

FIGHTING HEROES OF THE INTELLIGENCE CORPS

By Harry Fecitt MBE TD, (ex-22 Intelligence Company and various armies)

Hero No. 2: SAMUEL NEWLAND DSO

Indian Army Intelligence Corps

Now that the monsoon has arrived and the G.S.I.z forward parties, which have been operating in 4th Corps, are coming back, I would like at this juncture to express my appreciation of the work which these parties have been doing.

I know well enough the hard conditions under which they have been living and operating for weeks on end, I know too the strain that the work imposes on all members of the parties – it has, in fact, been described to my staff by an officer (not a member of one of the forward parties) as similar to hunting a wounded tiger.

In spite, however, of the many difficulties with which the parties have had to contend, they have managed to provide a flow of information which has been most valuable to me and has, I think, enabled us to inflict a considerable amount of damage on the Japanese by air action.

It has further been of assistance to me to be able to send requests for information to these parties, when I have wished to clear up the situation in any particular area.

Extract from a letter by Lieutenant G A P Scoones, Commander 4th Corps, Imphal, India.

Z Force

In 1941-42 the Japanese invaded Burma and forced the British out of the territory back into India. The successful Japanese advance entered northern Burma but stopped short just north of Myitkyina and along the line of the Chindwin river to the west of that town. This left the British guessing at what enemy intentions were, as the speed of the Japanese advance had prevented organised 'stay behind' information-gathering parties from being left in place.

The director of military intelligence and his staff in Delhi decided that operators needed to be used on the ground up to a maximum of about 70 miles behind enemy lines. These had to be men who knew the terrain and the local inhabitants and who were capable of accepting the mental strain

imposed by their situation. The operators were to be in uniform and armed but were not to take offensive action; their role was to collect information and to report relevant items back to India using wireless sets. A counter-intelligence department of the General Staff was titled G.S.I.z and it was decided that would be the department that controlled the operators and it was soon known, by those allowed to know of its existence, as Z Force. The operators were known as 'The Johnnies' which in the military jargon of the time equated to 'The Chaps'.

Colonel J P Shelley directed the role of the Johnnies and Lieutenant Colonel C E C. Gregory provided the management, supported by Major A A Goring. Z Force office opened an office in Calcutta.

The Johnnies

To meet the job specification for operators, men were recruited who had been forest managers either for the Burma government or for the private companies who received extraction concessions. These managers had been used to living in camps in the jungles and forests with their local labour forces and draught elephants. They had become familiar with loneliness, rarely seeing another manager and conversing all day in Burmese. Whatever problems or mishaps occurred had to be solved by themselves, including self-medication for illness and animal or snake attack. Some had previous military experience as officers in the Burma Rifles during the retreat from Burma, others did not. But once a man was recruited and convinced that Z Force operations could work, he was allowed to nominate a partner to patrol with, and by word of mouth a team of very tough, physically fit and self-reliant operators was formed to operate in northern Burma. Many of the Johnnies had British fathers and Burmese mothers and so they had been brought up to speak fluent English and Burmese. The first recruiting phase for Z Force saw 10 Johnnies selected and divided into five teams with each being given a sector to patrol behind the enemy front lines.

The Johnnies were given the option of taking a few Burmese soldiers in with them or of recruiting soldiers from ex-servicemen in the local communities once they had marched into their operational areas. Most went in with riflemen from the Kachin tribe located in northeast Burma, but one or two preferred to recruit on the ground. The Kachins, all former soldiers in the Burma Rifles, had been concentrated with the remnants of the Burma government and Burma Army, near Simla in India. Whether the Johnnies used Kachins or not, they were faced with taking porters in to carry the radio equipment or else hiring daily shifts of porters to move the equipment one leg of the journey at a time.

Equipment and operational methods

Former technicians of the Burma Oil Company built special lightweight radios using parts obtained by searching through bazaars in India, as none of the current military radio equipment was suitable. A hand-cranked generator was also designed and built, which after lengthy cranking provided power for short periods of radio use. Radio reception stations were located in Delhi, Calcutta, Shillong in Assam, Imphal in the Princely State of Manipur and later at 14th Army Headquarters. Suitable women station operators were recruited, trained and appointed as sergeants in the Women's Auxiliary Corps of India.

