



THE DEATH OF ORDE WINGATE

Much has already been written about Major-General Orde Charles Wingate: Wingate the man, Wingate the tactician, Wingate in peace and Wingate in war, written by historians and by those who knew him and by some who served with him in Ethiopia, Palestine and Burma. Many books, articles, and news reports refer to Wingate's death in a plane crash on the night of March 24/25, 1944, in Assam, north-east India. At that time, with a minimum of releasable news, it is hardly surprising that wrong facts were printed in news reports, and have been perpetuated over the years. For instance, many references are made to the bad weather on that night in 1944. Storms of thunder and lightning have often been suggested as the possible cause of the crash of Wingate's plane. So much so that this has almost become the accepted fact, even to the point where some have recorded that Wingate flew out of Imphal in bad weather against all advice.

Journalists of the day were constrained by the censor. Similarly, official press releases were scant and understandably short on detail. As early as March 27, 1944, the PR men were putting their stories together and were requesting permission to cable. Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, the Supreme Commander in South-East Asia, refused to sanction the release of any of these reports and it was not until April 1 that the official news was announced. Even then, the communiqué carried only the barest of detail and it was left to the press to fill in some of these.

After hostilities had ceased in the Far East, it was still impossible to get at official information, and it was not until 1972 that the file on the death of Wingate [WO203/4881/7033] was released by the Public Record Office. Even worse, it was not until

1980 that the American 'Investigation of, and Report on, the Airplane Accident Which Resulted in the Death of General Wingate, 24th March 1944' was released. The United States Air Force was involved because the

By Dennis Hawley

plane was one of theirs, and was crewed by a USAAF crew of five men.



Top: Death in the jungle — the crash site in the state of Manipur in north-east India, photographed by the US Air Force. The outer section of the port wing can be seen centre left. The dark oval area to the right of the wing is the impact crater. On Thursday, March 23, 1944, Wingate had flown to Broadway, one of the advanced landing grounds prepared in a day by the Chindits far behind Japanese lines, on an inspection tour. The following afternoon, Wingate spoke by radio with Colonel Cochran requesting that an aircraft be sent to pick him up and take him on to Imphal, approximately 180 miles to the west. A B-25H based at Hailakandi, in India, possibly one of those seen (above) circling the airfield, was detailed to fly the 220 miles to Broadway in Burma where it arrived shortly before 4 p.m. With nine people on board, including his ADC, Captain George Borrow, and two newsmen, Stanley Wills of the *Daily Herald* and Stuart Emery of the *News Chronicle*, the aircraft took off for the short hop to Imphal where it touched down at 6.23 p.m.

The B-25H (43-4242) was piloted by Lieutenant Brian F. Hodges with 2nd Lieutenant Stephen A. Wanderer as navigator. Other members of the American crew were Technical Sergeant Frank Sadoski, the gunner; Tech/Sergeant James W. Hickey on radio, and Staff Sergeant Vernon A. McIninch, the flight engineer. The night was dark and overcast, General Wingate, wearing the pith helmet which was his trademark, boarding the aircraft shortly before 8 p.m. *Right:* No photographs were taken that evening but the scene must have looked much like this shot taken shortly before his last flight. Although it is presumed that his destination was Hailakandi, there is no surviving record to confirm it and Wingate could equally have intended flying to either Lalaghat or Sylhet, both airfields lying to the west of Imphal. We shall never know. What is clear is the report from Captain R. L. Benjamin who was flying a Dakota on a similar course to the west when he witnessed a fiery explosion on the ground, some 40 miles west of Imphal.



On April 1, 1944, along with countless millions of others, I heard of the death of Orde Wingate. How could I have known that exactly three years later to the day I would again be talking about Wingate? The difference was that on April 1, 1947, I was several thousands of miles nearer to where Wingate lost his life: in actual fact not much more than about 100 miles north-west of the crash site. On that day in 1947 I was serving with 'J' Lines of Communication Signals at Shillong in Assam, in north-east India. Throughout 1946, whilst at Chittagong in what is now Bangladesh and also whilst at Shillong in the first half of 1947, another British unit was based with us. This was the 63rd Graves Concentration Unit. Their task was to trace the unofficial burials of British troops killed in action and remove the remains to the nearest British war cemetery for reinterment under the auspices of the Imperial War Graves Commission as it was then known.

On April 1, 1947, I was told that an expedition was being mounted to locate and retrieve the remains of Orde Wingate. My

task, as a radio operator, would be to accompany the 63rd GCU to provide communications. The unit would depart at some time during the next 48 hours. However, on April 3, I was informed that, after all, it was not possible to include a radio operator. Naturally I was disappointed at being left out, and said as much.

I waited impatiently for the return of the 63rd GCU as I knew they always came back to Shillong after an expedition and I was sure that I would get the story from a GCU corporal who shared my room. When the unit returned, I questioned the corporal as to the success of the mission, but his answers were unsatisfactory and his discomfort in discussing the matter was plain to see. I was to get nowhere at all with this discussion. Some days later, there was a press release which was consistent with what my corporal friend had said, but really didn't tell us very much.

Over a period of many years, and in discussion with others on the subject of the death of Wingate, it became obvious that hardly anyone had any information as to what

happened to the general after he was killed. One friend did tell me that he knew that Wingate was buried in Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia in the USA. Why? Another piece of information was to the effect that the plane in which Wingate was flying was carrying treasure. This may have emerged from the fact that silver rupee and half-rupee coins had been found at the scene of the crash, but these were quite simply coins from a supply that was always made available to an American crew in case of forced-landing when it was hoped the money would buy assistance from the local people. It has also emerged that plugs of opium were at times carried for the same purpose. Of course, there was always the never-ending belief that sabotage was at the root of the crash. This was surely something which derived from the oft-quoted stories that Wingate was utterly disliked — even hated — and was at odds with everyone he came up against, even Mountbatten. But these were simply some of the myths that surrounded Wingate, particularly in the Chindit connection.



In 1944, Dennis Hawley (*left*), our author, had not yet been called up, and he was still working in the office machinery business in Huddersfield when he heard the news that Wingate had been killed. Little could he have imagined that three years later, while serving with the Royal Corps of Signals in Assam, he would be chosen to join an expedition to the crash site to recover the remains of the passengers and crew. In the event, he was left out of the party — much to his chagrin — yet his



interest in the mystery surrounding Wingate's death never left him and in 1985 he began his research which was to continue over the next seven years. However, by that time, travel in the area by foreigners was well nigh impossible so he commissioned a local Baptist minister, the Reverend R. R. Lolly, to undertake a round trip of 140 miles over a period of ten days, to take photographs for him. *Right:* This is Imphal airfield today, looking north.

By 1985, I felt so frustrated about the lack of information, coupled with my slight knowledge about the April 1947 expedition, that I decided to try to get to the bottom of the matter. I would confine myself solely to the task of obtaining information as to what had happened to Wingate after he was killed.

