

PEOPLE PROFILES

Major Neville Hogan MBE



Born in Burma to an Irish father and Burmese mother, Major Hogan fought in two Burma campaigns.

The first campaign was the British retreat in 1942. In the second campaign the Allies returned to recapture Burma.

Hogan's father worked as an assistant manager for a shipping company and his mother was a schoolteacher. He led an ordinary life with his two sisters (one of whom rose to the rank of major in the Women's Auxiliary Service in the British Indian Army) and a brother who eventually became an Anglican priest.

A keen boy scout, he enlisted into the Territorial Army on 15 August 1939 at the tender age of 16. When war broke out in Europe, no one thought that the war would come to Burma and, like most young people, Hogan had no real interest in politics.

Everything changed when Singapore was captured by the Japanese and Burma became their next target. In early 1942 many civilians fled to India including Major Hogan's mother and siblings.

THE FIRST CAMPAIGN

The retreat from Burma to India was a gruelling operation. There was only one road to India. Much of the route was surrounded by paddy fields which were submerged in muddy water or by hills. The journey for Hogan and his troops covered about 1000 miles and took weeks to complete.

Once he arrived in central India, he was sent to Jhansi for infantry training in skills such as using a bayonet and other weapons. At this time, Hogan also received a commission, which meant he was promoted from a private to an officer.



Group photo taken at a jungle training camp December 1944

THE SECOND CAMPAIGN

Now an officer in the Burma Rifles, which formed the backbone of the Chindits, Hogan worked as a reconnaissance platoon commander. Along with

other Allied troops, Hogan parachuted into Burma deep inside enemy territory. Every day Hogan and his unit had to go ahead of 400 men and 100 mules, looking for the best spots to receive supply drops from their air support crews.

They also had to find good landing sites where light planes could pick up casualties, locate food and water, and find places where 400 men and 100 mules could hide for the night. In addition, they had to clear the dung made by the mules and set booby traps for the enemy.

Major Hogan's fondest memories of this time were "the camaraderie and friendship; knowing that you all shared the same experience, whether you were an officer or a private."

It was exhausting and painful, as the men were hunted like animals by the Japanese. They often had little sleep, little food and had to protect themselves from the tough terrain as well as their enemy. Mosquitoes carried the deadly disease malaria and blood-sucking leeches would get inside their clothes.

In addition each soldier had to carry their gun and a 55lb (24.9kg) backpack which contained food rations for five days, ammunition, a groundsheet, a cardigan, underwear, socks and a towel.

On many occasions Major Hogan faced his biggest fear, which was hand-to-hand

combat with the enemy. The Japanese would attack with rifles and Samurai swords. Hogan and his men would be forced to counterattack with their bayonets, while the Gurkhas used their kukries. Fighting would be fierce and often fatal.

After the war Hogan remained in Burma, marrying his wife Glory in April 1949. However the political tensions of the time which followed Burma's independence as well as anti-British sentiment, led to him being imprisoned by the Communist Party. He escaped and fled to England with his family in 1950 and is not able to return to Burma. He lives with his family now in Hemel Hemstead, England.

Major Hogan was awarded an MBE on 1 January 2004 for his services to the Chindit Old Association and providing welfare to war widows and disabled veterans.



Singer Vera Lynn

In 1944 famous singer Dame Vera Lynn met Major Hogan when he was just 21 years old and lying in a hospital bed in eastern India. Hogan was recovering from a bullet wound to his shoulder in addition to pneumonia, malaria and typhus.



Wedding day, 1949



Major Hogan's wife Glory, who is also Anglo-Burmese, was a prisoner at a civilian POW Camp in Burma. Unlike most prisoners, Glory and her family were treated very well by their Japanese captors.

The Camp's commandment had been educated at Cambridge University in England and even apologised when he was ordered by his superiors not to give prisoners Red Cross relief parcels that were sent to them.



Major Hogan and his wife Glory in 2009

She asked him if there was anything she could do for him and he asked for a kiss. She kindly obliged!

Dame Vera sang the wartime hits 'We'll Meet Again' and 'There'll Be Bluebirds Over The White Cliffs of Dover' and was known as the 'Forces' Sweetheart'. She toured Egypt, India and Burma and performed outdoor concerts for the troops. In 2004, the pair met again at a 60th anniversary reception at London's Imperial War Museum.