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The Cross of Sacrifice, Imphal War Cemetery
With the poppy wreaths laid in memory of
Major David WALKER and Major 'Sandy' LAMBERT

A CONCISE BIOGRAPHY OF:

CAPTAIN F. J. G. WALKER MAJOR H. D. WALKER

A concise biography of brothers Captain Francis John George WALKER, and Major Hugh David WALKER, M.C., who served with British Indian Army between 1939 and 1944. Both came from Great Torrington in North Devon, and both died on active service in Burma in 1943 and 1944 respectively.

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A Concise Biography of Captain F. J. G. and Major H. D. Walker

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Dedicated to the memory of Kenneth WALKER
30 June 1923 – 7 November 2013

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Captain Francis John George WALKER and, Major Hugh David WALKER, M.C.

This is the biography of two brothers, Captain Francis John George WALKER, and Major Hugh David WALKER, M.C.. Both men came from the small market town of Great Torrington in North Devon, yet they were to lose their lives far away from Devon in the jungles of Burma during the Second World War.

Family Background

Francis John George WALKER and Hugh David WALKER were two of the three sons born to Doctor Ernest Haines WALKER and his wife Dorothy Violet WALKER. They had a third son, Kenneth, who survived the war.

Born in 1889 in Tonbridge, Kent, Ernest Haines WALKER (known within the family as 'Jack') was himself the son of a doctor. He was educated at Epsom College and St. Thomas's Hospital, London, from where he graduated with a Bachelor of Medicine degree (M.B.) in 1914. He also was awarded the Conjoint Diploma to become qualified as a Bachelor of Surgery (B.S.). On graduation, he worked at the Hellingly Mental Hospital, a very large mental asylum in Sussex, and one of the big institutions that were common at this time.

With the outbreak of the Great War, Ernest WALKER joined the Royal Army Medical Corps, being commissioned in the rank of Temporary Lieutenant on 7 May 1915. He was posted to various military hospitals and reached the rank of Captain; being described as showing a natural flair for surgery. In 1917, Ernest WALKER married Dorothy Violet HYDE, who during the war was a Voluntary Aid Detachment nurse in Kent. Jack and Dorothy met at Dartford, and they married at nearby Langton Green.

At the end of the war, he was demobilized to become a general practitioner in Kent, and a surgeon at Sevenoaks Hospital. He was released from military service to help combat the flu epidemic then prevalent in society. He joined his father's practice, which was based in Ightham, four miles east of Sevenoaks. Jack and Dorothy lived at West House, at Wrotham in Kent. Their first son, Francis John George (known as John) was born in 1918 in the family home. Their second son, Hugh David (known as David) was born three years later in 1921, and the third son Kenneth was born in 1923. Jack was a keen cricketer and also played hockey, but his main interest was hunting.

The WALKER family moved to Seaton in East Devon in 1926. Jack had decided to leave Kent as his uncle had joined the practice, so he bought a share in a practice in Seaton. They bought Seafield House, which was opposite the town square and had a lawn running down to the sea front.

The house was destined to receive a direct hit from a German bomb in 1944 and was never rebuilt, the site is now a public garden.

The eldest son, John was sent to Allhallows Preparatory School at Honiton. David and Kenneth had a governess, Miss FRASER. The boy's parents became members of the Axe Vale Harriers and went foxhunting with them. The family also played tennis at the club at Seaton. John moved on from Allhallows School to Chard School in Somerset.



Figure 1 – John pictured with the First XI Cricket Team at Chard School in 1933. John is seated at the far right hand side of the picture.

Courtesy Kenneth WALKER

In 1932, Kenneth and his elder brother David went to St. Martin's School in Sidmouth. Miss FRASER left the employ of the family at this time. St. Martin's was a preparatory school, at which both the boys were boarders. There were about fourteen boarders, and twenty day pupils at this school, which was run by a retired vicar and his wife.

There were only two classes in the school, Preparatory and 'the rest'. Boys could remain at the school up to sixteen, when they sat the School Certificate.

David was considered physically too weak to attend a public school, so remained at St. Martin's until he was sixteen years' of age. Kenneth however, won an exhibition that allowed him to attend Kelly College near Tavistock in West Devon.¹ During this period, the usual cost for a boarder at a school like St. Martin's was £30 per term, with fees for larger public schools being about £45 per term. Whilst David and Kenneth were at St. Martin's, the Headteacher wrote to their parents requesting an increase of £5 per term, which the WALKER's agreed to.

One of the reasons that David and Kenneth started to attend a school was that the family moved again, this time to The Laurels in Porlock in West Somerset. Family life revolved around hunting and horses during this period. The father, Jack WALKER, ran a surgery in a cottage at Exford twice a week as well as the Porlock surgery. The decade of the 1930's was one of economic depression in the United Kingdom, and across the world. These were the days before the National Health Service was formed in the U.K., so all medical practices were privately run. The depression affected the farming community of Exmoor. The income for the WALKER family from the Porlock and Exford surgeries was insufficient to maintain the family, in particular, the costs of educating the three boys at boarding schools was significant.

¹ The meaning of exhibition in this sense is a scheme similar to a scholarship, but smaller in amount.



*Figure 2 – A picture of John (left of picture), and David (right) with their grandfather taken in Seaton in 1934.
Courtesy Kenneth WALKER*

In consequence, the family moved to The Mount in Market Harborough in Leicestershire in 1934. John was sixteen when the family moved to Market Harborough, and finishing school he returned to the family home. He and his father played cricket for The Leicester Gentlemen, the first occasion a father and son had played together in that team. On leaving school, John began work with Grindley's Bank in London, and he moved to London to live.

In 1937, Ernest WALKER decided to give up his practice at Market Harborough. He had been feeling unwell for some time, probably as a result of inhaling chloroform during surgery on patients. He applied for and was appointed the Medical Officer of Health for Torrington Rural District Council and honorary surgeon at Torrington Hospital. The family moved to Great Torrington and bought a property called Castle House, a large detached property at the bottom of Castle Street on the outskirts of the town centre.