As I progressed and early material began to arrive, it was immediately obvious that I had stumbled on to an area of staggering proportion. What was to arrive in due course was nothing short of astonishing. It is true to say that for some considerable time every scrap of information which arrived raised even more questions; I remember wondering if I might have bitten off more than I could chew! But I was hooked, I would carry on, the results of my research finally being set down in great detail in my book *The Death of Wingate* published by Merlin Books in 1994.

Some readers will be aware that Wingate's 1944 operations relied on air support provided by the 1st Air Commando Group, USAAF. This unit was formed as the tool of Wingate's ideas of Long Range Penetration Groups, and as a result of discussions between Mountbatten, Churchill, Roosevelt and General Henry H. Arnold, the commander of the US Army Air Forces. Two co-commanders were appointed by 'Hap' Arnold, Lieutenant Colonel Philip G. Cochran and Lieutenant Colonel John R. Alison but, for administrative purposes, Cochran was referred to as the commander and Alison as his deputy. The unit was to be completely self-contained. It would be equipped with C-47 Dakotas, B-25H Mitchells, L-1 and L-5 light planes, UC-64 Norseman, P-51A Mustangs and Waco gliders.

By January 1944, two airfields had been chosen to the south of Sylhet in Assam (now Bangladesh); these were Hailakandi and, a few miles further south, Lalaghat. The latter with its longer runway was used by the C-47 Dakota and the Waco gliders, whilst Hailakandi was used by the other aircraft. The choice of these two airfields was an ideal one for both had direct rail links to the port of Chittagong in the Bay of Bengal and also north to the Brahmaputra and eventually to Calcutta.

From early January 1944, planes and supplies poured into these two fields and the build-up of the 1st Air Commando Group into an active fighting force was rapid. The group was under the overall command of Wingate and could not be diverted to other uses.

It has been said on other occasions that Wingate flew to the airfield known as Broadway on March 24, 1944 in a Mitchell B-25; however, the USAF Historical Research Center records that Wingate flew to his forward bases in the vicinity of Katha/Indaw on March 23 and in an L-5 light plane. On page 228 of *Wingate in Peace and War* Brigadier Derek Tulloch, Wingate's Chief-of-Staff and the deputy commander of the Chindits, writes: 'so very early on the morning of 24th March Wingate flew into Broadway on board a B-25.' However, in his diary of events compiled at the time, Tulloch records: '23rd March, OCW flew to Broadway'.

The confusion has arisen because having finished his inspection of the various bases, and conferences with his officers, Wingate then returned to Broadway on the afternoon of the 24th. Arrangements had been made between Wingate and Lieutenant Colonel Cochran to have him transported from Broadway to Imphal. At about 1545 hours, Wingate spoke by radio to Cochran and amongst other things asked if he would send a plane to pick him up from Broadway. Cochran replied that a B-25 was already on its way and should arrive at Broadway within the next ten minutes or so, which it did.

According to Dr Cortez Enloe, Wingate's flight surgeon at Hailakandi in a letter to



Derek Tulloch in October 1972, the B-25 left Hailakandi at 1500 hours to fly the 220 miles to Broadway, a flight which should have taken about 45 minutes. Accompanying Wingate was his ADC Captain George Borrow. The USAAF aircrew flying the B-25H were: 1st Lieutenant Brian Floyd Hodges, 0433525, pilot; 2nd Lieutenant Stephen Albert Wanderer, 06981944, navigator; Tech/Sergeant Frank Sadoski, 6730933, gunner; Tech/Sergeant James Walton Hickey, 20811833, radio; Staff Sergeant Vernon A. McIninch, 18117506, engineer. Two British war correspondents were also present: Stanley Wills of the *Daily Herald*, and Stuart Emeny of the *News Chronicle*.

With nine people on board, Wingate's Mitchell took off from Broadway and headed due west for Imphal. He had previously arranged to have a meeting there with Air Commodore S. F. Vincent, commander of No. 221 Group, RAF. According to Squadron Leader H. G. F. Larsen, the commanding officer at Imphal airfield, Wingate's B-25 touched down at 1823 hours local time. Arriving at Imphal, the aircrew and passengers all disembarked and, along with Wingate, went into the control tower.

Whilst at Imphal, the crew used the radio link to Hailakandi to enquire the state of the weather along the flight path back to base. It is also on record that the plane was under guard from the time of its arrival until its departure at just after 2000 hours local time.

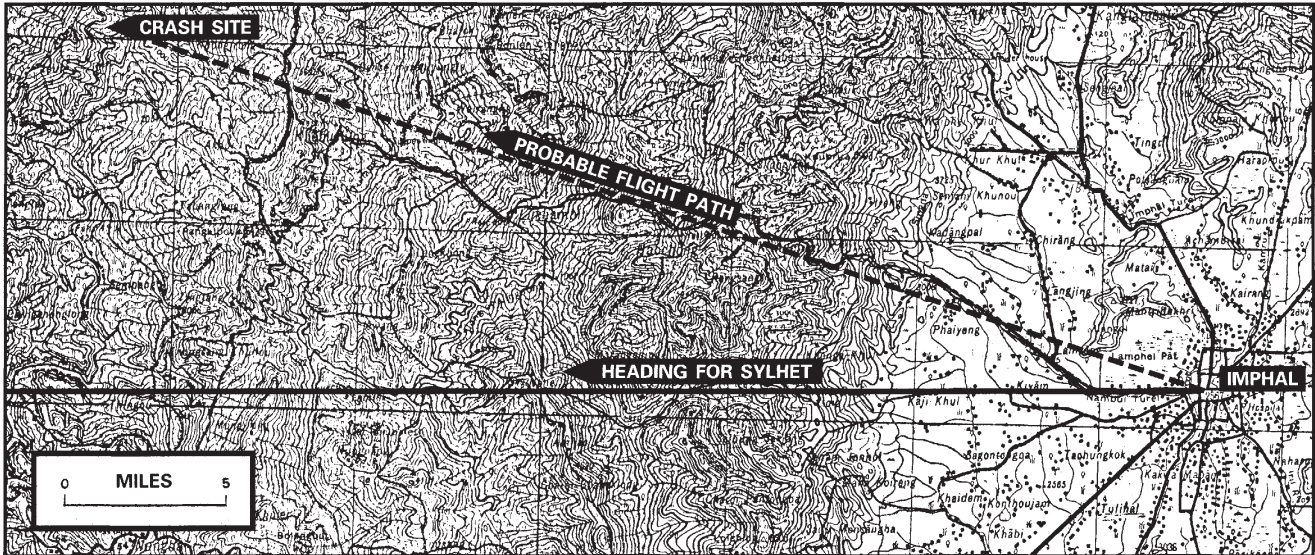
Since it has often been stated that Wingate took off from Imphal during a storm, it is

worth examining this point, if only to settle the matter once and for all.

