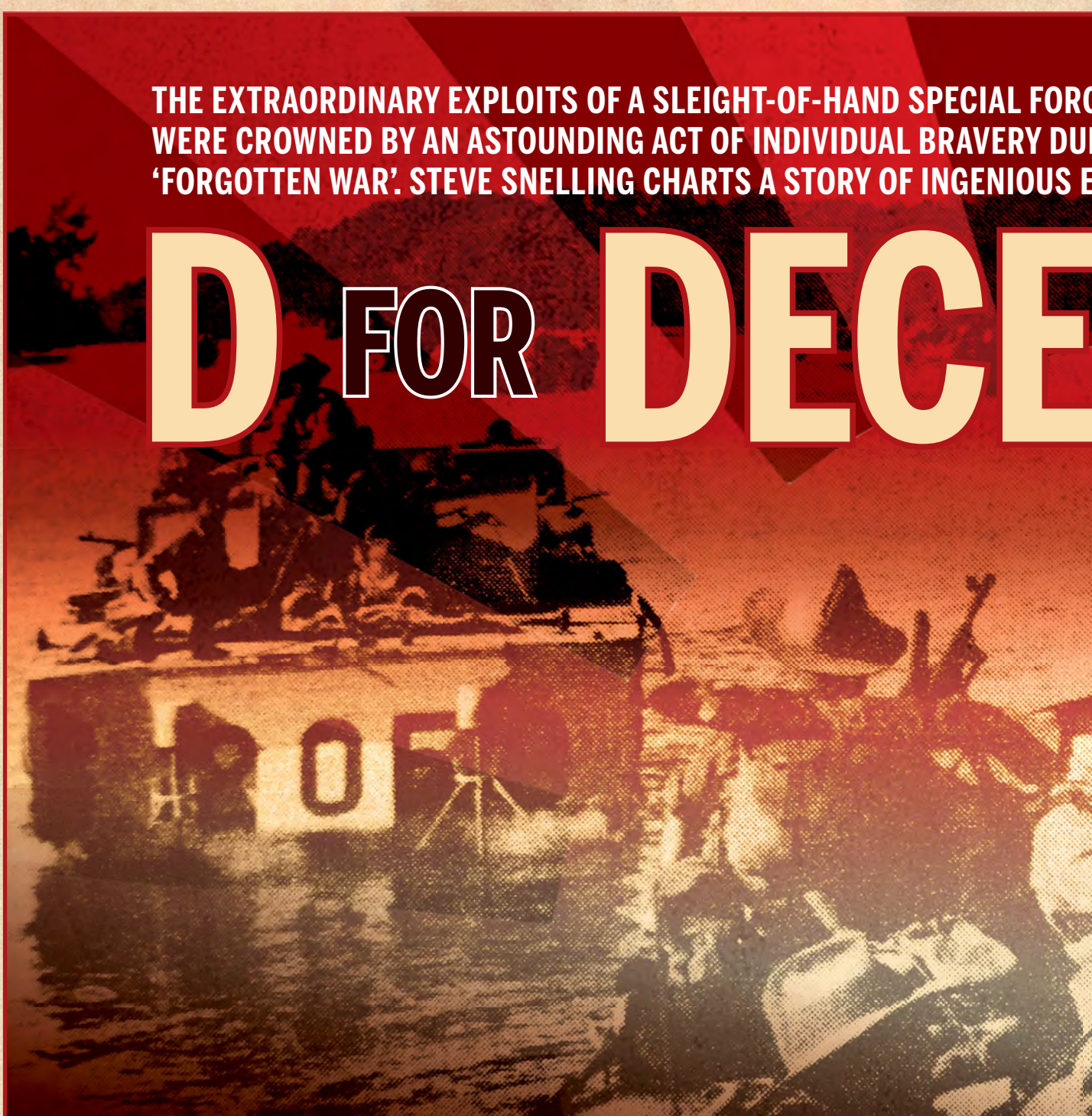


THE EXTRAORDINARY EXPLOITS OF A SLEIGHT-OF-HAND SPECIAL FORCE TR  
WERE CROWNED BY AN ASTOUNDING ACT OF INDIVIDUAL BRAVERY DURING  
'FORGOTTEN WAR'. STEVE SNELLING CHARTS A STORY OF INGENUOUS ENDE