At the time that Ernest and Dorothy moved to Great Torrington in North Devon, John was living and working in London; David was about to finish at St. Martin's School in Sidmouth, East Devon; and Kenneth was a pupil at Kelly College at Tavistock in West Devon. Thus, most of the family were now based back in Devon, albeit spread across this large county.



Figure 3 – Torrington Community Hospital, which was formerly Torrington Cottage Hospital, built in 1906. This is where Doctor Jack WALKER worked.

The Author (2014)

The First Brother (David) Enlists

The first brother to join the Army was the middle son, David. On leaving school, he joined his parents in Torrington. He wanted to be a solicitor, so became articled as a clerk with a local firm of solicitors in Torrington. The 6th Battalion, The Devonshire Regiment was a Territorial Army unit based in North Devon. The headquarters of the battalion was located at Barnstaple, with the companies based in the towns across North Devon. There was a Drill Hall in Torrington where 'D' Company was based. The Drill Hall is now the Plough Theatre.

When the Territorial Army was required to expand in April 1939, the 6th Battalion duplicated to form the new 9th Battalion of the regiment. Aged eighteen years, David enlisted in The Devonshire Regiment prior to the outbreak of the war, and he became a Private in the 9th Battalion.

Figure 4 – Torrington's former Drill Hall.

The Author (2014)



Both the 6th and 9th Battalions required new officers, so on 2 September 1939, David was commissioned in the Territorial Army as a Second Lieutenant with the 9th Battalion (his service number was 97315).



*Figure 5
David WALKER as a new commissioned Second Lieutenant
in the Devonshire Regiment.*

Courtesy Kenneth WALKER

The Second Brother (John) Joins the Army



Figure 6 – A picture of John WALKER aged about eighteen.

Courtesy of Kenneth WALKER

By the outbreak of the Second World War, John WALKER was living and working in Bombay, India. He had been sent to India in 1938 by his bank, Grindlay's, to work in their Bombay office. This suited John, as it allowed him to play a lot of cricket. Grindlay & Company Limited, Bankers and Agents had offices at 54, Parliament Street, London S.W.1, and had offices in Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi, New Delhi, Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar City, Peshawar Cantonment, Quetta and Simla. John rented Flat 126, Emperor Court, Churchgate, Bombay.

It appears that John settled in well in Bombay, writing to his parents on 21 July 1939, shortly after his twenty-first birthday. For his birthday, he threw a party at the Taj Mahal Hotel for the office, and three or four other friends. Starting at the Harbour Bar, they reached the hotel, where at midnight the dance floor was cleared and everyone toasted John's health on attaining the age of twenty-one.

He had to make a speech to all assembled, with the party continuing until about 3.30 am. Not surprisingly, he describes the office as being in chaos later that morning when everyone turned up for work. At lunchtime, eight friends took him out for a meal at the Gymkhana. That evening he played soccer, scoring the winning goal, and then to bed at the end of an eventful day.

With the rapid expansion of the British Indian Army, there was a requirement for new officers. At an interview, John was selected to become an officer. He received his orders on 24 July to proceed to Bangalore on 15 August for a period of '*intensive training*'. John was in the first batch of officer cadets to attend the Officer Cadet Training Unit at Bangalore. He completed his training successfully, being granted an Emergency Commission in the Indian Army as a Second Lieutenant on 22 December 1940 (service number EC/1298). John joined the 2nd Battalion 1st Punjab Regiment, which was then stationed at Bannu as part of the frontier brigade based there.

Their Careers Develop

While John was undergoing his training in India, David was with the 9th Bn. The Devonshire Regiment, which formed part of 134th Infantry Brigade, 45th Infantry Division stationed in the U.K.. This formation moved to Sussex in May 1940 on anti-invasion duties, and then to Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire by the autumn of 1940. On 2 March 1941, David was promoted to the rank of War Substantive Lieutenant. Meanwhile, John was with his battalion when it was ordered to mobilise on 17 October 1941, moving to Secunderabad for training. Then, on 8 December 1941, Japan entered the war by invading Malaya and Hong Kong.

The 9th Bn. The Devonshire Regiment was disbanded in February 1942, an early casualty of the need to provide men as reinforcements for the various theatres of war. David was part of a draft sent from the United Kingdom to India around this time to reinforce the 1st Bn. The Devonshire Regiment, then stationed in Lahore. The commanding officer of the 9th Bn., Lieutenant Colonel G. A. de V. HARVEST, was one of this draft travelling to India, where in May 1943 he assumed command of the 1st Bn. The Devonshire Regiment, then stationed on the island of Ceylon. On his arrival in India, David met up with John. They spent a period of leave together in Kashmir. According to their letters, they spent most of their time riding through the hills or playing golf.

The Battle of Donbaik – John is Killed in Action

The 2nd/1st Punjab Regiment, of which John was an officer, joined the 47th Indian Infantry Brigade in February 1942, transferring to the 55th Indian Infantry Brigade in October 1942. This brigade then joined the 14th Indian Division in the Arakan. In a letter dated 30 September 42, John describes life as an infantry officer. The climate was very humid, with a hot sun. Being surrounded by paddy fields, this added to the humidity present in the air. The supply of food posed a difficulty, with his unit living on mainly chicken and rice. Mosquitos were an ever-present menace, with John stating he was about the only person in his unit that had not been bitten.

John speaks of the monsoon, and that the unit had to move around in boats, a process he calls '*quite good fun but very slow work*'. He also gives a sense of the frustration in that '*there is nothing better we would like than a real move forward to try and recapture Burma. Perhaps by the time this letter reaches you we shall have wiped out some "Japs"*'. He managed to obtain a short period of leave, when he met up with his brother David. He goes on to describe how the battalion was short of officers. Some young officers joined the battalion recently, fresh from the United Kingdom, and were having difficulties in acclimatizing and learning Urdu, the language of the British Indian Army.