In the inquiry which followed Wingate's death, Air Commodore Vincent was interviewed. When questioned about the weather at the time of Wingate's departure he replied: 'It was a very dark night when the aircraft departed. It was clear but very dark and it was overcast.'

It is a matter of historical record that Wingate's B-25H took off from Imphal airfield at 2005 hours local time. The destination was believed to be Hailakandi which is almost due west but it is perfectly possible that the airfield at Lalaghat could have been the destination. It is also possible that Wingate could have decided to use the concrete runway at Sylhet, but it is all academic; certainly he was returning westwards and only Wingate and the crew knew which airfield was to be used.

At the same time that the B-25H was airborne, Captain R. L. Benjamin, USAAF, piloting a Dakota, was flying a similar course to Wingate's plane. He and his co-pilot witnessed an explosion on the ground after which a fire ensued. At the inquiry, Captain Benjamin was also asked about the weather conditions; he replied: 'That evening over the Imphal valley we had strato-cumulus clouds at 8,000ft. As we got to the other side [of the mountain range] we broke through them at about 7,000ft, and there were scattered clouds below us. Visibility below to be able to identify a fire was all right for a good distance.'



In the American accident report, the weather is given as: 'Scattered clouds over site of accident'. A member of the RAF ground crew at Imphal at the time of Wingate's departure also confirms there was no storm. From these reports I think the only conclusion one can come to is that there simply was no storm — or even bad weather.

In the total absence of any official information about the cause of Wingate's crash, it was the newspaper reports that began the storm theory at the time of the release of the news that Wingate was dead. All the news reports were similar. Officially they only had the news that Wingate had been killed in an aircraft accident whilst returning from the front line. Unofficially it is most likely that PR men in the area all had additional information about the incident which Mountbatten would not allow to be released.

Without conclusive evidence as to Wingate's destination, the flight path from Imphal due west to Sylhet (solid line) can only be conjecture. The dotted line is the direct route from the airfield to the crash site near Thilon, just off the map to the north.

The *Sunday Times* dated April 12, 1944, said: 'It is believed in New Delhi that the bomber in which Major-General Wingate, the guerrilla leader, was travelling when he was killed on 24th March 1944 in Burma encountered a severe storm and crashed into a mountain side.'

From reports such as these, it has become the accepted fact that there was a storm that night. In the total absence of any other information from official sources, press reports such as those above were all that one had.

Captain Benjamin and his co-pilot noted

the time of the explosions and fires as 2030 hours local time and the position was given over the radio to Hailakandi as approximately 40 miles north of east from Hailakandi. The bearing was not over 250 degrees. The USAAF accident report gives the position as Long. 93° 22' Lat. 24° 59'. The site of the crash was on a ridge at about 3,000ft above sea level and, according to USAAF, was some two miles south-west of the village of Thilon. Indian Army patrols differ and place the site at about one kilometre south-west of Thilon.

Another IJS photo showing a general view of the crash site (upper quarter, right of centre) on the edge of the ridge behind the ravine in the foreground.





Although wreckage had been spotted in the jungle, the aircraft was so smashed up that there was nothing to positively identify the type from the air. Colonel Cochran therefore asked for a ground patrol to be sent in and Captain John Barnes (*left*) of the Royal Berkshire Regiment, at 3rd Indian Division headquarters, was detailed to investigate. He left Sylhet on the afternoon of Friday, March 25, accompanied by the medical officer, Lieutenant Boyle, and the Field Security Officer, Captain Boyle. Captain Barnes later told the air investigating officer that 'the other two officers and myself searched through the wreckage to see what we could find. There was very little as it appeared that the aircraft had exploded on impact; consequently there were very small pieces of everything all over a considerable area. There was only one piece of wreckage. This was about ten feet long and, as far as I could see, probably belonged to the cabin of the aircraft. In addition, there was a portion of the rear wing. We looked at the bodies to see if there was anything by which we could identify them. There were in all, as far as we could see, what may be called three trunks of bodies and the medical officer suggested looking through the clothing to see if we could get anything for identification. The MO searched the bodies very carefully and reported to me that there was nothing. I found a damaged pith helmet of the type used by General Wingate. I found some messages which had been addressed to or originated from Broadway where General Wingate had been a few hours previously, and some additional reports from Broadway. The other two officers and myself were around the wreckage for approximately one hour and we could find nothing else which could give us any clue. We then left the wreckage and went back to the village of Thilon, rested there about four hours and returned.' (IWM)

The morning of March 25 was taken up by sending a number of sorties over the area, but no one who circled the site could positively identify the wreckage as coming from a B-25H. Colonel Cochran then contacted 3rd Indian Infantry Division at Sylhet and suggested that a ground patrol should make its way to the site to see if identification could be made; also to see if anything could be done. The three-man patrol left Sylhet to travel east by Jeep during the afternoon of March 25.

The patrol travelled from Lalaghat to Oinamlong on the Imphal track, leaving Lalaghat following the track north to reach the Hailakandi-Silchar road before turning east. At Silchar, the Jeep headed for Lakhipur and the Imphal track proper making for Oinamlong. Many rivers and ferries had to be crossed along the entire route. After a journey of some 74 miles, Oinamlong was reached at 2000 hours. Here, the Jeep could take them no further as there was no suitable track and the patrol headed north on foot, travelling throughout the night to reach the site of the reported wreckage at approximately 1130 hours on March 26. The journey north on foot covered about 24 miles and had taken something like 15 hours.

The arrival at the site of the crash was described by Captain John Barnes in his evidence to the USAAF investigation:

REPORT BY CAPTAIN J. F. F. BARNES
CC Patrol sent to locate Missing Plane.
Ref ¼" Map. Sheet 83H.

1. The patrol consisted of:
Lt. Boyle, Medical Officer,
Capt. Boyle, FSO 257 Sub Area,
Capt. J. F. F. Barnes, HQ 3rd Indian Division.

2. The patrol left OINAMLONG RJ 65 at 2000 hours 25th March 1944, marched at night and arrived at the scene of the crash at THILON RJ 78 at 1130 hours 26th March 1944 arriving at OILALONG at 1700 hours 27th March 1944.
3. The aircraft crashed at RJ 7483 on 24th March; cause not known, but from wreckage it appears that it crash-dived and exploded on impact. Definite portions of the wing could not be found and it seems possible that one or both wings may have come off before crashing. It appears that the aircraft crashed without warning and that it is improbable that anyone escaped prior to the crash.
4. There are pieces of bodies and aircraft within 100 yards of the area. Quite impossible to identify any of the bodies. Only three bodies have definite trunks but these are unrecognizable due to the fact that blast has made the faces etc. very mis-shapen. Two of the trunks wore clothes in American flying uniforms; a number of feet with American type flying boots on them were also found.
5. The crater (approx 20ft wide, 6-8ft deep) which contained the charred portions of the wreckage was still smouldering at 1130 hours 26th March 1944.
6. I think that it is beyond doubt that General WINGATE was aboard for the following reasons:
 - (a) The remains of a pith helmet of the type normally worn by him was found.
 - (b) Copies of messages which were addressed to or originated from BROADWAY were found. (Gen-

eral WINGATE had visited Broadway a few hours before the crash.)
(c) Copies of BROADWAY sitreps were found.