Conferences attended by the operators decided that patrols should consist of two Johnnies and a minimum of eight men, carrying 45-pound packs and cut-down rifles until Sten guns became available. To shoot game for the pot, a shotgun and small-bore rifle were part of every patrol's inventory. Two wireless sets had to be carried in case one malfunctioned.

Gold sovereigns, silver rupees and opium were carried to pay informants. The gold proved unsatisfactory because if it was found or seen by the Japanese and their local informants it signified contact with the British. Opium was often the preferred form of payment but the authorities in India were Scrooge-like in their distribution of it. Silver rupees became the most reliable intelligence currency, but their weight was considerable.

Favourite rations were tea, saccharine, powdered milk, salt, Marmite, curry powder, biscuits, dehydrated potatoes, beetroot and onions, cigarettes and matches. Either shooting game or buying produce from villagers, was a vital part of administrative arrangements. During the first patrolling season all stores were carried in but as this often meant that patrols went hungry because of local security situations where village headmen were Japanese informers, air drops were successfully used during the second season. Surpluses from the airdrops were buried in sealed tins in reserve dumps; bears however were particularly good at digging up and pilfering from these dumps.

Crossing large rivers like the Chindwin could be hazardous as most villagers near the rivers watched and reported for the Japanese who tended to make all boats tie up at night-time on the east bank of the river. But some villagers loyal to the British sank one or two boats near the west bank to conceal them, and then raised and used those boats to take Z Force patrols across the water by night.

Once on the ground in their allocated areas patrols could opt to contact village headmen or personalities known to them or else to avoid villages

altogether, contacting isolated farmers for information. Networks of informants were established with key personalities being targeted such as the local butcher used by a Japanese camp – the butcher always knew the enemy ration strength. Another very useful informant was an overseer of an elephant convoy that resupplied Japanese camps, as he could describe individual camp locations. People that were also avoided if possible were from other British intelligence organisations and from British Levy units – avoidance simplified operational life and aided security.

When Japanese supply dumps or camps were found concealed under the jungle canopy to prevent aerial observation, or when new roads were found and plotted, the details were sent back usually to Imphal where 4 Corps HQ would decide whether Allied aircraft should mount bombing raids. As can be seen in General Scoone's text at the beginning of this article sometimes specific intelligence requirements would be sent by radio to the Johnnies and their response times justified their presence behind enemy lines.

Citation for the DSO for Major Samuel Newland

Citation for the award of a Companion of the Distinguished Service Order made to 5592 Major (temporary) Samuel Newland, Intelligence Corps, Indian Army 'in recognition of gallant and distinguished services in the field':

Patrolled during the campaign seasons of 1942-43 and 1943-44 in the SOUTH CHIN HILLS in advance of our forward troops. Produced most valuable, meticulous and consistent information throughout regarding enemy troop movements and dispositions. The accuracy of his information regarding important Japanese troop movement in the ARAKAN was later confirmed in detail by captured Japanese documents.

When the Japanese occupied the SOUTH CHIN HILLS, he remained behind the enemy lines constantly hunted by the Japanese, carried out numerous daring reconnaissances, and continued to produce most valuable information until he reached a state of absolute exhaustion. On one occasion he penetrated alone at night into HAKA then held by the Japanese, in order to obtain accurate information. He exercised considerable influence amongst the CHIN Chiefs, and did much to keep many of them loyal during a most difficult period. One of the most gallant and valuable officers in the present Z FORCE. Has shown considerable gallantry and qualities of leadership throughout two years' operations.

Samuel Newland

Samuel's father had been an officer in the Indian Medical Service, who took a liking to the Chin Hills – located in the north-west of Burma – whilst campaigning there; he retired to live amongst the Chins, practised medicine and married a leading chief's daughter; Samuel, born in 1900, was the only child. In his book *The Johnnies* General Sir Geoffrey Evans comments:

The Chins, originally of Indo-Chinese stock, were slow of speech, serious in manner, proud and generally well built and strong. A cloth wound round the head, another round the loins and a blanket thrown around the shoulders was the usual dress. Their besetting sins were dirtiness and drunkenness, and whether it was a marriage or a death or the visit of some important person, there always seemed to be a pretext for a prolonged orgy, which entailed drinking quantities of Zu, brewed locally as a beer or spirit.