# D FOR DECEIT



**MIDDLE**  
*A convoy of assault landing craft carrying men of the 26<sup>th</sup> Indian Division towards Letpan. It was in support of units exploiting this landing that D Force fought its most celebrated action a few days later.*

**R**onald Norman was feeling miserable. All his best-laid plans had come to virtually nothing with mission after mission thwarted by a mixture of misfortune and misinformation. Since arriving in Burma three months earlier to help spearhead a third Arakan offensive, the highly-trained, highly-motivated group of men making up 58 Company, D Force, the newly-raised tactical arm of a top-secret strategic deception organisation, had accomplished little. Small parties of men had taken part

in only a handful of operations and of those one had been half-scuppered by enemy interference and another rendered completely redundant by a lack of opposition!

As 1944 gave way to 1945 in an endless round of demonstrations and exercises, it seemed that one of the British Army's lesser known Special Forces was fated to fade into obscurity without an opportunity to make a name for itself. Disenchanted and disheartened, the 25-year-old ex-Commando, a veteran of defeats and

retreats in Crete and Burma, scribbled in his diary for 23 January 1945: "Very fed-up... Must transfer, if only to get some real action..." But even as he pondered a move, events along the Arakanese coast were taking place that would lift his spirits and transform his unit's fortunes. Against expectations, the men of 58 Company, D Force, were about to be catapulted into the forefront of a series of leapfrogging amphibious operations that would culminate in a diversionary action destined to be remembered as one of the >>



MAINTAINED TO FIGHT WITH DECEIT AND GUILF  
THE CLOSING STAGES OF BURMA'S  
SAVOUR BEHIND ENEMY LINES.

# PTION



**ABOVE**

*Lieutenant Claud Raymond VC (1923-1945). The son of an Indian Army officer who had narrowly escaped capture during the first Burma campaign, he served with a field company before volunteering for D Force in 1944.*



**RIGHT**

Captain Ronald Norman (1920-1963), centre front, commander of 58 Company, D Force, together with some of his NCOs in 1945.

They include Corporal D H P Flatman, far left back row, who was awarded a Military Medal for his deception exploits.



bravest individual exploits of Burma's 'Forgotten War'.

**SONIC WARFARE**

As a war service officer risen from the ranks, Ronald Henry Douglas Norman's path to the command of an obscure Special Forces unit was a circuitous one. Enlisting in the Royal Scots four days after Britain's declaration of war, he was an early recruit to the newly-formed Commandos, surviving a rearguard action in Crete before volunteering for 'guerrilla activities in the Far East'. Arriving at the Bush Warfare School in Maymyo shortly before the Japanese invasion of Burma, he was one of a 15-man troop belonging to

Special Service Detachment 1, which trekked 450 miles through jungle and monsoon, leaving a trail of wrecked bridges and ferries in their wake. Flown back from China to India, he underwent officer training before resuming his Special Forces career as a lieutenant in the 13<sup>th</sup> Frontier Force Regiment attached to a strange new unit charged with an even stranger duty in the reconquest of Burma.

D Force - the D being for 'Deception' and its 'Depot' cover name - was an offshoot of a strategic deception section organised and run by Lieutenant Colonel Peter Fleming, a pre-war explorer, best selling author and elder brother of James Bond-creator Ian. An adjunct of

military intelligence, D Division, as it was misleadingly styled, employed a network of double agents and broadcast fake reports with the aim of making the Japanese "take - or refrain from taking - a particular course of action", thereby improving the Army's chances of "defeating" them.

