

2024

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Author: Robert PALMER, M.A.



The Cross of Sacrifice
Imphal War Cemetery

A CONCISE BIOGRAPHY OF:

BRIGADIER B. C. H. GERTY

A concise biography of Brigadier Bernard Charles Hamilton GERTY, C.B.E., D.S.O., an officer in the British Indian Army between 1918 and 1948 who served in Burma in 1942, as a battalion commander in the Arakan and at Imphal, and then as a brigade commander in the Arakan.
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**A Concise Biography of Brigadier Bernard Charles Hamilton GERTY, C.B.E., D.S.O.,
Indian Army**

Version: V2_1
This edition dated: 12 April 2024
ISBN: Not yet allocated.

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Author: Robert PALMER, M.A. (copyright held by author)
Assisted by: Stephen HEAL
Published privately by: The Author – Publishing as:
www.BritishMilitaryHistory.co.uk

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Brigadier Bernard Charles Hamilton GERTY, C.B.E., D.S.O.

Ordinary men – Extraordinary lives.

Nothing fits better the story of the life of Brigadier Bernard Charles Hamilton GERTY, C.B.E., D.S.O.. An officer in the British Indian Army from 1918 until 1948, he came from an ordinary background in London, and joined the Army at eighteen years of age. His career was nothing exceptional, yet he proved himself a superb leader of men. During the Second World War, he was a battalion commander for over two years, and then a brigade commander in the most demanding of theatres of war, namely Burma.

Early Life and Career

Bernard Charles Hamilton GERTY was born in Hampstead, London on 3 February 1900. His father, Charles Herbert Burleigh GERTY was a Commercial Traveller for a printing company, and sadly died at the age of thirty years in Brentford on 31 December 1901, when Bernard was still a young child. Charles was born in about 1871 in Moorby, Lincolnshire, but moved to Ireland with his family when he was young. Bernard's mother was Muriel Isabel HOWSE, was born in Stogussey, Somerset in about 1865, which made her six years her husband's senior in age. In 1901, the family lived at 49, Dynham Road, Hampstead, London, which is possibly where Bernard was born. The GERTY's shared this address with a couple called William and Margaret BENDALL. The house is a two-storey terraced property, just to the south of West Hampstead railway station, so the two families may have had separate flats in the house.¹

Bernard went to live with his uncle, Herbert Ward EVANS, and his wife, Hilda Mabel EVANS at 22, Chetwynd Bank, Newport, Shropshire. His uncle was a General Practitioner in the town, and they had two children, Nancy Mabel (who was one year older than Bernard), and a son Andrew Eagle EVANS, who was two years younger than Bernard. Bernard's mother, Muriel Isabel GERTY came to live with her brother-in-law, so Bernard had some continuity after his loss. Herbert EVANS employed a Domestic Cook and Palourmaid in his home.²

Bernard was educated at St. Bede's School in Cumberland, from which he entered the Royal Military College at Sandhurst. As the Great War was still on-going when he entered Sandhurst, the course was shorter than pre-war, so on 16 December 1918 GERTY was commissioned on the Unattached List for the Indian Army. The usual practice was for newly commissioned officers in the Indian Army to be posted to a British battalion for their first twelve months of service, but GERTY was admitted to the Indian Army on 23 December, only seven days after commissioning. He joined the 6th Royal Jat Light Infantry, as an eighteen-year-old, Second Lieutenant with the service number IA/104.

¹ 1901 Census at www.Ancestry.co.uk

² 1911 Census at www.Ancestry.co.uk

Having performed successfully on probation, GERTY was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant on 16 December 1919. He continued on regimental duties, serving in Afghanistan in 1919 and then in Waziristan until 1922. There was a period of temporary promotion, as he was promoted to the rank of Acting Captain whilst commanding a company, between 10 February and 31 March 1921.

In 1922, the Indian Army reorganised, with the infantry battalions consolidated into twenty multi-battalion regiments. The 6th Royal Jat Light Infantry became the 1st (Royal) Battalion, 9th Jat Regiment. On 6 October 1924, GERTY took up the appointment as Quarter-Master of the battalion. The Quarter-Master of an infantry battalion is responsible for the provision of equipment, clothing and other items required by the men of the unit. Promotion to the rank of Captain took effect from 16 December 1924.

GERTY completed his tenure as Quarter-Master of the battalion on 3 March 1928, returning to company duties until 16 June 1931 when he assumed the role as Adjutant of the battalion. This was a key role, as an Adjutant is responsible for the discipline and efficient running of the battalion on behalf of the commanding officer. Usually, it is given to promising and well-respected officers. GERTY obviously performed the role exceptionally well, for he held the post for over four years, leaving on 29 September 1935.