I was quite unable to find General WINGATE's body, the above is therefore purely circumstantial evidence.

7. The following possible clues of identity were also found:
 - (a) Personal letters and messages addressed to STUART EMENY (ADPR).
 - (b) .38 Revolver No. 69063.
 - (c) .45 American revolver No. 1030386.
 - (d) Part of Binoculars with No. 337877 on it.
8. (a) From the wreckage it was not possible to ascertain the type of aircraft. There was, however, a considerable number of .5 ammunition lying around.
(b) The following numbers were found on pieces of aircraft:
 - (i) No. ATC AD 24 ST on rear wing.
 - (ii) NA 96 in 82 533193 on a piece of metal but NOT possible to state which part of the aircraft the metal had come from.
9. The MO estimates that only five bodies could be made up from the bits lying around. My own estimate is that there are about 11 bodies in the vicinity of the wreckage. I base this on the fact that a considerable number of bodies are very charred and you do not realise it is a body until you stand by it.
10. The local rajah of THILON village has been asked by 257 Sub Area to cover up the remains of personnel and aircraft with earth.



Left: November 1991: Reverend Lolly with his porter prepare to leave Saramba for the journey to Thilon (right) located on the top of a range of hills. 'I am pleased to extend all possible help', he had written to Dennis Hawley, 'because the project is very important, interesting, and of great worth for the future generation.'



To avoid waiting for Captain Barnes to return to base, Colonel Cochran arranged for an L-5 Stinson to rendezvous over the crash site and pick up a message pouch strung between two poles. However, the L-5 arrived over the wreckage before the ground party had reached it and, while circling, the engine cut out. With no height to glide to safety, the pilot, Sergeant Lloyd Samp, had no alternative but try to crash-land in the clearing made by the B-25 when it exploded. When Dennis Hawley

found out about Samp's abortive flight, he realised that he was a vital witness yet the only information he had was that Samp had served with 'D' Squadron of the 1st Air Commando Group. Dennis tried every possible method to trace him in the States: personnel records, military archives, the Veterans' Administration, public libraries and telephone directories, finally tracking him down after an eight-month search, alive and well, in Jacksonville, Missouri.

It had been arranged between Captain Barnes's patrol and Colonel Cochran that on arrival at the scene of the crash contact would be made with a light plane which would be circling the area. After an examination of the wreckage, a message would be strung up between two poles which the light plane would then snatch up. Sergeant Lloyd I. Samp, was tasked to circle the site during the morning of March 26 and to attempt to make contact with the ground patrol.

'We arrived at the site at the designated time', Lloyd Samp told me in a letter in July 1988. 'Because of the terrain we expected a British delay. As ordered, we circled the area watching for the arrival of the investigating party. The fuel capacity of the L-5 allowed us about an hour and a half of circling time before we would have to return to our base. After approximately an hour, I told my companion that I would continue for a few more minutes and if the British did not show then we would return to base. Before beginning the final manoeuvre, the plane began to lose power. It was not uncommon at an altitude of 5,000ft to pick up carburettor icing. I pulled full carburettor icing, but it did not improve the performance of the plane. At this point I knew that the only alternative was a forced landing.

'With what little power left, I set the aircraft in a glide to try and set down as close as possible to the B-25 crash scene. Unfortunately I did not get as close as I planned. The area was tall and heavy bamboo jungle. I pulled full flaps and cut what little power I had left. The forward motion luckily slowed enough to keep the plane from nosing into the side of the mountain.

'The crash left me considerably dazed. My first thoughts were to get out of the plane because of the possibility of fire. Instead of going out of the door on my right, I climbed, without really thinking, out of the left window. Although it was not really big enough, I somehow made it out anyway. Once safely out I rushed to the other door to check on my fellow pilot — Bill Walters. He was unconscious but came round in a few minutes. The first thing he said was that he thought his leg was broken. While lifting him out of the plane I could see that his diagnosis was correct. I then popped a parachute and made a pallet on the ground under the wing of the aircraft. After making him as comfortable as possible under the circumstances, I checked the radio. It was damaged beyond repair.

'I decided to take a closer look at the B-25 wreckage. Little was left of Wingate's plane. One wing and one strut were the only parts of any size. I walked in the direction that the small debris had been scattered. After going about 20ft I came upon the part of one corpse — the torso and one arm. It was a long time before it dawned on me how strange it was for these two parts to be still intact since they were so close to the wreckage and had not been burned. The site gave every indication of a very intense fire and a strong explosion. A short distance from the body remains lay a pith helmet. The damage to it was minimal. Such a helmet in Burma was a rarity, I knew that it had to be Wingate's. It was his trademark.

'Later in the afternoon, I thought I heard sounds coming from the B-25 wreckage

which was located about 300 yards from our plane through the dense jungle. I told Walters that I was going to investigate. Although reluctant to be left alone because of his immobility, he consented. The steep climb convinced me that I had sustained several cuts and bruises during our forced landing. But they were soon forgotten as I neared the ledge where the B-25 wreckage lay. I could make out voices, I picked a hole in the cover to see who was making the noise. They were not British but natives called Nagas. I could see about 20 to 30 of them pilfering the wreckage. They would pick up an object, closely examine it, throw it down, and move on to another item. Since I was about 50 yards away I could not make out what they were inspecting. After several minutes of observation I returned, much to Walters' relief.'



In the event, the L-5 crash-landed some 300 yards away from the B-25 wreckage, the co-pilot, Sergeant Bill Walters, breaking a leg. The two crash sites were separated by thick jungle and both Samp and Barnes missed each other. In the end, Sergeant Walters was carried out of the jungle on a stretcher by natives as far as Oinamlong and then driven by Jeep to Silchar where he was flown to Hailakandi. The picture shows him being lifted into an ambulance on arrival being watched by Sergeant Samp in the vest with his back to the camera. The failure of Lloyd Samp to link up with Captain Barnes and his party at the site appears to be explained by the fact that he took off from Hailakandi at 0845 to fly east for approximately 50 miles. He would have begun to circle the crash site by about 0915. This would place the time of his crash-landing at approximately 0945. Barnes gives the time of his arrival at the site as 1100 hours when interviewed at the official inquiry but he changed this to 1130 hours in his written report. Assuming that making Walters comfortable took only some 30 minutes, Samp would have been inspecting the site by about 1000 hours, or perhaps a little later. The fact that Samp saw a pith helmet on the ground, which he says he knew could only belong to Wingate, and that John Barnes carried Wingate's helmet back to Hailakandi, proves that Samp was at the site first.