John spent a period of just over a year as Adjutant of the 2nd Bn. 1st Punjab Regiment, and on his return from leave, the commanding officer gave John command of a company in the battalion. John describes his men as, '*a good crowd of Punjabi Mussalmans*', and that his second in command was an Indian officer.

Another insight into life as an Indian Army officer is that John explains how Grindlay's Bank continued to pay him one-hundred and twenty rupees per month to make up his Army salary to that he enjoyed before joining up. However, on being promoted to the rank of Captain, his pay was now equitable to his previous salary.

The 14th Indian Division was under command of the XV Indian Corps, and in December 1942, it was ordered to advance down the Mayu peninsula to threaten or capture Akyab. The advance initially made good progress, but at a village called Donbaik, it met determined resistance from a company of Japanese troops well dug-in to strong defensive positions. The first assaults on the Japanese positions were repulsed with heavy losses, and the 55th Brigade was called forward to make another attack. The position at Donbaik was not very hopeful for the 55th Brigade. After the attack of 1 February, the troops had met stubborn and vigorous resistance.

Little offensive action took place until 7 February, from which date the area became more lively. On 12 February, plans were made for another attack, with the order 'to destroy all Japs and Jap posts in the chaung and village areas' being issued.² Zero hour was set for 04.30 hours on 18 February. During the night of 16/17 February, agreed concentrations of machine gun fire were fired by the 9th Jat Regiment, together with artillery fire, on the forward Japanese positions. The Japanese then raided the 5th/8th Punjab Regiment, without success.

The plan was for the 55th Indian Brigade to attack from its concentration area to the north of the chaung to capture the Japanese positions along the chaung and in the village area. The attack was to be undertaken at night, preceded by an artillery concentration. The 1st Bn. The Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers were to attack on the right, with the 2nd Bn. 1st Punjab Regiment on the left to capture the enemy positions between M16 and Sugar (S) 5, and then push on to the village area.

An officer from the Machine Gun Battalion, 9th Jat Regiment, who was present at the briefing given by Lieutenant Colonel LOWTHER, describes how the orders were straightforward. There was no feeling or emotion expressed openly, although every officer present must have known that the task given to the assaulting companies could not be accomplished without heavy loss of life. The writer describes the Indian soldiers as the finest troops he knew, but he added how they looked to their officers for leadership. In all probability, John WALKER knew that he had to lead the attack from the front, and his chance of survival was slim. There was no show of emotion, just calm acceptance of orders and their fate.

At 04.00 am on Thursday 18 February 1943, the 2nd Bn. 1st Punjab Regiment launched their attack. 'D' Company under BUDH SINGH was on the right, with 'B' Company under Captain WALKER on the left. 'A' Company (Captain Ujagar SINGH DHILLON) was to follow up 'B' Company.

² A 'chaung' is a Burmese name for a river, often in a deep channel.

'C' Company (SKELTON) was placed in reserve. Right from the beginning, 'B' Company was subjected to heavy machine gun fire, in particular from the Sugar 5 position. In addition, machine gun fire from the flanks hit the company. The leading platoon commanders were Jemadar Mohammed ZARIN and Jemadar MIR AFZAL, and they displayed great determination and leadership in continuing to advance on Sugar 4 and Sugar 5 in spite of the heavy fire.

Jemadar Mohammed ZARIN reached an enemy post and was killed fighting at the entrance to that post. Jemadar 19200 Mohammed ZARIN KHAN was just twenty-one years' old. He was the son of HAJAT KHAN and BEGUM NUR and came from Seri, Hazara Province. He is commemorated on Face 30 of the Rangoon Memorial.