The creation of D Force in the late summer of 1944 was merely a battlefield extension of that policy. It was born out of an amalgamation of six British-officered Indian 'observation' squadrons which made up the bogus 303 Indian Brigade and two sonic deception units operating under the titles 4 and 5 Light Scout Car Companies.

Based near Calcutta. The eight newly-raised companies were equipped to wage mock warfare with a veritable arsenal of ingenious devices designed to imitate everything from dive bombers, grenade blasts and machine gun fire to a full-scale amphibious landing. Their sleight-of-hand armoury included delayed action seaborne flares, dubbed Aquatails, exploding firecrackers known as Bicat sausages, after their inventor, and specially developed fireworks to simulate automatic fire as well as the top secret 'battle' sound system, codenamed Poplin.

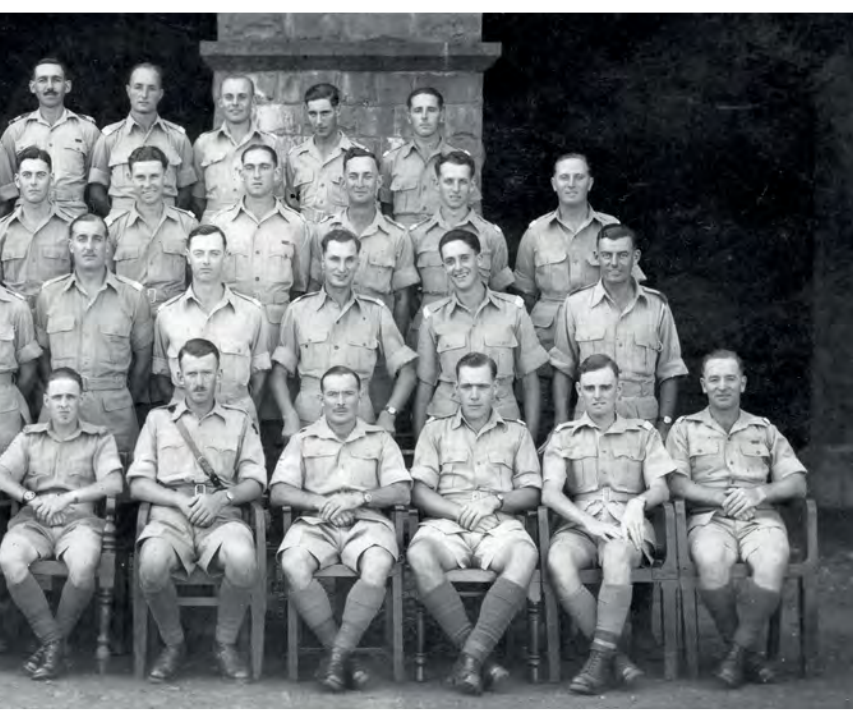
One of three all-British units in D Force, Norman's 45-strong detachment was trained to operate the whole range of equipment with the overall objective of protecting a

**RIGHT**

The third Arakan campaign was characterised by a series of amphibious operations and it was D Force's main role to distract Japanese attentions away from such vulnerable yet vitally-important beachheads.







**LEFT**  
Norman, second from right in middle row, with fellow cadets undergoing officer training at Belgaum, India, February 1943. He was commissioned into the Frontier Force Regiment before volunteering for a new role in military deception.

funded six-month course at Trinity College, Cambridge, before joining 507 Field Company, Royal Engineers. Though he came of a military family - his father, grandfather and four uncles had all served in the Indian Army - he was far from the traditional army type. Described by his sister Sallie as having "the kind of sunny personality that makes life enjoyable", he dabbled in poetry and was "disinclined to accept rules at their face value". As a somewhat wayward member of Wellington's Junior Training Corps, he was said to have displayed "more ingenuity than he did efficiency" and, according to his tutor Robin Walker, endeared himself to his many friends by his "natural, charming roguishness". To fellow Cambridge student and room-mate Robin Williams, he was "a born leader" possessed of a "very strong personality" who "knew what he wanted to do and what he wanted anyone else to do". One of the so-called 'night climbers' who defied university rules by scaling the spire of King's College Chapel, he was, in Williams' words, "always up to something 'agin' authority".

