoon.</p> <p>1230 hrs warning order from Bde received that A Coy on RING were to be relieved by 2/1 PUNJAB Regt. 2000 hrs 2 Coys of Japs attacked 63 Bde Box at SENGMAI 2978, and were repulsed. Padre buried the bodies of the following men recovered after the capture of the Jap positions on NORTH face of PIMPLE:- C Coy men – Pte. BLAKE reported as Missing – Believed killed on 11.04.44, Sgt. STEELE, Cpl JAMES, Ptes. DOWELL, EBBAGE, TORRENCE, PIGDEN – reported as Missing - Believed killed on 13.04.44 – D Coy men – Pts. DEFUE, MOTT, NARDUZZO, BENNET, TOD, and Cpl. GOUDIE W 3053489, Pte. KNOX F 14541024, Pte. SAVAGE R 14515513 – who were reported as Missing on the 15.04.44. – A Coy men- Pte. MACE – reported as Missing - Believed killed on 13.04.44. 2/Lts. RICHARDSON, GUNTON and ELLIS posted to this Bn.</p> | <p>T.S.M.Gs – Thompson Submachine Gun</p> |

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| <p>Wednesday April 19</p> | <p>1100 hrs A Coy on RING relieved by 2/1 PUNJAB Regt. 1130 hrs Lt-Col. H.R. HOPKING relinquished his command of the Bn, and proceeded to Div HQ – MAJOR K.C. MENNEER assumed command A.M. 4/5 MAHRATTA Regt of 37 Bde relieved this unit on Pt. 4057. 1230 hrs L/Cpl. RAYSON A 6029119 HQ Coy, injured by a mine, while lifting booby traps, B Coy area. 1300 hrs Bn HQ closed present location and reopened at PUNGDONSAM Village 464710, where Bn took over from 1/17 DOGRA Regt – whole Bn in by 1730 hrs. 2/1 PUNJAB continued attacking Jap positions on SOUTH end of SAUSAGE and put 2 L.M.Gs, out of action, feature not yet completely captured – night all quiet on Bn front.</p> | |
| <p>Thursday April 20</p> | <p>A.M. 2/Lts. RICHARDSON, GUNTON, ELLIS, posted to A – D – B - respectively. Sgt. CROPLEY and a slaughtering party slaughtered some cattle for the Bn, including 4 cows, brought in by Sgt. PARR, which were killed on a mine-field. 1430 hrs Commanding Officer's conference for Coy Commanders. Bn spent day in general maintenance and bathing. Telegram received that Pte. DAVIDSON C. 5782770 of A Coy died of wounds received on 15.04.44. Night all quiet on Bn front.</p> | |

A list of when Murdo was lucky:

1. Murdo could have been sent to the OCTU at Dunbar, instead of Colchester, and perhaps commissioned to the Black Watch. N.B. - The 2nd Battalion Black Watch served in the 3rd Indian Division (Special Force) under Wingate in Burma at the same time Murdo was there
2. Met Norah Preston, fell out with her, then bumped into her again by chance and started afresh
3. His request to volunteer for Narvik was refused (he'd said earlier in his tape 'never volunteer')
4. The enemy never attacked the aerodrome in Norfolk where the only defence was Murdo's 38 pistol and six bullets
5. His convoy to India (WS.7x) was never attacked
6. When the 2 Welch were sent off with to defend Rangoon on the S.S Jalaqurda, along with the 2nd Borders and 1st Northants, but turned back in time and avoided capture
7. Was twice 106.2°F
8. When he joined 1st Royal Welch Fusiliers, they were on their way back after losing many men in the First Arakan Campaign
9. That the 5th Indian Division was sent down the Arakan coast, and not on the East side of the Mayu Range
10. That the 5th Indian Division white regiment chosen to boost the 7th Indian Division in the Admin Box was the 2 West Yorks and not the 2 Suffolks
11. That the first Dakota to leave Dohazari for Imphal did not crash with men, vehicles, mules, and guns aboard
12. That the Royal West Kents were ordered to remain in Kohima instead of the 2 Suffolks and became surrounded
13. That on the 8th April, along with his fighting patrol, he was more alert than the enemy
14. That again on the 8th April at 1653 hrs when B Coy reported that the enemy were seen only 200 yards away to the N.E., Murdo and his platoon were still patrolling to the N. and N.W. so closely avoiding "friendly" artillery fire
15. And lastly, that Murdo felt uncomfortable enough to change his bath position precisely when he did.

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