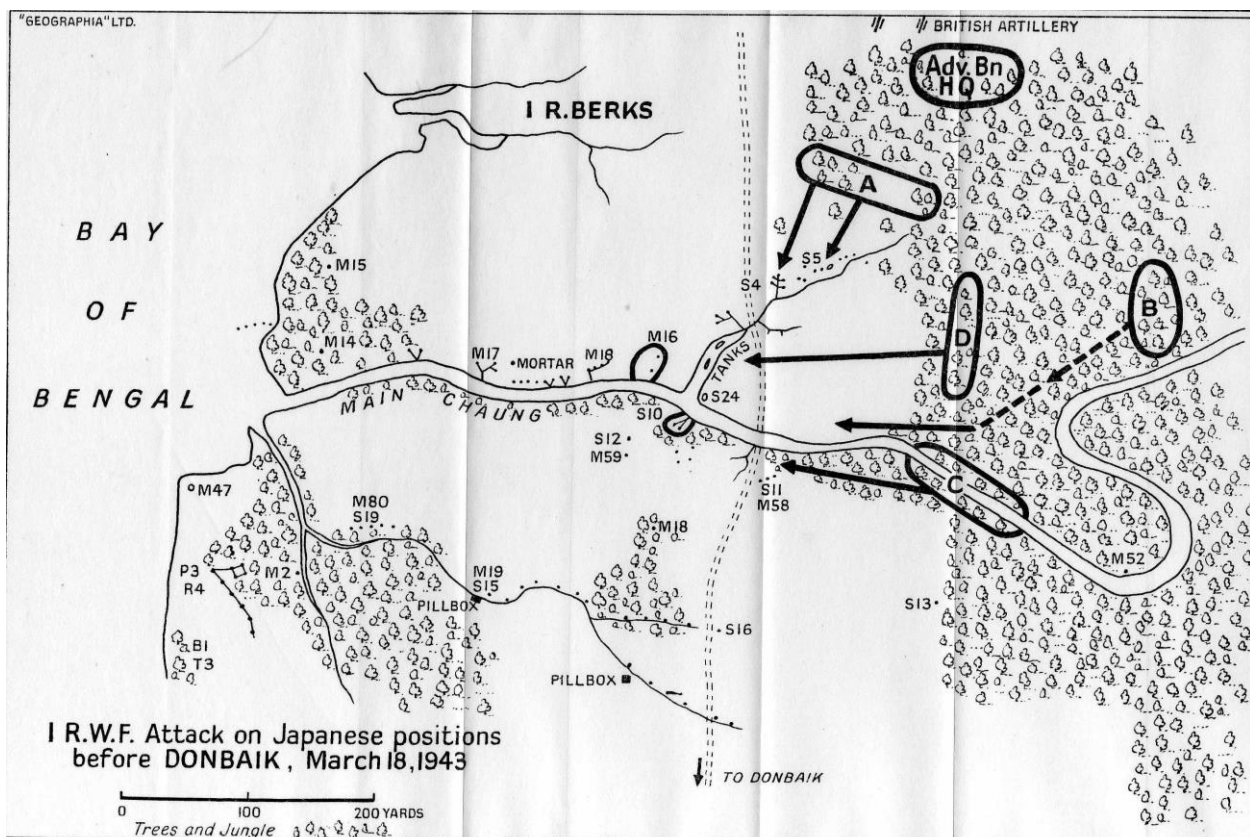


Figure 7 – The Japanese positions at Donbaik. Although this map is of the attack mounted by the 1st Bn. The Royal Welch Fusiliers a month after the 2nd/1st Punjab, the line of attack by ‘A’ Company 1st R.W.F. is the same as that taken by ‘B’ Company, 2nd/1st Punjab commanded by Captain WALKER on 18 February 1943.

Jemadar MIR AFZAL with some men from his platoon actually reached some of the forward trenches of the Sugar 4 position. He sent some men down the connecting nullah towards the main chaung.³ 'A' Company, following up 'B' Company, met with intense machine gun fire as they tried to reach the main chaung and were caught in the open. The party that Jamadar MIR AFZAL had sent down the nullah also met with intense enemy fire, so withdrew back up to the platoon's main position.

³ A 'nullah' is a small, steep sided watercourse, similar to a ditch.

The position held by Jemadar MIR AFZAL was untenable, with the only men left standing being himself, his Havildar GUL REHMAN, and five sepoys. He decided to pull back, and on reaching 'A' Company found that the company commander, Captain Ujagar SINGH DHILLON, and the second-in-command, thirty-one year-old Lieutenant Claude William SHERRIFF, were both dead.⁴ Lieutenant SHERRIFF is now buried in Grave 3.H.3. of the Taukkyan War Cemetery in Myanmar (Burma). He was married and came from Warrington in Lancashire.

Jemadar MIR AFZAL and Havildar GUL REHMAN brought the men from 'A' Company and the survivors from 'B' Company back to the edge of the jungle, where they met Captain WALKER. As Captain WALKER and Jemadar MIR AFZAL were discussing the situation, they were cut down by a burst of machine gun fire and both were killed. Captain EC/1298 Francis John WALKER was aged twenty-five years when he died. Jemadar 176701/IO MIR AFZAL was one year older than Captain WALKER and came from Aluli, Hazara Province. Captain WALKER was buried in a small cemetery at Shinkali in the Akyab District, but at the end of the war, his grave could not be located so both officers are commemorated on Face 30 of the Rangoon Memorial.⁵

Jemadar MIR AFZAL and Jemadar Mohammed ZARIN KHAN were both awarded the Indian Order of Merit (I.O.M.) (2nd Class) posthumously.⁶ The citation for Jemadar MIR AFZAL was written by Lieutenant Colonel LOWTHER, and states:

At Donbaik Front Burma On 4 Feb 1943

At 02.45 hrs this V.C.O.'s platoon was attacked in Jungle country by a party of 15-20 Japs. This V.C.O. seized a Bren Gun and immediately opened fire himself on the attackers. His prompt personal action drove back the attack and resulted in six enemy bodies being recovered later in addition to two wounded Japs.

On 18 Feb 1943

This V.C.O. was in command of a Platoon detailed to attack an enemy post known as S4. This post was known to be very strong and heavily armed with machine guns. Jemadar MIR AFZAL led his platoon with the utmost vigour and in a most fearless manner. He succeeded in capturing the post and then pushed on through it to the Main Chaung.

On the way he encountered very heavy fire and most of his platoon were wiped out. As no assistance was immediately available he was forced to retire with the remnants of his platoon which then consisted of the Platoon Havildar & four men.

⁴ The reference to his death is contained in the Regimental history – The First Punjabis, History of the First Punjab Regiment 1759 – 1956, by Major Mohammed Ibrahim QURESHI and published by Gale and Polden Ltd, Aldershot (1958), but I can find no entry on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

⁵ The village of Shinkali cannot be identified today. Villages in the Arakan move, as people search for new and better land to cultivate, and also are often known by different names today in 2020 than they were in 1943.

⁶ The award of the Indian Order of Merit for Jemadar MIR AFZAL is not included on his entry on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website, but that for Jemadar Mohammed ZARIN KHAN is shown.

On the way back he found two wounded British Officers and still under very heavy fire brought one of them back to cover. The Platoon Havildar carried back the second British Officer. Jemadar MIR AFZAL went forward on several occasions after this to bring in wounded men and to try and collect what remained of the company. He was later killed by a burst of machine gun fire.

This V.C.O. displayed courage and leadership of a very high order throughout the operations in which this unit has been engaged. His coolness and complete disregard of danger was an example to all the men and in the attack on the 18 Feb 1943 his courage and leadership was outstanding.

