

LST 534 Newsletter

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The Elephant Man

Films tell story of WWII elephant rescue in Burma

LONDON (AP) — British tea planter Gyles Mackrell organized one of the most remarkable rescue missions during World War II — by using elephants when nothing else would do.

Now researchers have released new information that tells, for the first time, the full story of Mackrell's successful effort to use the animals to evacuate hundreds of desperate Burmese refugees stranded by a rain-swollen river. Britain's Cambridge University put online a video shot by Mackrell, which together with his diaries and other documents brings to life a feat that with time had faded from public memory.

The material explains how Mackrell, who spent most of his life working as a planter for a tea company in British India, came to the aid of masses of people desperate to escape Burma as the Japanese army advanced. Through his work, he had access to elephants — the only safe way to cross the roiling Dapha river at the Indian border.

Tens of thousands of the refugees — many sick and starving — had trekked for hundreds of miles through dense jungle in the hope of reaching the Indian border. But by May 1942, those who made it to the border were trapped by monsoons that had turned the Dapha into a torrent.

Mackrell's diaries show that he collected some elephants to travel to the river soon after receiving a call for help from a group of refugees on June 4, 1942. His

party rode the elephants for about 100 miles (160 kilometers) before finally reaching the river bank — only to find themselves helpless as they saw that fierce flood waters had trapped Burmese soldiers on river islands.

"On reaching the bank on a big tusker I discovered a number of men on an island surrounded by high and very fierce water," Mackrell, aged 53 at the time, wrote in his diary. "They signaled wildly and made signs to show us they were starving. I made several attempts to get over but it was utterly impossible."

The video shows Mackrell's elephants flailing against the power of the river, up to their eyes in water and struggling to move forward.

Mackrell and his men were about to give up when, the next morning, the waters retreated briefly and he saw an opportunity for his elephants to transport the men to safety.

"Rungdot, a Kampti elephant was the first to be ready and ... by 7 a.m. he was back in camp with the first three refugees," he wrote on June 10, 1942. "The others came in a few at a time and by midday we had the whole 68."

In the weeks that followed, Mackrell and his colleagues set up camp by the Dapha and helped 200 people cross the river.

His exploits were reported in the British press at the time — Mackrell was dubbed "The Elephant Man" — but it wasn't until his family donated the

video, his diaries and other accounts by some of those rescued to Cambridge University that the story could be told in full.

"Without the help of Mackrell and others like him, hundreds of people fleeing the Japanese advance would quite simply never have made it," said Kevin Greenbank, an archivist at Cambridge's Center of South Asian Studies.

The donated collection of material will give researchers a new opportunity to study the rescue efforts organized by Mackrell and others like him who helped save many people during the summer of 1942, Greenbank said.

Annamaria Motrescu, a research associate at the center, said Mackrell was embarrassed by the attention at the time but his story deserves new prominence now.

"It's a remarkable story of courage, spirit and ingenuity that took place at a time when no one was sure what the consequences of the war in the Far East would be. It deserves to be remembered."

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NEWS

TOKYO (AP) — Two mass graves that may hold the remains of up to 2,000 Japanese soldiers have been discovered on the island of Iwo Jima, one of the bloodiest and most iconic battlesites of World War II.

A team of Japanese searchers have discovered 51 remains in two areas listed by the U.S. military after the war as enemy cemeteries, one of which could contain as many as 2,000 bodies, Japan's Kyodo news agency said.

The team was to report its findings to the prime minister's office.

Officials at Japan's health ministry, which supervises search efforts on the remote island, confirmed that 51 bodies had been recovered and two sites believed to be burial grounds had been found. But they could not immediately confirm the potential size of the mass graves or other details of the Kyodo report.

The discovery of the remains would be one of the biggest breakthroughs in decades toward finding the bodies of roughly 12,000 Japanese who remain missing and presumed dead after the 1945 battle on the island, which has been renamed Iwoto by the Japanese government.

Hiroshi Sato of Japan's Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare carefully examined the remains of a Japanese soldier buried on Alaska's Attu Island, where an estimated 2,500 Japanese troops were killed or committed suicide in one of the deadliest conflicts in the Pacific. It was second only to Iwo Jima.

The island was seen as key to the United States because it had an early warning radar station and three airfields used by Japanese fighter planes that posed a threat to U.S. bombing raids on Tokyo and Japan's main islands. The U.S. wanted the airfields for its fighter escort planes.

Virtually all of the 22,000 Japanese soldiers tasked with defending the

rugged, volcanic crag were killed in the battle, which became a symbol and rallying point for the United States in the Pacific war after the U.S. flag was raised on its highest ground, Mount Suribachi.

The battle claimed 6,821 American and 21,570 Japanese lives. Dozens of remains are recovered every year, but about 12,000 Japanese are still classified as missing in action and presumed killed on the island, along with 218 Americans.

Fighting began on Feb. 19, 1945, but Iwo Jima was not declared secured until March 26.

Japan surrendered in August of that year, after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

According to the Kyodo report, searchers dug near a runway at a base used by the Japanese military — the only full-time inhabitants of the island — and at the foot of Suribachi. It said the operation began early this month based on information from the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.

The report said the main site is estimated to have about 2,000 bodies and the Suribachi site 70-200 bodies. It said the recovery effort was expected to take several months.

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Japan to dig site linked to WWII human experiments

Japan is excavating the site of a former medical school that may reveal grisly secrets from World War II.

The investigation began at the former school linked to Unit 731, a germ and biological warfare outfit during the war. Shadowy experiments conducted by the unit on war prisoners have never been officially acknowledged by the government but have been documented by historians and participants.