On 3 December 1935, for the first time in his career, GERTY left the 1st Bn. 9th Jat Regiment to become the Assistant Commandant of the 3rd (Naga Hills) Battalion, The Assam Rifles. This unit was one of four battalions of the Assam Rifles that operated as a para-military police force in the border areas of Assam with Burma. During his tenure in this role, GERTY received promotion to the rank of Major on 16 December 1936, twelve years after his promotion to Captain. He was now thirty-six years of age, and he had eighteen years' service in the Indian Army. On 3 October 1938, GERTY left The Assam Rifles, and returned to his battalion, where he became a company commander. He took command of 'B' Company, which comprised Mussalman Rajputs; Muslim soldiers who came from Rajputana District in India. The battalion was stationed at Chitral on the North-West Frontier, with a detached company at Chitral Fort. Training continued in this inhospitable area, with Major GERTY taking his company to climb the Lohigal Pass at 14,340 feet above sea level.

The Outbreak of the Second World War

The outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939 did not change life much for the Indian Army, but steadily units were mobilised for service in the Middle East. The second-in-command of the battalion, Major C. K. TESTER, M.C. left to command the 2nd (Mooltan) Battalion, 9th Jat Regiment on 14 July 1940, so Major GERTY was appointed in his place. The orders to mobilise the battalion were received in November 1941. This process was completed on 15 November, so the battalion left Wah to embark on a troopship to sail for Burma. Under the command of Lieutenant Colonel B. S. HEY, the battalion arrived at Rangoon on 30 November 1941 as part of the 16th Indian Infantry Brigade.

The First Burma Campaign

The brigade moved to Moulmein in southern Burma, from where it moved inland to Kawkaik to guard against Japanese invasion from Thailand. The Japanese Army invaded Burma through the Chin Hills on 20 January. The 1st (Royal) Battalion held positions around Kawkaik, with the first encounters with Japanese troops on 21 January. In these first clashes, a colleague of GERTY's, Captain (EC/3011) Gordon Baty FEATHERSTONE (who commanded 'D' Company (Punjabi Mussalman)) was lost, and he is presumed to have died. His body has never been found or identified, so he is commemorated on Face 38 of the Rangoon Memorial.

At this time, infantry battalions in Burma were not equipped with radios, so Major GERTY was the means of contact between brigade headquarters and the battalion using a motor cycle. Runners maintained contact with the companies on foot. Despite on paper being a Regular battalion of the Indian Army, the reality was very different. Most of the soldiers were young men, with only six months basic training. Most of the experienced officers and non-commissioned officers had left for other units, so Major GERTY had a key role as second-in-command providing a calm and experienced head to support his subordinate officers.

The strength of the Japanese attack quickly became apparent, with both the 55th Division and 33rd Division advancing into Burma from Thailand. The brigade withdrew, with the 1st (Royal) Battalion leaving by motor transport on 22 January for Kyondo. Here they had to cross the river, and then continue on foot. As a result, all the mechanical equipment, reserve ammunition and stores had to be destroyed. The battalion reached the village of Tarana, about twenty miles from Moulmein at about 4.00 am. The river steamer to take them to Moulmein did not arrive until 10.00 pm.

The battalion landed at Martaban on the northern shore of the Salween River. At this point, the river is one and half miles wide, with Moulmein on the southern shore of the river. The 16th Indian Infantry Brigade was ordered to hold the northern bank of the river on a front of about sixty miles, with four battalions, the:

- 2nd Bn. The Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry
- 1st (Royal) Bn. 9th Jat Regiment
- 7th Bn. 10th Baluch Regiment
- 3rd Bn. 7th Gurkha Rifles.

On the night of 30 January, Major GERTY led a patrol comprising Second Lieutenant J. FULLER (the battalion's Motor Transport Officer), five Viceroy's commissioned officers and fifty Indian other ranks in a small river steamer to the Kado area. Bright moonlight illuminated the night. At the first location where GERTY was looking to land, they found that there was a large number of Japanese in the area. He decided therefore to open fire on them from the steamer. After an intense gun battle, during which one sepoy died and thirty were wounded, GERTY decided to return to Martaban.

On the same night, the Japanese attacked Molmein, and were so successful that they had secured the town by 1 February. As the Japanese crossed the River Salween, the 17th Indian Infantry Division fell back to take up positions along the River Bilin. The commanding officer of the battalion Lieutenant Colonel HEY left the battalion to be replaced by Lieutenant Colonel GODLEY, who flew out from India to take over command. GERTY remained as the second-in-command of the battalion.

Over the period from 17 February 1942, the Japanese launched an offensive across the River Bilin. The enemy managed to infiltrate behind the British lines, and the situation became very confused. By 20 February, the battalion was isolated, but received an order to retire at about 11.30 pm. The battalion passed back to the command of the 16th Indian Infantry Brigade from the 48th Indian Infantry Brigade, and it made its way to the River Sittang. The 1st Royal Battalion formed part of the bridgehead at Mokpalin, protecting the railway bridge across the River Sittang, which was the only bridge across the river anywhere near the positions of the 17th Indian Division.

Then, at about 05.00 am on 23 February, there was a tremendous explosion and the part of the bridge collapsed into the river. It had been blown up. There was a state of confusion; both Brigadier JONES, the commanding officer of the 16th Indian Infantry Brigade and Brigadier EKIN of the 46th Indian Infantry Brigade visited the battalion. A large number of stragglers added to the problems faced by the two brigadiers, plus the Japanese were continuing to attack the units located at the bridgehead.