Just over three months later, Lieutenant Colonel Christopher Perowne, serving as chaplain with HQ 3rd Indian Division at Sylhet, mounted an expedition to the site of Wingate's crashed aircraft, taking with them a cross which had been made in the division's workshops. On July 6, after a march of four days, they reached a steep slope which had had the trees burnt off and was green with cultivation. At the centre bottom they could see a portion of the crashed plane shining brightly in the sunlight. Halfway



down the hill was a basha which they took advantage of to have a welcome rest for a few minutes. In the hut were a number of objects from the plane which included a glasses' case and a more or less intact boot. After their rest they descended to the bottom of the slope to find debris scattered within a few hundred yards radius of an enormous hole which still contained the largest pieces. There were still bits of clothing about the place, and some small bones. Padre Perowne quickly selected a suitable site for the cross. This was to be placed at the edge of the impact crater and very near to the remains of the outer section of the port wing. The small collection of bone fragments which had been collected from the surrounding area was placed in the hole and covered over. The cross, which faced east, was positioned above these pathetic remains of nine men and surmounted with a circular bronze plaque which they had brought with them giving the names of those on the aircraft.

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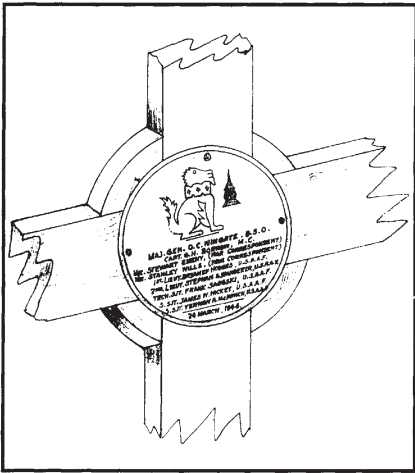
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Three months later, Padre Perowne was able to set out on his long-delayed trip. Although his party was to follow the same route taken by Captain Barnes — from Sylhet to Silchar, Lakhipur, Oinamlong, Thilon — the difference was that it was now the wet season and the rains had started in earnest. And where Barnes had travelled light in a single Jeep, now there were to be two Jeeps, a 15-cwt truck and 12 mules. The tracks were treacherous, deep in mud, with many precipitous drops, and there were fast-flowing rivers and gorges to cross. Consequently, a journey that had taken Captain Barnes a day now took four days of fearsome toil. They left Sylhet on Sunday July 2, the most dangerous episode on the way to the Jiri river (left) being an encounter with two elephants — most Indian tuskers hating Jeeps! Then the truck had to be abandoned



after getting bogged down at the bottom of a hill near Lakhipur. Right: The River Makru was crossed via this narrow suspension bridge which had developed a list so the Jeep bonnet was rubbing on the side. Most such bridges had been destroyed by the Japanese and they were reported to be advancing through the jungle to cut this one. From Oinamlong, the party had to proceed on foot, the mules being loaded with supplies including the specially-made cross to be erected at the crash site and cement to hold it in position. Every two hours, the party would halt to rest man and beast and burn off leeches. The Padre had also slipped and injured his leg which caused him considerable pain. Finally, on the morning of July 6, they reached the crash to find fragments of wreckage scattered over several hundred square yards. (IWM)



The teak cross, which had been specially made in the division's workshops at Sylhet, had already been prepared with an inscribed circular bronze plaque recording the names of the nine men.



A few fragments of bone were collected and buried at the edge of the crater and the cross erected above, set in rocks and concrete, facing east. Reverend Perowne then held a short service: the Consecration, the Memorial, prayers for all members of the Forces, their next-of-kin, the 23rd Psalm, some verses of Scripture, and a final prayer. Before they left, this photograph was taken, the only one of the gravesite which appears to exist today, now fading in Reverend Perowne's personal photo album. The return journey was a nightmare of constant rain along paths knee-deep in water and frequent attacks from leeches. The party finally reached base late on Sunday, July 9, the round trip of over 200 miles having taken a full week. (IWM)

In 1945, Lorna Wingate, Orde's widow, wrote to Winston Churchill asking him if her husband's body could be brought home from Burma. Churchill replied in the negative saying that such action would be against public policy, and that he must be buried at Imphal with his comrades-in-arms.

From what Churchill said, it seems evident that what we might describe as the Wingate group burial was not going to be allowed to remain within the vicinity of Thilon village and at some time in the future it would be moved to Imphal Military Cemetery, later renamed Imphal War Cemetery, located about one mile north of the town of Imphal, on the Kohima Road.

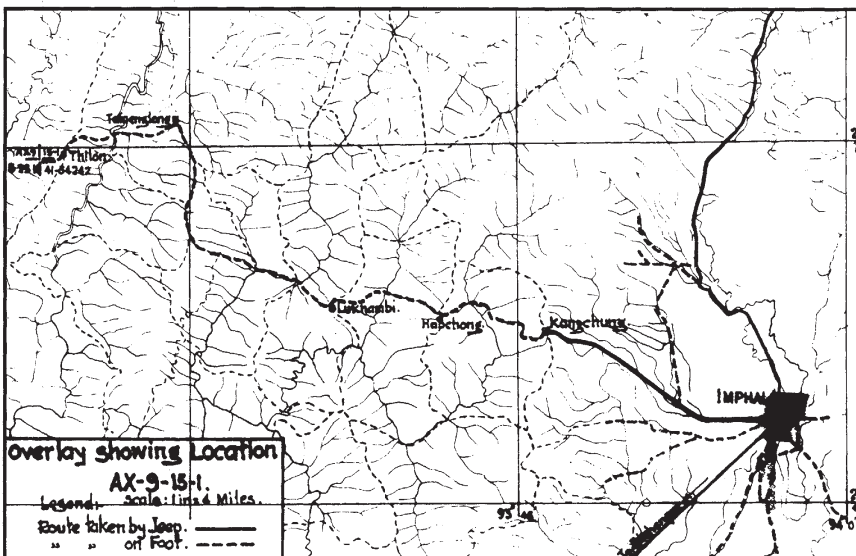
Meanwhile, the 63rd Graves Concentration Unit was carrying out its operations to the north of Chittagong which was then in East Bengal, later East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. Also operating in similar areas to the 63rd GCU were their American counterparts in the US Graves Registration Section. About the end of March 1947, a small party assembled at Imphal; this consisted of: Sergeant Thomas M. Kauppi and Sergeant Clarence E. Manby of the US GRS, with Major J. Scott and Captain E. Carew of the 63rd GCU. As recounted earlier, it was on April 1, 1947, at Shillong, exactly three years to the day from the official announcement of Wingate's death, that I was initially placed on a 48-hour stand-by to accompany this party to the crash site.

