



Neville Hogan (IWM SR 12342)

I think parties of about 30 or 40 were organised to swim this river. And I was in one of these parties. Coming down a swift flowing river is something. It's frightening. You look at water, it's so beautiful, but once you get there, underneath, oh it's frightening. Boots around my neck, a 4.5 pistol with its big web belt, a big broad web belt choking you. Tin hat, which I lost immediately I got into the water, a pair of shorts and that's it. About half way, three quarters of the way across, I had a thud in my thigh and I thought, 'Oh God, there goes another poor Gurkha drowning.' But it turned out that I was hit by shrapnel in my thigh. Anyway I got to the north bank about 300 yards from the bridge, climbed up. Out of our party of about 30 or 40 – I'm not quite sure – there must have been about only 10 of us left. And then we made for the railway line which takes us to Pegu. We got to Pegu which was about a 42 mile walk and I think we did that in about 2 days. And there was a hospital train where I had my shrapnel removed just by being pulled out, leaving a few bits inside...

Prue Brewis (IWM SR 22741)

We had to evacuate rather quickly. We were taken to Shwebo by about 9 o'clock at night. And then we were put on the train. Very hot. There were 8 of us in a carriage. We were on this train for 6 days and did exactly 65 miles in 6 days because we could only travel at night. Anyway after 6 days the... I don't know what he was, the director of railways, came down in his rail car. So he gave us 10 minutes to sort out what we thought was about 30 pounds of luggage and get into his rail car where we were absolutely packed like sardines. Standing up, standing room only, you know. And took what we thought was most essential things, really, anything we wanted to get out. And he took us the other... I don't know how many miles, 100 miles or something, up to Myitkyina. And actually we got the last plane to leave Burma because the next day the aerodrome was bombed. Well we flew out and then we went on a train journey down to Calcutta where we had to try and buy a few clothes and then were sent on to Simla.

Dominic Neill (IWM SR 13299)

We were now marching north along a narrow track. I had about two or three Gurkhas ahead of me and the others to my rear. I don't think we'd gone very far out of the village when, totally out of the blue, an ambush exploded abruptly to my immediate left. I can remember roaring out to my men, 'Take cover right' before diving for cover myself into the bushes to the right of the track. Things happen very quickly in an ambush, hundreds of thoughts flash through the minds of those caught in this way and all in the briefest of seconds. I remember

that I wasn't actually frightened, which surprised me, but I was totally and utterly shocked. Never ever during any of my previous training had I been taught any of the approved contact drills, certainly the counter ambush drill was unknown to me. I was utterly appalled to realise that I simply did not know what to do in order to extract my men and myself from our present predicament. My earlier inadequate training chickens had now come home to roost with a vengeance. The gunner was firing his LMG immediately opposite me from the jungle on the far side of the track. He was so close that I could clearly see the smoke rising from his gun's muzzle. His bursts of fire were hitting the trees and bushes above my head, the bullets were cutting the branches and bits of leaf and wood were falling on my pack, on my neck and down my shirt collar. There was also rifle fire coming from the enemy lying to the left and right of the light machine gunner. I think, but I'm not absolutely certain, that another LMG was firing at my men who had been behind me on the track. Altogether my impression was the enemy ambush was not of any great length.

Roland Nappin (IWM SR 20593)

I can't remember the exact company I was with but they wanted volunteers for to go into the animal transport. And I volunteered and that was how I became a muleteer. I liked animals and I thought it would be something different and I volunteered for the animal transport. So I ended up as a muleteer. When I joined the animal transport, the mules that were there, we had to put saddles on them and that was a job of itself. You'd get the saddle on and tie the girth around and as soon as you went to put a load on them to carry they used to up, buck, hind legs up in the air and throw the load off. The one I had did this, so we tied him up tight to a post, held on to him, put the blankets on him, threw a girth all over the lot so he couldn't throw it off and then we took him round. He was bucking and chucking and trying to throw it off. He'd come back afterwards white with lather, but he didn't throw any more off, it was just to get them to carry a load. We brushed them down and wiped them down, they were looked after well and truly.

John Randle (IWM SR 20457)

To start with anyway we had our own mess, our own cook. Later on in the war I switched over to eating Indian food. As the only British officer in the company I mean my ration was a couple of biscuits and half a tin of warm bully beef. So I decided this was ludicrous, so I adapted myself to eating Indian food, I've never been so fit in my life. Looking back on it now I was remarkably fit. Up in the fighting in Burma it was mainly dal, which is lentils, very lightly curried with a bit of ghee and then chapattis, unleavened bread. I believe from a dietary point of view that is as good a food as any. We fought all the way through Burma our chaps, on that, and my endurance and capability to go on fighting through the monsoons and in great heat and stuff was completely sustained by this. Occasionally we liberated a chicken or something like that or a goat, but we didn't even get an awful lot of meat really.

Norman Bowdler (IWM SR 22342)

Well it was a frightening experience because it was done at night. We were overflown by aircraft all the time to drown out the noise of our engines and we were very close to the Japanese – very close indeed. We had to get over this pass which had just been recently dug I mean it was twisty turny. There would be a drop on one side of five or six hundred feet and on the other cliffs straight up. Yes it was a bit dodgy, getting a thirty ton tank around these S-bends. Some of the bends were so severe that you had to go backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards to negotiate them.

Bert Harwood (IWM SR 20769)

The casualties were taken back into battalion headquarters, they had pioneers and that there, they dug all these trenches to lay the wounded in, nothing over the top of them, just laying them in there. I walked around there one day just to see how some of the blokes were and it was terrible really seeing them laying out there just in these trenches. We were supplied by air at that time. These parachutes came down and water was one of the main things we had trouble with and they used to drop these water packles, the packles which were carried on the side of a mule, you used to carry one on each side of a mule, water. They were dropping these down by parachute and on occasions the parachute wouldn't open and one of these packles hit a couple of casualties in the trenches and killed them. That sort of thing happened. The shelling killed people that were in the trenches, waiting. Even the actual first aid centre, I never actually went into it, I went round where the casualties were, but eventually that got hit by shells and I think a doctor was killed. They were doing all operations with the very minimum of supplies.

Enid Grant (IWM SR 22688)

We then got posted to Rangoon. I can't remember, I think we were flown by RAF plane to Rangoon. I was there on VJ Day. We were put in the YWCA to start with there was no particular hospital posting. And VJ Day came while we were there – it was very exciting. All the shipping on the river tooted and hooted and sirens were everywhere and people were rushing up and down the streets in jeeps. There was money; I picked up a lot of Japanese money which was thrown. It was just lying about in the streets. And we all dashed about and somebody tried to drive a tank into Government House and the Japanese were in there handing over the sword and General Stopford was there. It was a hilarious time, everybody was going about... I had two Japanese notes and everybody around signed them, we all signed these notes. Yes, it was very exciting.