When, he eventually swapped the life of a student for that of a soldier he did so with little enthusiasm and a healthy dose of realism. As his former tutor observed, "like so many of his young generation he believed that war was not the best way of reaching decisions and he went to join up with no sense of heroics". None of that prevented him from volunteering for special duties with D Force. Perhaps it was the less-rigid structure and the promise of independent action that appealed. Whatever his reasoning, the one-time student 'rebel' was readily accepted into the 'deception' >>

**LEFT**  
Lieutenant Reg Pike, Royal Indian Navy Volunteer Reserve, scanning the Arakan coast from the bridge of ML 440. Pike's vessel ferried D Force parties on a number of hazardous operations into enemy-held territory and suffered occasional compass malfunctions caused by the sonic warfare loudspeaker equipment.



string of planned landings along the Arakan coast by duping the Japanese "into pouring gunfire on to positions that didn't exist and countering attacks that never came from where they were expected". To that end, 58 Company comprised a Poplin as well as a so-called Observation platoon whose officers included a sapper subaltern with family ties to the country to which they were now headed.

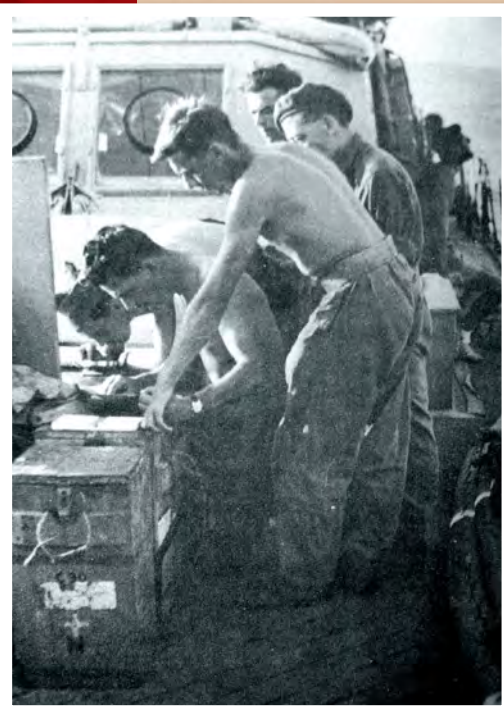
### **'A BORN LEADER'**

Lieutenant Claud Raymond was 21 and looked even younger. Commissioned in May 1943, he was still a pupil at Wellington College when war broke out and had undertaken an 'accelerated', Army-



**LEFT**  
A typical Arakan Coastal Forces motor launch of the type used by D Force to conduct their sonic warfare and diversionary operations.





**ABOVE**  
An army special forces party being carried on a mission aboard one of the Arakan Coastal Forces' launches.

**RIGHT**  
British infantry move warily through a street in abandoned Akyab in January 1945.

**RIGHT**  
Motor launches of the 56<sup>th</sup> Flotilla, Arakan Coastal Forces, off the coast of Akyab. D Force's participation in the landing operation was cancelled at the last-minute when it was found the Japanese had already fled.

fold as Observation platoon leader and second-in-command of 58 Company.

An intensive period of training followed before orders were received to ship out to Chittagong en route to the Special Forces base at Teknaf, on a slither of land separating the Bay of Bengal from the maze of crocodile-infested tidal chaungs and mangrove swamps that were to become the test bed for a novel new kind of warfare.

Raymond was part of the advance guard that departed D Division's HQ on 18 October 1944. Before leaving there was time for a reunion with his parents who had remained in India after narrowly escaping the Japanese during the 1942 campaign when his father, a pre-war officer in the Burma Police was employed as the Army's chief censor. By way of a send-off, they threw a party which was attended by other D Force officers, including Peter Fleming. Everyone was in high spirits. There was much joshing and good-humored fatherly advice. As Raymond senior later recounted to his daughter, Sallie, the mood seemed more akin to "an outing to the seaside than a military operation".