The citation for Jemadar Mohammed ZARIN reads:

AT DONBAIK FRONT BURMA

On 18 Feb 1943

This V.C.O. was in command of a platoon detailed to attack an enemy strong post known as S4. This post was well known to be strongly garrisoned by a determined enemy. Before the attack, Jemadar Mohd Zarin was full of confidence and inspired his men with his enthusiasm.

When the attack started, this V.C.O. rushed forward at the head of his men and succeeded in reaching the post and had the Japs suing for peace with up stretched arms but with grenades in their hands. His shouts of encouragement to his men exhorting them to kill the enemy were heard over the battlefield. This V.C.O. was killed as he stood at the entrance to the enemy post. His example was superb.

His fearlessness and utter disregard of danger was an inspiration to all the men in his command and to the battalion. The courage he displayed was magnificent and of the highest order.

Lieutenant Colonel LOWTHER wrote the citation on 20 February 1943, Brigadier HUNT (Commanding Officer 55th Indian Infantry Brigade) endorsed it on 4 March 1943; Major General LLOYD and Lieutenant General IRWIN, the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Army on 18 March 1943.

Havildar GUL REHMAN was awarded the Indian Distinguished Conduct Medal (I.S.D.M.), notification of which was published in the London Gazette on 22 April 1943. His citation reads:

At Donbaik Front Burma on 18 Feb 1943 – This N.C.O. who was Pln Hav led the first line of the attack on the enemy post known as S4. He succeeded in reaching the post in spite of heavy fire and advanced towards the main Chaung but was eventually ordered to retire by the Pln Comd when most of the Pln had been wiped out.

On the way back 12569 Hav Gul Rehman found Capt C.W. SHERRIFF badly wounded and under heavy fire carried him to cover. Later the Hav. went forward again on three occasions to bring back wounded men of his Pln lying near the enemy post.

12569 Hav Gul Rehman acted with superb coolness and courage throughout and set a magnificent example to his men.

Whilst 'B' Company were assaulting Sugar 4, 'D' Company had some success on the right. Captain BUDH SINGH found that the two companies of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers due to advance alongside him were not up to the start line, however, as any delay would negate the effect of the artillery barrage he attacked immediately. He led his men over the open land through a hail of enemy fire. They reached the position called M16 and successfully captured it. At first, as the Inniskillings were slightly behind them, they were fired on from both sides, in particular, from Sugar 4. The Inniskillings reached the line of the chaung, but the battalion had suffered so many casualties that they numbered barely a platoon out of the original two companies.

Captain BUDH SINGH realised that his position was untenable, so he collected as many wounded as possible and made his way back across the open ground to the original company position. Only forty-four fit men from the company made it back. Second Lieutenant EC/3908 Clement Stanley STANKOWSKI, who was twenty-one years' of age, was missing, presumed dead. He was last seen as the attack commenced, but soon lost touch with the rest of the company and was presumed to have died in the attack. His body was never found, and so he is commemorated on Face 30 of the Rangoon Memorial at Taukkyan in Myanmar. Platoon commanders Jemadar SUJAN SINGH and Havildar Major INDAR SINGH were seriously wounded and both were evacuated.

At about 06.30 hours, the battalion congregated north of the chaung positions, allowing Lieutenant Colonel LOWTHER to take stock of the situation. In that day's fighting, four officers, two Viceroy commissioned officers and seven other ranks had been killed. Two Viceroy commissioned officers were wounded, as were ninety-nine other ranks. Seventeen other ranks were missing. The battalion was a spent force, so moved back to Buthidaung to rest and refit.

Lieutenant Colonel LOWTHER recommended Captain BUDH SINGH for the immediate award of the Military Cross, which was published in the London Gazette on 22 April 1943. His citation reads:

At Donbaik Front Burma on 18 Feb 1943 – Capt Budh Singh's Coy was ordered to attack an enemy post known as M16. The advance was over open and bullet swept country. Capt Budh Singh led his coy with great courage and skill up to the enemy post and was forced to retire only when his coy had suffered some 50% casualties and he was in danger of being cut off as the coy on his right had failed to arrive. On the way back this officer arranged for the collection of as many wounded as he could find and although he was under very heavy fire the whole time succeeded by his coolness and example in holding his coy together. It was largely due to this officer's example that his coy did such magnificent work.

Throughout the operations Capt Budh Singh has shown outstanding courage and fearless leadership and has been at all times an inspiration to his men.

By midday on 18 February, the 1st/7th Rajput Regiment advanced from the left of the 2nd/1st Punjab in order to link up with the 1st Inniskillings and isolate two Japanese positions called S4 and S5. This was met with heavy mortar fire, and the attack was halted. The Inniskillings could not hold onto their positions as they were pinned down by sniper and machine gun fire. The position became confused, so although the divisional commander ordered the Inniskillings to hold present gains at all costs, in the early hours of 19 February the battalion withdrew.

The First Arakan campaign ended in an ignominious defeat for the British Indian forces. Lieutenant General IRWIN who had led the campaign was relieved of his command, as was the General Officer Commanding 14th Indian Division, Major General Wilfrid LLOYD.

As a postscript, on 1 June 1943, Captain Budh SINGH was awarded a Bar to his Military Cross. His citation was written by Lieutenant Colonel LOWTHER, and it states:

At Htizwe Front, Burma

On the night 12/13 March 43

During the night of 12/13 March this officer's Coy was attacked 6 times by strong determined Jap forces. All the attacks were driven off with heavy losses to the enemy. Capt Budh SINGH throughout the night was an inspiration to his men, and it was largely due to his magnificent example that the attacks were so successfully defeated.

At dawn on the 14th March a platoon of Capt Budh SINGH's Coy holding a hill guarding Bn. H.Q. was attacked by a force of approx. 300 Japs and Mughs. Capt Budh SINGH went with reinforcements to his platoon and took charge of the situation. The attack was driven off leaving 73 dead Japs around the positions. Capt Budh SINGH on both these occasions displayed courage and leadership of a very high order.