On March 30, the joint British-American recovery party set out from Imphal by Jeep and headed somewhat north of west on the track for Tamenglong some 60 miles away. At Tamenglong, there was a Sub-District Office and a rest hut, the track being 'Jeep-able in dry weather' for about the first 15 miles. Kangchup was as far as they could travel by Jeep and the rest of the journey was to be undertaken on foot. This event is described in a letter dated July 3, 1947, from Calcutta to Washington: 'On 5th April 1947, a Search and Recovery Team consisting of two non-commissioned officers from American Graves Registration Service, India-Burma Zone, and two officers of the 63rd Graves Concentration Unit discovered in the jungle west of Imphal Manipur, the wreckage of a crashed B-25, No. 41-34242 (sic). At the site there was a well-made cross carrying a bronze plaque upon which was written the names of the crew and passengers. From beneath this marker the team recovered approximately three (3) pounds of human

bone fragments which were taken to Imphal and left in temporary storage at the 63rd GCU, pending decision as to their final interment.'

The 63rd Graves Concentration Unit lost no time in dealing with the remains exhumed from the burial conducted by Reverend Perowne in July 1944 and they were interred at Imphal in Row H, Plot 9, Collective Burial 1-9 on April 10, 1947.

However, Captain Barnes's account indicates that the body parts seen on March 26 were considerable and sufficiently intact for the doctor to estimate that several people had been on board the aircraft. Lloyd Samp did not leave the area until two days later and he says that he saw the natives gathering up human remains using baskets made of bamboo and placing them in the crater. This was up to eight feet deep in that part which contained no wreckage. These remains represented most of the body parts attributable to nine men and they have never been recovered.



After the war, graves concentration units — both British and American — continued their task of tracking down unofficial graves in remote areas and removing the remains for burial in the nearest military cemetery. In 1947, as recounted earlier, Dennis Hawley was serving with the Signals at Shillong, not 100 miles from the crash, when the 63rd Graves Concentration Unit was working the area. On April 1, Dennis was detailed as a radio operator to accompany a joint Anglo-American detail to exhume the remains from the Wingate burial although two days later he was told he would not be required as the latter part of the journey was in rough country through which a heavy radio truck could not pass. This plan from the US report shows the route from Imphal — much more arduous than that followed by Captain Barnes as the four-man party could only travel by Jeep as far as Kongchung — a distance of 15 miles. The remainder of the journey — another 56 miles — had to be covered on foot.

Led by Major John Scott of the 63rd Graves Concentration Unit, the four-man party left Imphal on March 30 and reached the crash site on April 5. The two American NCOs, Sergeant Thomas M. Kauppi and Sergeant Clarence E. Manby, who were experienced in the recovery of aircraft victims, assumed responsibility. A detailed list was compiled of the serial numbers and markings on various pieces of wreckage including six Browning machine guns and the large 75mm field gun with which B-25H's were fitted. There was nothing to identify any of the individuals aboard but sufficient supporting evidence to positively confirm that it was Wingate's aircraft. However, it was at this point that the whole purpose of the visit — to recover all the human remains — inexplicably failed. The US report states that 'we had with us the natives that made the burial. All fragments were found at a spot 3ft wide and 10ft long on a 30 degree slope buried at no more than 3 to 6 inches under the top soil. It is our belief that no grave was made, the bones merely placed in a pile. Several monsoons would have washed them down the slope a short way and covered them with soil.'

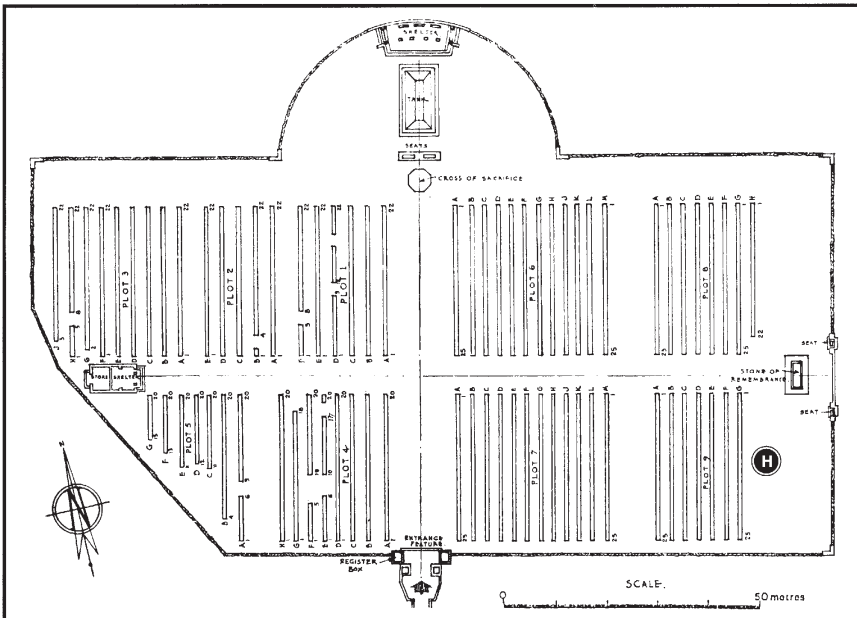
GRAVES CONCENTRATION REPORT (INDIA.)									
Report Serial No. 63/EC/11		Re-buried at (Name of cemetery and M.R.) MILITARY CEM. IMPHAL N.D.I. DEWH.						No. SEA/Y/1	
on (date)								Schedule No.	
Plot	Service No.	Name & Initials (Block letters)	Rank	Service Regt. or Unit	Plot	Row	Grave site	No. 3372 No.	Means of Identity
1		WINGATE O.S.	M/SGT		9	H	VILLAGE	63/1	Remains on grave
2		BORROW G.H.	CAPT			2	INDIVIDUAL		None
3		MR. V. STANLEY ENEMY		WAR CORPSES		9	COMMON		None
4		MR. V. STANLEY WINGS		DENTS		9	COMMON		None
5		BROWN HODGES F.B.	LIEUT	USAAF		9	GRAVE		None
6		WANDERER S.A.	LIEUT			6			
7		SADOSKI F.	1/SGT			7			
8		JAMES HICKNEY J.V.	1/SGT			8			
9		MCININCH V.A.	1/SGT			9			

I was present throughout the process of exhumation and have disposed of all effects etc. in the proper manner.

Date: 10/4/47

Signature of officer: G. Conrad Capt. (Signature)

Signature and designation of officer, completing the re-burials: J. S. H. (Signature) O.C. 63/ECU (P.T.O.)



The policy of the British and Commonwealth governments has always been that service personnel killed abroad were never to be repatriated to the United Kingdom but were to be buried in the nearest military cemetery. However, in 1946, the United States Government passed Public Law 383 which authorised repatriation to the USA of American service personnel killed overseas. Thus the policy of the two Allies was at complete variance. An American policy memorandum dated April 11, 1946, had already been sent by the Quartermaster General, Memorial Division, Washington DC, to the Foreign Office in London. It stated (in part) that 'in the event that [a] group burial includes both American and Allied deceased ... if the Allied deceased cannot be segregated, the Allied Government(s) concerned will be asked whether or not they would interpose any objection to the shipment of the group to the United States. If no objection is forthcoming, all the remains in the group will be returned to the United States for final burial in a National Cemetery. If there is objection to such removal, the remains of all the group will be finally interred in a permanent overseas American Cemetery.'