### 'EARN OUR RATIONS'

The early excitement did not last. Attached first to 3<sup>rd</sup> Commando Brigade and then, from 8 December, to 26<sup>th</sup> Indian Division, the 'illusionists' of 58 Company initially found their unusual services in limited demand.

An attempt to incorporate 'special effects' into a raid on Elizabeth Isle

by 42 Royal Marine Commando on the night of 19/20 November proved a depressing augury. Spotted as they approached to within 500yds of their objective, and just as the devices were about to be activated, they were forced to beat a hasty retreat.

More disappointment followed as sortie after sortie was either cancelled or disrupted. Technical troubles merely added to Norman's frustration.

The catalogue of problems included issues over the audibility of some of the sound effects, operators becoming violently seasick and loudspeakers sending ships' compasses haywire. Meanwhile, one attempt to replicate a ship's hooter by means of an amplified human voice ended in farce "owing to [the] performer suffering from stage fright and giggles". Fearful of being marginalised or totally ignored, Norman proposed a more vigorous role, sending deception parties deeper into enemy territory and for longer periods. Small numbers of men, he

Whether by coincidence or design, Norman's wish was soon granted.

Less than three weeks after his intervention, 58 Company was establishing a new base at Kyaukpyu and by the end of January 1945 was engaged helping conventional forces complete the capture of Ramree Island. The actions around the Yanbauk Chaung marked the beginning of a whirlwind series of diversionary sorties involving small parties, operating by canoes, landing craft and motor launches, with the aim of gathering intelligence as well as spreading alarm and confusion among the enemy ranks along the lines set out in his report.

Both Norman and Raymond played a full part in the operations that were designed to throw the Japanese off the scent of actual landings designed to cut the Japanese line of retreat. Their eagerness to get to grips with their intended role was reflected in a brief entry in Norman's diary for



argued, could represent a column of battalion strength. He suggested "shooting up Jap occupied villages with real and dummy fire, and scattering delayed effects such as delayed action cooking fires and small explosions and bursts of fire over a wide area". He even went so far as to propose a possible re-deployment to Central Burma or the Shan States, where he felt certain "we could earn our rations", or retraining for airborne operations or attachment to divisions more actively involved in the Arakan. Anxious to convince senior officers his unit was capable "of fighting and looking after itself as well as carrying out deception", he declared: "The men's morale would be easier to keep up if we were at least in a forward area with the chance to do some fighting."







**LEFT**  
A convoy of assault landing craft ferrying British and Indian troops up a chaung towards Kangaw, one of the amphibious operations supported by D Force's diversionary sorties.

15 February, written shortly before embarking on another mission behind enemy lines: "Claud and I tossed for canoe party. I won." The two-day sortie, involving the two officers and most of 58 Company's fighting strength carried aboard an assortment of motor launches, landing craft and a British Yard Mine Sweeper, was typical of the operations now being undertaken.

Designed to distract the Japanese away from 25<sup>th</sup> Indian Division's landing near Kangaw, it involved a dangerous canoe reconnaissance, that only narrowly escaped detection, and an arduous slog through a mangrove

swamp before laying low for the night. The next day they got to work.

Norman's diary summarises an eventful few hours: "Set off in ALC [assault landing craft] and recce'd shore... laid effects, shot up Japs in village. Then back to base after near miss from mortar. At dusk set ambushes and sunk two Jap canoes. Then out to sea, shooting up Jap OP [observation post] with all guns on way out."

And so it went on through the rest of February and into March, confidence rising with every operation until the black moods of December and January seemed a distant memory. Writing

to his old Wellington tutor Robin Walker, Claud Raymond summed up the new spirit. "As you know, I am thoroughly a pacifist and disapprove of war," he said, "but I'm really rather enjoying this."