Their country was a wide one, a contorted mass of mountains rising as high as ten thousand feet, intersected by deep valleys and devoid of any tableland. The approach from the Gangaw Valley was by rugged steep spurs covered with thick jungle and divided from one another by deep narrow ravines. Between these spurs and the Indian frontier lay range upon range of almost bare-topped mountains, their sides dotted with villages and a few terraced fields. In the gorges, swiftly running rivers foamed and swirled on their way to the valleys of Burma and south towards Arakan.

As a boy Samuel played with Chin children but he was educated at a boarding school in Maymyo, Burma and he served as a sergeant in the Indian Defence Force during the Chin uprising of 1917-18. This uprising started when Chins were required for the British Labour Corps in France, but because of insufficient time spent on explanation and persuasion many of them declined to volunteer or be tribally conscripted. Samuel's father was so well respected by the Chins as a doctor and a personality that there was no animosity expressed against the family. In the early 1920s, Samuel qualified in forestry management at Edinburgh University and returned to Burma to begin a career with the Burma Forest Service. Geoffrey Evans writes:

But Newland was something of an ascetic and his needs were few; he was a non-smoker who drank very little and his religious beliefs were strong. A man of high principles, only the best satisfied him in all he undertook, a standard which he expected from all who served under him. His chief interests being outdoor sports and shooting, he was at his happiest when isolated from civilization in a jungle camp or on a shooting expedition. Both soldiers and civilians, who knew him well before and during the war, realized his solid worth, integrity, courage and moral uprightness.

As the Japanese advanced up Burma during 1941 Samuel, now married with four children, was employed to manage convoys of refugees, mainly from the British trading companies, who were moving by vehicle, boat,

elephant and foot up the Chindwin River into the Kabaw Valley and then across the Indian border to Imphal. Having reached Solan, near Simla, where officials and civilians from Burma were re-organising their affairs, Samuel was instructed to report to Delhi where he volunteered for Z Force, being granted a commission in the Indian Intelligence Corps. He chose Denis Wilmot Rae, an Anglo-Burmese forest officer in the Burma Forestry Service, to be his patrolling partner and second in command; Denis was later awarded the Military Cross.

The first patrol mission given to Newland and Rae at the end of 1942 was 'To organise an intelligence network in the south Chin Hills and obtain information of what was taking place in the Gangaw Valley south of Kalewa'. The Gangaw Valley ran north to south on the east flank of the Chin Hills. The patrol moved from Chittagong to Rangamati in the Hill Tracts and then to Lungleh in the South Lushai Hills. Moving eastwards from there, the Burma border was crossed over very precipitous ground and Newland was back in the Chin Hills, his home country where he had grown up.

The Japanese were not occupying all of the Chin Hills, but when provoked they demonstrated their ability to do so; these shows of force had demoralised many Chins and their headmen who knew the atrocities that would be applied to any villages openly siding with the British. The Japanese were sponsoring the Chin Defence Army, their own form of levies who were particularly good at terrorising other Chins. Nevertheless Newland's knowledge of and friendship with leading Chin personalities resulted in villagers volunteering to work with him and he was soon in business and he later wrote ' . . . a Chin will go to great lengths to secure a firearm. Having good rifles and ammunition to offer, I soon collected thirteen men as bodyguard, porters for the wireless set and watchmen for our dump'.

The intelligence network was established and Newland made three visits into the Gangaw Valley where he plotted a new Japanese road and several supply dumps. Although nobody on the British side was aware of it at the time these were enemy preparations designed to facilitate an attack on India. After five months of patrolling Newland and Rae withdrew from the Hills and returned to Calcutta for extensive debriefing.

Samuel Newland's patrolling role 1943-44

Going back into the Chin Hills in September 1943, Newland saw that the Japanese were mounting an occupation and the major Chin towns of Haka and Falam were soon occupied by the enemy. Now new enemy troops appeared in the uniforms of the Indian National Army (INA) – a renegade

organisation sponsored by the Japanese, recruited from Indian sepoys in prisoner of war camps in Singapore and Malaya and led by Subhas Chandra Bose, an Indian politician who allied himself with Germany and Japan. Harold Braund MC, an officer serving in the Western Chin Levies, commented on the INA in the Chin Hills in his book *Distinctly I*

Remember:

The greater part of them comprised a minority of those who had been captured in Malaya or Singapore: they had accepted service in the INA as an alternative to the rigours of continuing captivity. Among their ranks were three elements of, I would judge, roughly equal representation. Firstly, there were those who shared Bose's belief in the rightness of what they were doing. Secondly, there were the badmash element – freebooters attracted by the open door to loot and rape. Thirdly, there were those who saw in feigned enlistment a golden opportunity to escape and get back to their regiments.