One would have thought that, with such an important mission, Major Scott would have been provided with a copy of Captain Barnes's 1944 report detailing the burial of the bodies by the natives or, if the tribesmen were in fact the same ones, that they might have pointed out the main burial site in the crater. As it was, all the unit recovered were 20 pieces of bone, weighing about 3lbs, presumably the same ones which Reverend Perowne had buried beneath the cross. Left: These were buried

in a rubber bag in Row H of Plot 9 at Imphal War Cemetery (centre) on April 10. This picture shows the cemetery with its temporary wooden crosses about 1949. Right: Work to transform it into a permanent war cemetery began in 1952, being completed in 1955 with recumbent headstones as is the policy of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in areas prone to volcanic activity or adverse climatic conditions. Plot 9 is to the immediate right of the Stone of Remembrance.

REPORT OF INTERMENT										NAME OF CEMETERY	
TO: THE QUARTERMASTER GENERAL WASHINGTON 25, D. C.										ARLINGTON NATIONAL	
NAME (Last, First, Middle Initial) <i>WINGATE, O. C.</i>										EMBLEM (check one) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CHRISTIAN <input type="checkbox"/> HEBREW <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (Specify)	
RANK <i>Mej. Gen. VORDE</i>										SERIAL NUMBER	
STATE										SERVICE DATA (Company, Regiment, Division, or other organization, and branch of service) <i>Royal Artillery</i>	
DATE OF BIRTH										DATE OF INTERMENT	
DATE OF DEATH										GRAVE LOC.	
MONTH DAY YEAR										MONTH DAY YEAR	
<i>Age 41</i>										<i>3 24 44</i>	
Nov. 10 1950										12 288	
REMARKS (Authority for interment, pension, or claim number, disinterment, etc.)										HEADSTONE OR MARKER ORDERED	
Remains were returned under WWII Dead Program and are buried in the common grave with (see list attached to QMC Form 14 for HODGES, Brian F. 1/Lt. to whose QMC Form 14 the list is attached.)										GREEN MOUNTAIN, VA. 6 MAY 1951	
NAME AND ADDRESS OF NEXT OF KIN OR OTHER RESPONSIBLE PERSON										SHIPPING POINT FOR HEADSTONE	
SIGNATURE OF SUPERINTENDENT OF NATIONAL CEMETERY, OR TRANSPORTATION OFFICER, OR ON OF POST CEMETERY										NEAREST FREIGHT STATION	
<i>William C. Davidson</i>										ROSSLYN, VA.	
PREVIOUS EDITIONS OF THIS FORM ARE OBSOLETE										POST OFFICE ADDRESS	
Colonel, U.S. Army Officer in Charge										C 1 9	



A report on the exhumation was forwarded by the American Graves Registration Service for the India-Burma Zone to the Memorial Division in Washington: 'The British Army in India referred the question of final burial of the group to their headquarters in London with a request for confirmation of their decision for final burial in the British Military Cemetery in Imphal. It is the opinion of the War Department that in view of the fact that the plane was an American military plane with a United States Army Air Force crew on a scheduled flight in which the British officers and War Correspondents were merely passengers, the remains of the group should be removed for final interment in a United States military cemetery overseas, preferably at Manila or Guam. This is particularly desirable as the British Government will no longer exercise control of the area in which the cemetery at Imphal is located [reference to the impending British withdrawal from India].' Thus began a behind-the-scenes wrangle between the British and American governments which each had entirely opposing policies

concerning the disposition of servicemen killed in war. On the one hand, ever since 1916, Britain had enshrined the principal that her war dead should be interred in perpetuity on the field of battle — in the original graves wherever possible — whereas the United States implemented Public Law 383 in 1946 which authorised the repatriation of remains to the USA should the next of kin so desire. Agreement was reached between the two allies in 1948 that in the case of air crashes, where the individuals could not be separately identified, the US would have the right to claim the remains if American crewmen predominated. Although this was the case with the Wingate crash (five American to four Britains), the Imperial War Graves Commission asked that as a British General was on board, a special case be made in this instance. However, the British government acquiesced to the American demand on March 4, 1949, and the small bag of bones was exhumed from Imphal on December 18 that year and sent to the Philippines pending final disposition. Right: The empty Row H at Imphal today.

In 1948, referring to the Wingate group burial in Imphal Military Cemetery, the US Department of the Army told the British War Office that 'In the case of the group burial which includes the remains of the late Major-General Wingate, we feel that the same procedure as that followed in other groups should govern. It is appreciated that General Wingate's operations in Northern Burma were of great historical significance, but we believe the American next-of-kin would be unjustly discriminated against by any such exception.'

On September 30, 1949, the US Embassy in London acknowledged to the British Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, Acting Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, the agreement concerning the impending exhumation of the Imphal burial of Orde Wingate and eight others. The acknowledgement also confirmed that the American Graves Registration Service in Manila had been instructed to contact Imperial War Graves Commission in New Delhi, with respect to the disposition of the remains. It was further stated that if segregation and separate identification of British remains was possible, such remains would not be removed from Imphal.

On December 18, 1949, the grave was opened by the United States Army and the contents transferred to Manila in the Philippines pending final disposition. This came on July 19, 1950, in a letter from the Memorial Division, Office of the Quartermaster General, US Army, to the Officer in Charge, Arlington National Cemetery, Fort Meyer, Virginia, advising that Arlington had been designated as the final burial place of the Wingate group. The burial at Arlington in Grave 288 of Section 12, was carried out later that year. On November 10, few British officers were present at what was almost entirely an American event. Amongst them were the British Military Attaché and a representative of the Embassy staff.



In a letter dated July 19, 1950, the Memorial Division of the Office of the Quartermaster General advised the authorities at the Arlington National Cemetery that it had been chosen as the final resting place for the group burial. While the Americans informed their next-of-kin of the arrangements and sent out invitations to attend the reburial, the British authorities deliberately refrained from doing likewise, the Imperial War Graves Commission agreeing with the Foreign Office that 'we do not propose to make an exception in this case thus giving the relatives of the four British dead concerned the opportunity, denied to others, of attending the reburial service'. In fact, Mrs Wingate was only informed that her husband had been exhumed and sent to the United States for burial on the very day — November 10, 1950 — that the interment at Arlington was taking place. The Americans officially notified the four British next-of-kin of the fait accompli seven days later. Mrs Marie McIninch, mother of the flight engineer, took this picture — little could anyone have then realised that the huge casket contained only a small bag of bones.



Following American tradition, Mrs McIninch is presented with one of the five US flags which covered the casket. No Union Jacks were present at the ceremony and few British officers attended, neither was the British National Anthem played. It was therefore only to be expected that a furore broke out

when the news reached Britain, summed up by the renowned *Daily Mirror* columnist, Cassandra: 'Surely in the records of official callousness or on the botched scrolls of abysmal inefficiency there are few blunders to surpass this performance with its appalling affront to the families of the dead men.'