### **'DRAW OFF'**

Buoyed by their success, Norman and Raymond undertook their longest mission to date, leading two sections on a five-day diversionary operation into Japanese-held territory. It proved a lively affair, involving a brisk fire-fight with enemy troops fleeing aboard a convoy of sampans and a violent encounter with a local >>



**LEFT**  
A plume of smoke marks the destruction of a motor launch, blown up by a mine, off Kyaukpyu, D Force's new base for operations along the southern Arakan coast.



**RIGHT**

A British soldier inspects the bodies of some of the thousands of Japanese soldiers killed during their retreat through the maze of chaungs and mangrove swamps.

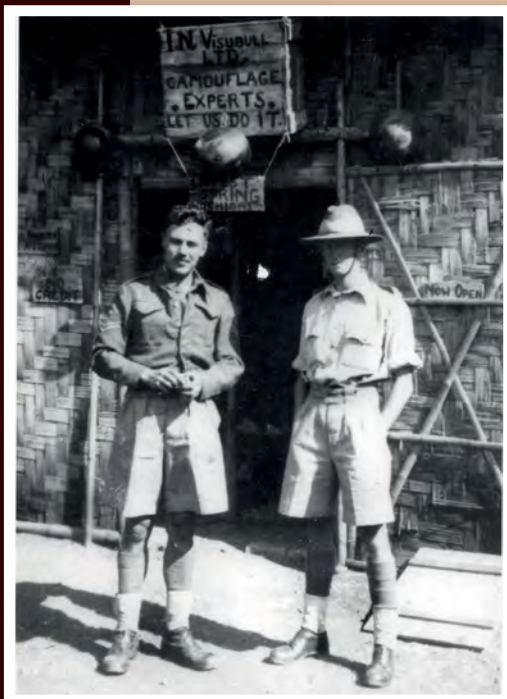


**MIDDLE**

An assault landing craft of the type that carried Raymond and his party through the tangle of waterways on his last sortie in March 1945.

**BELOW**

Ronald Norman, right, with a D Force NCO in front of a store offering 'no credit' and boasting the comic name, 'I.N. VISUBULL LTD. CAMOUFLAGE EXPERTS'.



“draw off” enemy troops engaging units of 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 26<sup>th</sup> Indian Division, advancing from Letpan. Norman and Raymond were part of a larger force, composed of sections of 52 and 58 Companies as well as a headquarters detachment, which embarked aboard HDML 1116 and 1265 at Kyaukpyu on 18 March.

Armed with intelligence reports picked up along the way, the party was established some 40 miles behind enemy lines by mid-morning the following day and Norman and Raymond together with 12 men from 58 Company set off in a LCA bound for the Kayaing river area which they reached at 09:00 on 20 March.

That the Japanese were close by was clear. As well as footprints on the beach, locals reported enemy troops seen moving through the area and occupying



villager that left one man with a bitten hand and another nursing a sore head from a blow with “a blunt dah”. The sortie ended dramatically and almost catastrophically when their landing craft became stuck, leaving the party marooned on a surf-battered beach. They were saved only by Norman’s courage, swimming out to the covering launch and returning with a line which he attached to the stricken vessel. Even then, several men only “narrowly escaped drowning”. Norman and Raymond were the last to leave, having ferried most of the Company’s weapons by canoe through a surf that was reported to be “heavy” and “dangerous”.

Within days, the pair, seemingly unaffected by their ordeal, were preparing for their next mission. What would prove to be the most celebrated of all D Force’s operations was a classic deception sortie aimed at creating the impression of “landings in force” north and south of Taungup in order to

a position on a nearby rise. In fact, there were just six Japanese on the hill, together with a couple of Burmese. Taken completely by surprise, they were quickly chased off with some loss, leaving behind a pan of rice still cooking on the fire and a position pocked with bunkers, foxholes and an assortment of abandoned equipment. Having set fire to a couple of bashas, the patrol gathered up as much as they could carry and returned to their LCA. Satisfied with his day’s work, Norman noted in his diary: “Spent night alongside ML 1116. Made plans for next show up chaungs.”