Brigadier J. M. HUNT, who was the commanding officer of the 55th Indian Infantry Brigade, added to Lieutenant Colonel LOWTHER's recommendation by adding: '*Recommended for Bar to M.C. if previous recommendation for M.C. accepted.*'

David Transfers to the Indian Army

When news of John's death reached the family, they placed a tribute in the Western Times newspaper on Friday 26 March 1943. It stated, simply: *'It is officially announced that Capt. F. G. J. (John) WALKER, aged 24, eldest son of Dr. and Mrs. WALKER of Torrington, has been killed in action in Burma.'*

The 2nd Battalion, 1st Punjab Regiment was withdrawn to rest and refit with the rest of the division. It appears that David probably transferred to this battalion during this period and after the death of his elder brother. David asked to be posted to the same battalion, in the same regiment, as the one his brother had served in. In a letter to his parents dated 30/4/43, he explains *'I have been posted to John's old battalion actually I asked to go there quite a long time ago, and as we all had to leave our present battalion I got this posting. I know you will not like it much but still I am very satisfied with it.'* He also describes the experience of travelling on the Indian Railways from Madras to Calcutta, and remarks how you could buy a Madras newspaper that was dated a day late, as it had to travel five-hundred miles from where it was printed to Madras, but that the papers in Calcutta were always a day early.

The 2nd Battalion 1st Punjab Regiment transferred to the 123rd Indian Infantry Brigade, which joined the 5th Indian Division in July 1943. The rest of the division had recently returned from Iraq, so a period of training followed. In October 1943, the 123rd Brigade moved to the Arakan as the 5th Indian Division was now under command of XV Indian Corps under Lieutenant General SLIM (soon to move to command of 14th Army).

The 5th Indian Division and 7th Indian Division were ordered to capture the Maungdaw to Buthidaung road, the only metalled road in the area. The 123rd Brigade was deployed on aggressive patrolling in the foothills of the Mayu Range during January 1944. Increasing contact with Japanese troops was encountered with the 2nd/1st Punjabs occupying three peaks on the ridge called Points 1975, 1749 and 1619 after their heights. In February 1944, the Japanese 55th Division attacked in the Arakan. The 7th Indian Division was cut off and split up into several defensive 'boxes', so the 5th Indian Division was ordered to relieve them. The 123rd Brigade was tasked with reopening the Ngakyedauk Pass. The 2nd/1st Punjab led the advance on the 12th February and on the 14th, communication was re-established with the 7th Indian Division with the situation stabilised.

On 21 February, the 2nd/1st Punjab attacked Point 1070, which had been lost to the Japanese a week earlier and captured the position, and then moved to capture Sugar Loaf thereby ending the siege of the 7th Indian Division and bringing the two divisions together after a troubling period of time. David WALKER was now commanding 'C' Company of the 2nd/1st Punjab Regiment, and held the rank of Acting Major, his substantive rank still being Lieutenant. Acting Lieutenant Colonel Sarbjit SINGH KALHA, who was the officiating commandant of the battalion recommended Major WALKER for the award of the Military Cross, as Lieutenant Colonel W. G. SMITH was officiating as the commanding officer of the 123rd Indian Infantry Brigade.



Figure 8 – The Military Cross awarded to Major David WALKER, still in its presentation case.

The Author (2013)

The citation written by Sarbjit SINGH KALHA reads:

MAYU RANGE FRONT ON FEB 44

On 16 Feb 44, Major Walker was commanding C Company in position at 407492. Observing enemy movement on feature CUDGEL 416491, he sent out a fighting patrol to capture or annihilate the enemy. The fighting patrol attacked and drove the enemy off the feature inflicting many casualties and capturing vast quantities of valuable documents. Suddenly another party of enemy 20/25 strong appeared and got in behind the fighting patrol.

Major Walker observing this cut off attempt of the enemy brought 3" mortar fire to bear on them immediately with excellent effect and put out his only reserve of two sections to annihilate them as they tried to escape from this mortar fire.

While this successful fight was being waged in the nala below three Japs infiltrated on to the Coy position itself, but they were expeditiously dealt with by Major Walker himself and a handful of men left with him after a hectic engagement.

In this very successful action, 15/20 casualties were inflicted on the enemy and most valuable documents including forty diaries and seven mule loads of equipment were brought back. The success of this operation was entirely due to the coolness, initiative and offensive spirit of Major Walker in making full use of the gallant men and weapons under his command.

Again on 22-2-44 when the company commanded by this officer was leading the Bn's advance on SUGAR LOAF his dogged determination, courage and confidence contributed very considerably to the success of the operation at 396543 and in the final advance on to SUGAR LOAF.

Lieutenant Colonel Sarbjit SINGH KALHA submitted the recommendation for the award on the 25th February. It was endorsed by the brigade commander on 27 February; the divisional commander (Major General BRIGGS) on 2 March; and the corps commander (Lieutenant General CHRISTISON) on 15 March. Lieutenant General SLIM (General Officer Commanding-in-Chief Fourteenth Army) recommended the award on 5 April, and it was approved by General GIFFARD Commander-in-Chief 11th Army Group on 13 April 1944.

The award of the Military Cross was published in the London Gazette on 26 June 1944, by which time its recipient was dead. The family received notification that David had been wounded, as a notice appeared in the Western Morning News in March 1944 stating:

Tuesday 08 February 1944. Dr. and Mrs. E. H. WALKER have received notification second son, Maj David WALKER wounded last month in Burma. Eldest son was killed last year in active service.