Lascivious attitudes towards Chin women by the second INA element caused outrage and hatred amongst the Chins that sometimes imperilled lone escapers from the third element, and Newland now found a new determination amongst the Chins to resist the Japanese and wherever possible kill members of the INA. The Japanese and the INA increased their unpopularity by destroying property in villages, looting and raping, eating all the villagers' grain and slaughtering domestic animals.

Newland and Rae stayed in friendly villages whenever they could as the night-time temperature outside at an elevation of 8,000 feet could freeze a person to death. Being able to call for air drops of supplies and silver rupees helped Newland immensely as he could quickly recompense those who helped him, and Chins began to appear from all over the hills and the Gangaw Valley with information. This attraction brought its own security problems as the Japanese were actively looking for the Z Force patrol.

His DSO citation describes Newland's covert foray into enemy-occupied Haka, and this example of acceptance of calculated risk endeared Newland to the loyal Chins. His influence as an intelligence officer and spokesman for the British – in the villages that he visited Chins were able to listen to British news on his wireless set – was a remarkable achievement recognised by the DSO. His reporting of information was not as exciting as that of the Johnnies who were pushed back into Imphal in March 1944 by the Japanese *U-Go* attack; but the fact that Newland could report that the Chin Hills were not being used by the Japanese as transit routes was itself very useful information. After eight months on patrol Newland and Rae crossed back into the Lushai Hills in June 1944. Both men were exhausted, mentally and physically, but they had achieved their mission whilst experiencing severe hardship and danger.

The later experiences of Z Force

During January 1944, before the abortive Japanese attack on Imphal and Kohima had even started, the British Commander 14th Army, General William Slim, had written:

G.S.I.z have now been serving Headquarters, Eastern Army and latterly my Headquarters and formations for some two years during the course of which time their patrols have been active on the north-east frontier of India for over eighteen months. I consider that the tactical information obtained by these patrols to be of paramount importance and there is no other G.S.I. organization which produces intelligence of the same operational importance and with such continuity.

Furthermore, I consider it essential that every endeavour is made to ensure continuance of the operation of G.S.I.z British Officer Armed Patrols in front of any advance that the 14th Army may make into Central and Southern Burma.

With these words spurring it forward, Z Force HQ conferred and decided to increase its strength to 20 patrols and to qualify members of patrols as parachutists. Air support was increased both for insertions and resupply. As the Japanese were retreating, information requirements became:

- On which roads and tracks was the enemy withdrawing?
- Where did they halt in any large numbers?
- Where did they cross rivers?
- How did they cover their withdrawals?
- The identification of opportunity targets that the Allied air forces could attack in order to discomfort, dislocate and cause maximum damage to Japanese withdrawal plans.

Newland and Rae went on patrol again through the Chin Hills, across the Kale Valley and the River Chindwin near Kin, and onward to Ye-u. Other Z Force patrols were either side of them and some were delivered by parachute well forward of the British advance. One of the most important Z Force discoveries was the Japanese-built road from An in Arakan to Minbu on the Irrawaddy; it was being used by the enemy to escape from the British landings that were taking place on the Arakan coast. Z Force was successfully used for the collection of tactical information right up to the capture of Rangoon.

The operational record of Z Force was impressive, with 26 patrols out on the ground during 1945. The comments of Generals Slim and Scoones testify to the usefulness of Z Force, and its impressive tally of awards – one CBE, two DSOs, four OBEs, four MBEs, 17 MCs with Bars to two of them, and 16 Burma Gallantry Medals, are evidence of the gallantry displayed by the Johnnies and their Burmese operators. Above all else the

product was valued well above that coming from other and sometimes rival sources.

Well Done the Johnnies, and especially Well Done to Samuel Newland DSO, Indian Army Intelligence Corps.

SOURCES:

Harold Braund MBE MC. *Distinctly I Remember. A personal story of Burma.* (Wren, Australia 1972).

Lieutenant General Sir Geoffrey Evans KBE CB DSO. *The Johnnies.* (Cassell 1964).

Photos & map are courtesy of General Sir Geoffrey Evans' book.