Mrs Wingate was only informed of the reburial on the very day it was taking place. She being too distressed to say anything, it was left to the General's sister, Miss Rachel Wingate, to write to Churchill, now Leader of the Opposition:

'Five years ago my sister-in-law asked you whether she might have my brother Orde Wingate's body brought home from Burma, you replied No, that would be contrary to public policy, he must be buried at Imphal with his comrades-in-arms. I may add that his brothers and sisters entirely agreed with this.

'I am informed this morning that his body, together with those of his ADC, Capt. George Borrow, MC, and two English newspapers' correspondents are to be buried today at Arlington Cemetery, USA, because it was not found possible to distinguish their remains from those of the American crew of five who were flying the Major-General at the time of the crash.

'That Orde's grave should be in Burma seemed to us fitting. . . . That the Americans should be permitted to dig it up . . . to include it for use in tributes to American flyers we strongly resent. If they had taken half the bones and buried them as American dead then that might have been permissible, though it would be more reverent to leave them alone. But to have British names put up in an American military cemetery to grace an American triumph because the Americans care where their dead lie is abominable. . . . If an American General, say Patton, had been killed in a plane flown by a British crew, would the Americans ever have allowed his body to be transported to Britain to be put into an RAF cemetery? They have more sense of the effect of such behaviour on the minds of common men.'

In 1975, at the request of the British Embassy, a new upright headstone was erected by the US authorities at their expense on Collective Grave 288 in Section 12. The service of rededication was held on February 27, 1975.



For 25 years, the Arlington grave was marked with this simple, flat gravestone.



Reverend Luther Miller of St David's Church, Macum Street, where the annual Commonwealth Remembrance Day Service in Washington is held, officiated: 'We are holding this simple service to rededicate this beautiful new gravestone before us. General Wingate's widow, in approving the design of the elegant new headstone, which the Cemetery authorities have so wonderfully provided, wrote that "in death all men are equal". In the context of World War II, they loved liberty, and loathed tyranny and oppression, even though, like many fighting men, they may not have been consciously aware of such high ideals all the time. Nevertheless their sacrifice should remind us that the price of freedom is eternal vigilance, and in remembering these men from both our great countries, the best spiritual memorial to them would be for us never to forget the implication of this message.' Right: Captain Jonathan Wingate, son of the late General, lays the first wreath on behalf of the family.



The final irony results from the American-inspired recovery expedition of April 1947 for, as we have seen, their assumption that what they exhumed in the jungle was a complete burial was in error. Had they made more careful enquiries in their own country they would have discovered this quite easily; further, they would have had accurate information which would have enabled them to locate all the available remains, which were considerable, which had been seen at the site of the crash on March 26-28, 1944. The remains that were seen between these two dates was sufficient to make up five complete

bodies. There was also enough other remains, to enable a medical officer to estimate that all those on board had perished in the plane crash. This was not checked by the US authorities; consequently, the burial at Arlington is incomplete.

After 45 years, I have indeed been extremely fortunate to ascertain the precise location of the remains of those nine occupants of the crashed plane who are not in the burial at Arlington. Even after all these years there will be no difficulty in identifying the burial area and since the remains of nine men are buried at a depth of some six feet there is

no way that they could have disappeared during the years which followed.

As the Americans consistently refuse to complete the task of recovery, perhaps it is best that things are left as they are as the Wingate family can rest in the sure knowledge that the General *does* indeed still lie in the land where he fought . . . and died.

Copies of The Death of Wingate by Dennis Hawley are available direct from the author at Yew Tree Cottage, Slaithwaite, Huddersfield, HD7 5UD, price £15.95 (post free in the UK).

And still there was one further tragedy, indirectly connected with the crash. At the time, India was still governed by the British and the wilder parts administered by Sub District Officers. The resident officer at Tamenglong (just a few miles east of Thilon) was Mr M. E. Young and Major Scott's 1947 exhumation team learned that he had been responsible for giving instructions for the collection and burial of the bodies. When they called at his bungalow (right) to see him they were told by the present SDO that Mr Young had retained some personal effects but that they could no longer be found as he had committed suicide a few days after the crash, believing that he was surrounded and about to be captured by the Japanese. Below: This was all that remained to mark Mr Young's grave when the Reverend Lolly made his pilgrimage to Thilon in 1991.



So what now remains? In 1947, Major Scott's team also visited the spot where Sergeant Lloyd Samp's L-5 had crashed but the wreckage had already been pilfered by natives and all that remained were light sections of metal wing bracing and a six-cylinder, in-line engine. Parts of the B-25 were also found in the possession of local villagers at Thilon. The plaque on the teak cross was recovered by Major Scott and was subsequently claimed by the Americans in a letter from the US Embassy in London to the British Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin. As Dennis Hawley comments in his book *The Death of Wingate*, 'it is difficult to understand how the United States authorities could think that it had any real claim to the plaque'. Although Dennis feels that it should have ended up in the Imperial War Museum in London, it was subsequently loaned to the Wingate family by the Imperial War Graves Commission in January 1953 pending a suitable last resting place.



Then, in May 1989, a patrol from 'F' Company of the 30th Assam Rifles led by Major A. K. Datta, set out from Imphal on a combined pilgrimage-cum-training march to the crash site, a distance of some 57 miles. Although a new all-weather track now exists from Tamenglong to Thilon, they followed the original route taken by Major Scott (see map page 8). At the crash site, they found the crater considerably overgrown but still containing the mangled nose section of the aircraft. The area was cleared of vegetation and, after considerable effort, the patrol was able to retrieve the 75mm cannon and the radial part of one of the engines. *Left:* The cannon and engine were then carried shoulder high back via Thilon to Tamenglong, a distance of 17 miles, demonstrating resourcefulness and tremendous stamina in negotiating the difficult terrain. The patrol finally reached Imphal on September 16. The trophies were then taken to the Assam Rifles HQ at Shillong where they were temporarily set up on the lawn of the Officers' Club (*above right*). *Below:* Subsequently, the Assam Rifles had the cannon and engine mounted in a permanent memorial as a fitting tribute. *Right:* When the Reverend Lolly retraced the 1947 route again in 1991, he discovered the nosewheel assembly lying in Thilon village although there was no trace of the wheel itself. Dennis Hawley has spent seven years of his life researching Wingate's death, his findings now encompassed in his incredibly detailed book of which this article is but a brief extract. In October 1988, he sent the US authorities evidence that the bulk of the remains of the nine men still remained buried at the crash site, with a direct appeal that they should be recovered 'as I don't think the burial at Arlington containing only 3lbs of small bones is very representative'. Six months later, he received a reply: [Your research] does not however prove the presence of recoverable remains some 45 years after the incident . . . the Army cannot adopt a practice of excavating areas in a speculative venture . . . the Army cannot, in good conscience, re-open this case and expend resources in the hope that the remains might be found.'