The Battle of Imphal – David is Killed in Action

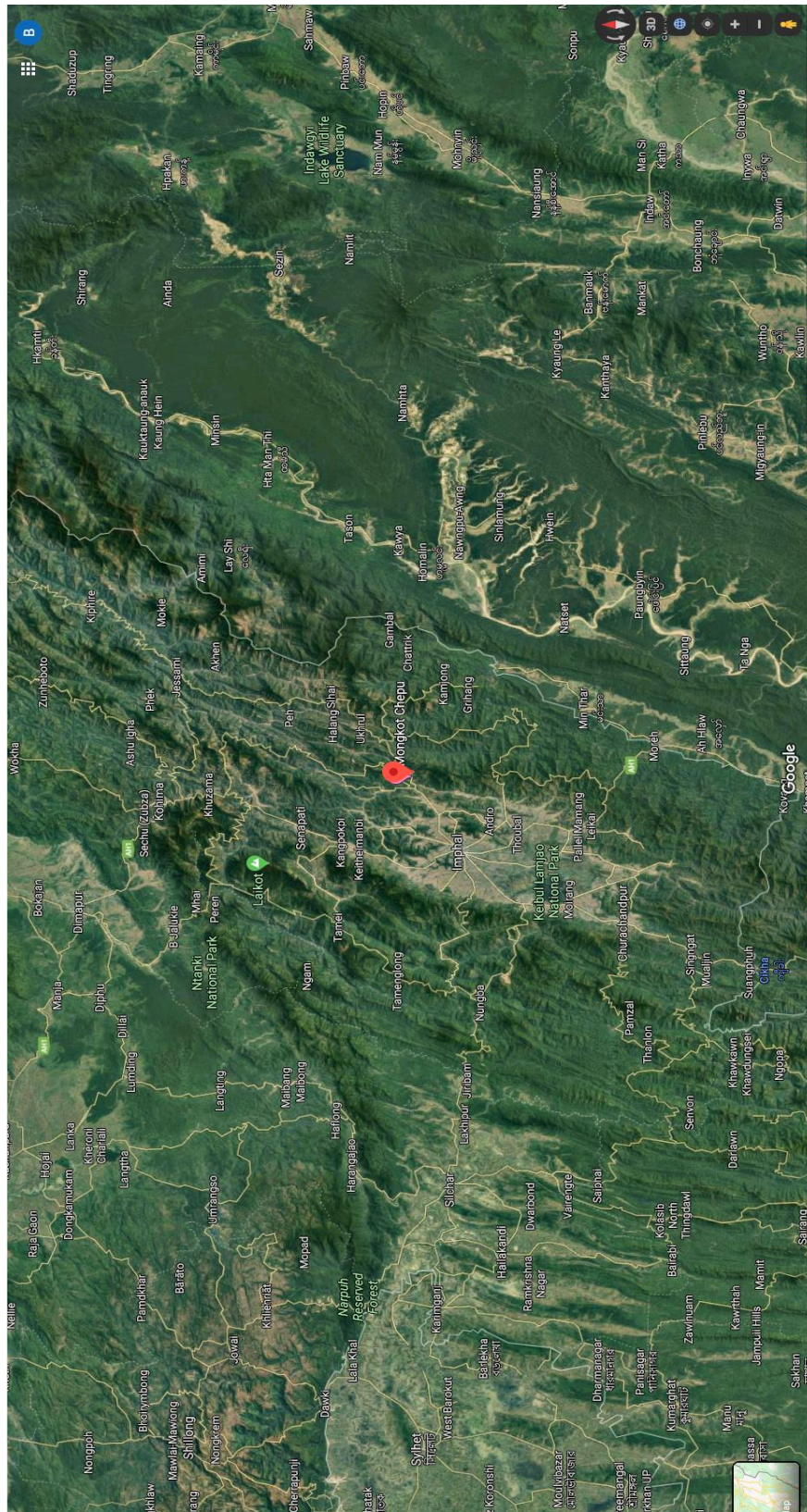
The main Japanese attack was launched in Assam with thrusts towards Imphal and Dimapur. The 5th Indian Division was moved by air from the Arakan to Imphal to join IV Corps which was facing the attacks by the Japanese. As one of the first battalions to arrive at Imphal, the 2nd/1st Punjab were sent to Litan, about twenty-six miles from Imphal. This move was intended to support the 50th Indian Parachute Brigade, which was under severe attack at Sangshak.

As the battalion could not reach the Parachute Brigade as they were now encircled, the commanding officer (Lieutenant Colonel W. G. SMITH) decided to form a defensive box near Litan. Brigadier Geoffrey EVANS, the brigade commander decided to withdraw his brigade to a better defensive location as his other two battalions had arrived and the survivors of the 50th Parachute Brigade were making their way back to Imphal. The 2nd/1st Punjabs located themselves on the slopes of a peak about half a mile west of Litan. Only two companies were dug in as the battalion was preparing to withdraw.

At about 8.00 pm on Wednesday, 26 April 1944, the Japanese launched a sustained assault on the 2nd/1st Punjab. 'C' Company, commanded by Major WALKER, was situated on a small hill about five hundred yards from the battalion headquarters. A Japanese battalion attacked 'C' Company relentlessly all night. The Punjabis resisted stoutly, with fierce and brutal hand-to-hand fighting at various times during the night. Major David WALKER met his death shortly after midnight in the early hours of 27 April 1944 whilst organising the precarious defence of the hill. He was twenty-three years' of age. No-one who survived that attack witnessed David WALKER's final moments, as they were lost within the melee in the dark on that isolated hill in North-East India.

When news of the death of Major WALKER reached him, Subadar Walayat KHAN took over command of 'C' Company as all the British officers were dead or wounded. Time and time again, the Japanese were driven off, only to persist and attack again. By daybreak, only six men of the original fifty men of 'C' Company were left fit for battle. The tenacious defence by 'C' Company no doubt saved the rest of the battalion, as it was spread out across the slopes of the main hill, and would have faced annihilation if the Japanese either had forced 'C' Company off the hill or had simply by-passed them. This very intense, hand-to-hand fighting was typical of many such events across Burma during the 1944 and 1945 campaign that are often forgotten or neglected today.