**‘FLED IN PANIC’**

Next morning they were off early. Exploring Thinganet Chaung they found more evidence of recent Jap occupation, but no sign of enemy troops. Moving on down a narrow tidal tributary, a canoe party destroyed a bamboo and wire boom and at the



same time spotted a Japanese soldier scampering away from a hill above the chaung.

Landing quickly, the patrol consisting of Norman, Raymond, eight other ranks and a guide, followed as far as a small settlement where villagers had just seen an enemy soldier carrying a full pack sprint through. Where he was headed was not clear, but the natives reported that ten Japanese troops were "living" on a hill south of Talaku.

The patrol pushed on until at around 14:30 the unmistakable sound of "singing" was heard coming from a hut hidden among a tangle of trees on top of a steep hill. Close by, Norman counted about ten more enemy bashas.

Creeping forward with two men, Norman took up a covering position near the first shelter and Raymond was in the process of leading the rest

that followed, he assisted in killing two Japanese troops and wounding a third before the remainder "fled in panic". Even then he would not give in, refusing any attention until another man's leg wound had been treated.

His injuries were desperate but, realising that any delay might endanger the patrol's withdrawal, he insisted on walking back to the landing craft. He managed half a mile before collapsing and was carried the rest of the way by local villagers on an improvised stretcher. Throughout the long march back, he remained resolutely cheerful. Unable to speak, he communicated with scribbled notes and hand signals. Norman later noted in his diary: "Poor Claud... Got him onto ML and then on to Kyaukpyu... Up all night on ML with Claud..." Tragically, it was all to no avail. Norman's diary entry for 22 March related the sad sequel: "Arrived at Kyaukpyu and put Claud on hospital ship Karoa. Too late, died at 06:00 hrs. I feel bloody. Buried him at 15:00 hrs... Miserable." However, it was not the end of the story.

Inspired by his friend's outstanding bravery and extraordinary endurance, Norman sought the highest possible recognition, writing in his diary two days later: "Claud in for the VC. Wrote to his people - rotten job. He did splendidly." Peter Fleming agreed. Following a tour of his frontline units, the commander of D Division wrote home: "Have just dined with the very shy, very brave commander of 58 Company. His second in command,



**LEFT**  
Raymond is commemorated on the Seaford War Memorial in Sussex, where his family lived.

a very nice boy and a good officer, was killed the other day in a rather heroic way..."

Some two months later, and six weeks after the Japanese were finally pushed out of the Arakan, the London Gazette of 28 June 1945, announced the posthumous award of the Victoria Cross to Claud Raymond.

By "drawing enemy fire on to himself", he had "saved the patrol from suffering many more casualties", thus making for the ultimate diversion in a special force's campaign of deception marked by unwavering courage and resource. Ⓞ

**BELOW**  
Claud Raymond VC is among nearly 27,000 British and Commonwealth troops commemorated in Tauckyan War Cemetery near Yangon (Rangoon).



of the patrol across a stretch of open ground when they were spotted. As the Japanese on top of the hill opened fire, Raymond did not hesitate. Charging straight for the enemy position through a hail of rifle fire, he was hit almost straightaway by a bullet through the right shoulder. Hardly breaking stride, he pressed on, "firing his rifle from the hip", only to be bowled over by a grenade which burst in front of him, "severing his wind-pipe and blowing off the whole of his lower jaw". Incredibly, in spite of these grievous injuries and fading strength, he continued scrambling up the near-precipitous slope, through dense scrub, to reach the enemy who were now firing at almost point blank range. While climbing up the last few feet, he was hit again by a bullet that shattered his left wrist and knocked him to the ground, but somehow he contrived to haul himself up and into the enemy position where, in the wild meleé