It is the first government probe of the Tokyo site, and follows a former nurse's revelation that she helped bury body parts there as American forces began occupying the capital at the end of the war.

Health Ministry official Kazuhiko Kawauchi said the excavation is aimed at finding out if anything is buried in the plot.

"We are not certain if the survey will find anything," Kawauchi said. "If anything is dug up, it may not be related to Unit 731."

The former nurse, Toyo Ishii, now 88, broke 60 years of silence in 2006, saying she and colleagues at an army hospital at the site were ordered to bury numerous corpses, bones and body parts during the weeks following Japan's Aug. 15, 1945, surrender before American troops arrived in the capital.

Her disclosure led to a face-to-face meeting with the health minister and a government pledge to investigate. The digging had to wait until the scheduled relocation of residents and the demolition of apartments on the site last year.

The site is close to another area where a mass grave of dozens of possible war-experiment victims was uncovered in 1989 during the construction of a Health Ministry research institute.

Any remains found at the planned excavation site would have a stronger connection to Unit 731, said Keiichi Tsuneishi, a Kanagawa University history professor and expert on biological warfare.

"The site used to be the research headquarters of Unit 731," Tsuneishi said. "If bones are found there, they are most likely related to Unit 731."

From its wartime base in Japanese-controlled Harbin in northern China, Unit 731 and related units injected war prisoners with typhus, cholera and other diseases to research germ warfare,

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according to historians and former unit members. Unit 731 also is believed to have performed vivisections and to have frozen prisoners to death in endurance tests.

The 1989 find revealed dozens of fragmented thigh bones and skulls, some with holes drilled in them or sections cut out. Police denied there was any evidence of criminal activity.

The ministry concluded that the bones could not be directly linked to Unit 731. It said the remains were mostly of non-Japanese Asians and were likely from bodies used in "medical education" or brought back from the war zone for analysis at the medical school.

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Second Ship Named After WWII Navy Commander

The second warship to bear the name of a Navy commander credited with success during a pivotal World War II battle has been christened in Maine.

The 9,200 ton Aegis destroyer bears the name of Raymond Spruance, who commanded a battle group with two of three U.S. aircraft carriers whose warplanes sank four Japanese carriers at the Battle of Midway. That was hailed as the turning point in World War II in the Pacific.

Hundreds watched as granddaughter Ellen Spruance Holscher christened the ship with a bottle of champagne. Her two daughters also participated.

Spruance commanded the Pacific Fleet from 1945 to 1946. The first ship bearing his name was the lead ship in the Spruance class of destroyers, built in the 1970's.

Credit: The Scuttlebutt



A Good Cause



Operation Military Embrace provides emotional, financial and personal assistance to our injured veterans and their families at the Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas. They serve breakfasts, set up free military exchange stores, run raffles, run errands, do favors for and make regular visits to these heroes.

The injured veteran's recovery is long, excruciatingly painful and difficult, and without us, many of them would bear it alone. We inform civic groups about strange diseases out of foreign lands they also do battle with, the psychological torment they suffer and indignities bureaucracies put them through.

When the country asked for help, they showed up. Now it's our turn. Donate or better yet, join us. A volunteer is just as important to us as money.

www.operationmilitaryembrace.com

Credit: Texas Monthly

In Memoriam

Alex Fielder passed away January 26, 2011. Alex was an engineer on board LST534. After WWII, Alex went on to serve in the Korean War, on an LST.

One thing I remember about Alex is what he told me after I interviewed him for the documentary. He thanked me. He said he had waited over 50 years to tell his story. Now Alex can tell his story to all the veterans in Heaven. Alex is survived by his wife Betty, and numerous kids, grandkids and great grandkids.

Alex, may you rest in peace.

BIRTHDAYS

April 1

Andy Cumella
11 Freeport Court
Toms River, NJ 08757

May 17

Jim Miller
1452 Ellsworth Road #221
Yakima, WA 98908

HOLIDAYS

April:

- 1 April Fools Day
- 17 Palm Sunday
- 18 Passover Begins
- 22 Good Friday
- Earth Day
- 24 Easter



May:

- 1 Holocaust Remembrance
- May Day
- 5 Cinco de Mayo
- 8 Mother's Day
- 21 Armed Forces Day
- 30 Memorial Day



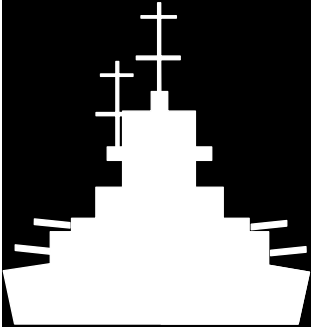
June:

- 14 Flag Day
- 19 Father's Day
- 22 Summer Begins



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Just for Fun

HUSBAND QUOTES

I haven't spoken to my wife for 18 months. I don't like to interrupt her.

Marriage is a three-ring circus: Engagement ring, wedding ring and suffering.

The last fight was my fault. My wife asked, "What's on TV?" I said, "Dust!"

In the beginning, God created earth and rested. Then God created man and rested. Then God created woman. Since then neither God nor man has rested.

Why do men die before their wives? They want to.

What is the difference between a dog and a fox? About five drinks.

Credit: The Scuttlebutt

NAUTICAL TERMS

In memory of James Richard Drew who contributed to this column until his passing.

Boat Top - A painted line that indicates the designed waterline

Give-way Vessel - A term used to describe the vessel which must yield in meeting, crossing or overtaking situations.

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