The bodies of Major WALKER, and his colleagues who lost their lives that night, were probably buried on that hill, in daylight, later that morning. They still lie there today.



Left – The area of North-East India around Imphal, with the village of Litan where Major David WALKER fought his last battle highlighted.
Courtesy of: Google Maps.

Subsequent Events and Remembrance

Tributes to both brothers appeared in the local paper, the Bideford Gazette, one of many tributes to members of the Armed Forces that sadly were published in local papers throughout the United Kingdom during the war. As is usual with the death of an officer, Lieutenant Colonel LOWTHER wrote to Doctor and Mrs WALKER to offer his deepest sympathy over the death of their son John. He was described as:

He was a grand fellow & very popular with the men of his company & with all. He was full of courage at all times & one of my very best officers. He is buried in a little cemetery on the Mayu peninsula in Burma, & I have personally seen to it that a Cross, suitably inscribed marks the grave.

He went on to inform his parents that John's effects were being returned to them by the Adjutant, and he offered further assistance to Doctor and Mrs WALKER.

The death of two of their three sons hit Doctor WALKER and his wife hard. By this time, their third son Kenneth was training to be a pilot in the Royal Air Force. He was stationed in Southern Rhodesia undergoing his basic flying training. Unbeknown to Kenneth, Doctor WALKER made representations to the Air Ministry for Kenneth not to serve on operations during the war. The Air Ministry sent a reply to Doctor WALKER stating that they understood the situation, and whilst there were no guarantees, they would take this into consideration when deciding on a posting.

Having qualified as a pilot, to his frustration, Kenneth was retained as an instructor at Induna, near Bulawayo. Meanwhile, following the deaths of John and David, Doctor and Mrs WALKER decided to sell their house in the centre of Torrington. The house was large, plus, it was increasingly difficult to find and retain the staff needed to keep the house running. They moved to a house called 'Fernhill' in the parish of St. Giles in the Wood, just to the east of the town of Great Torrington. Kenneth came home on leave in 1945 to see his parents, after which he was posted to India. He was released from military service in 1947 and went back to work for Shell, with whom he had started work before joining the R.A.F.. He had a successful career with that company, serving across the world. He retired in 1973. Kenneth married Elizabeth Mary McCLOSKEY in September 1953 in Berne, Switzerland, and they have three children, two daughters and one son. Their son is called John David, who is named after both of his uncles. At the time of writing (April 2013), Kenneth and Mary have ten grandchildren, and live near Parracombe on Exmoor in North Devon.⁷

⁷ Sadly, Kenneth died on 7 November 2013.

Although it is known that John was buried shortly after his death, his grave could not be located after the war, therefore, both brothers are commemorated on the Rangoon Memorial. Major Hugh David WALKER is commemorated on Face 6, as his parent regiment was still The Devonshire Regiment; with his brother Captain Francis John George WALKER on Face 30 with other members of the 1st Punjab Regiment.



Figure 9 – The Rangoon Memorial and Cross of Sacrifice, Taukkyan War Cemetery, Myanmar.

The Author (November 2012)



Figures 10 and 11 – Pictures of Face 6 and Face 30 of the Rangoon Memorial at Taukkyan Cemetery.

Courtesy of Jon WORT (2013)

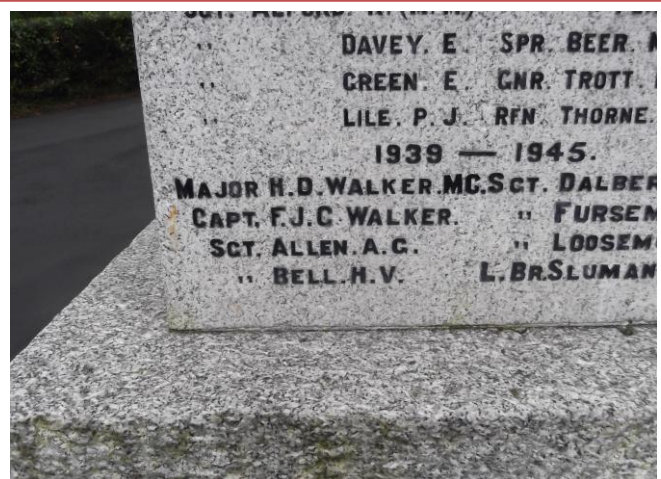


In addition, the brothers are commemorated on the War Memorial in Torrington, as well as on the gravestone of their parents in St Giles churchyard, and on a plaque within the parish church of St. Giles. Their story is both remarkable and yet typical of the young men who fought in the Second World War.



Figures 12 & 13 – Two views of the War Memorial in Torrington Cemetery.

The Author (2012)



Figures 14 & 15 – Mr Kenneth WALKER and his granddaughter Louisa at the rededication of the war memorial at Great Torrington in April 2013 to include the M.C. award to Major David WALKER.

The Author (2013)

Doctor WALKER continued to run his busy practice in Torrington and work at the town's hospital until he retired from general practice in 1948. Jack WALKER was a keen horseman, following a family tradition. Hunting with hounds was a part of family life, so on moving to the area, he became a member of the Torrington Farmer's foxhounds until ill health forced him to give up riding. He would still follow the hunt by car driven by his wife.

He died on 17 November 1968 aged seventy-eight years. His obituary stated that he would be much missed around Torrington where he was universally liked. He is buried in the churchyard at St. Giles in the Wood, and his wife Dorothy is also buried there having died on 3 August 1987 aged ninety-three years. In addition, their three sons are now commemorated on their gravestone.



Figure 16 – The family grave of Dr and Mrs WALKER at St. Giles in the Wood Parish Church, North Devon, commemorating their family.

Taken by the Author (2017)



Figure 17 & 18 – The memorials to the two brothers inside the parish church at St. Giles in the Wood.
The Author (2012)

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