Brigadier JONES ordered the units in the bridgehead to withdraw across the river as best they could. The 1st Royal Battalion was one of the last two units to leave the bridgehead at about 4.00 pm. By the time they reached the river, most of the rafts and boats had been used, however, most of the battalion successfully reached the other bank by swimming across, including Major GERTY. Lieutenant M. A. KHAN, the battalion's medical officer and about twenty Indian other ranks drowned, and others were captured or killed. Altogether, the battalion lost about eighty men. As the men emerged from the river, wet and tired after their long swim, they had to make their way to the railway station about two miles away. On their arrival at the railway station however, the soldiers were greeted with a cup of tea and biscuits. The Quarter-Master of the battalion, Second Lieutenant Ian LIDDINGTON, worked wonders to provide some sustenance for his battalion. It was not until 24 February that the battalion had their first hot meal since the nineteenth.

The next week was spent Hlegu resting and re-equipping. On 5 March, Major GERTY took 'A' Company to protect the oil refineries at Syriam (now known as Thanlyin) at the mouth of the Rangoon River. Two days later, the decision was taken to evacuate Rangoon, so Major GERTY and 'A' Company found themselves being evacuated by sea to India. Consequently, they played no further part in the Burma Campaign of 1942.

The 1st Royal Battalion arrived at Shillong in Assam on 17 July 1942. It transferred to the 1st Burma Division (soon to be redesignated as the 39th Indian Light Division), by which time GERTY was serving in the Middle East. On arrival back in India, GERTY and 'A' Company of the 1st Bn. 9th Jat Regiment were attached to the 6th Bn. 9th Jat Regiment. As the commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel BRETT, G.C., O.B.E., M.C. was at Chittagong, and the second-in-command Major Dudley Goodwin Russell LEONARD was serious ill in hospital, Major GERTY was promoted to the rank of Acting Lieutenant Colonel on 16 April 1942 and assumed command of the 6th Bn. 9th Jat Regiment.³ This war raised battalion was at the time stationed in Calcutta having just returned from Akyab.

Commanding Officer 3rd/9th Jat Regiment

The 3rd Bn. 9th Jat Regiment was serving in Libya and Egypt as part of the 5th Indian Division. On 5 June 1942, the commanding officer of the battalion, Lieutenant Colonel H. V. BRAGG was killed by shellfire together with four other officers. This left the battalion leaderless having suffered heavy casualties. Bernard GERTY was selected to take command of the battalion, so left India bound for Egypt. He arrived on 21 July, with the rank of Temporary Lieutenant Colonel and assumed command of the battalion.⁴

The 3rd Bn 9th Jat Regiment had seen much action in the Eritrea and the Western Desert since the outbreak of the Second World War, however, Lieutenant Colonel GERTY did not see action in this theatre. In September 1942, the 5th Indian Division, of which the 3rd Bn. 9th Jat Regiment was part, left Egypt for Iraq. After spending eight months in Iraq, the division arrived back in India in May 1943. A period of leave for all ranks followed, and then it embarked on an intensive six-week period of jungle training. The battalion had been brought up to strength during this period, and was fit, eager and well led for what lay ahead.

Lieutenant Colonel GERTY was fortunate to have a good group of officers in the key appointments within the battalion. Most were pre-war Regular Indian Army officers, so they all knew each other. The organization of the battalion at this time was:

- Commandant – Lieutenant Colonel (Temporary) B. C. H. GERTY,
- Second-in-command – Major (Temporary) R. H. WHITE,
- Commanding Officer 'A' Company – Major (Temporary) W. G. PETRIE-HAY,
- Commanding Officer 'B' Company – Major (Temporary) W. A. WATSON,
- Commanding Officer 'C' Company – Major (Temporary) H. A. LAMBERT,
- Commanding Officer 'D' Company – Major (Temporary) W. D. RITCHIE,

³ Major Douglas Goodwin Russell LEONARD died on 7 May 1942, aged thirty-three years. He is buried in Grave 6.G. 12. of the Delhi War Cemetery. He was married.

⁴ He was promoted to the rank of Temporary Lieutenant Colonel three months after being granted the Acting rank, i.e., on 16 July 1942.

- Signals Officer and Commanding Officer, Headquarter Company
 - Captain (Temporary) W. D. ROWLING,
 - Signal Platoon,
 - Mortar Platoon (6 x 3" mortars),
 - Pioneer Platoon,
 - Carrier Platoon (seven Bren carriers).
- Adjutant – Captain (Temporary) R. R. AITKEN,
- Quarter-Master – Captain (Temporary) H. T. MUSKETT,
- Medical Officer – Captain D. B. DOCTOR, I.A.M.C.,
- Commander Guerilla Platoon – Captain (Temporary) G. R. SELL,
- Animal Transport Officer – Lieutenant R. H. BEAUMONT,
- Motor Transport Officer – Lieutenant J. M. BERNIE,
- Mortar Officer – Lieutenant T. LEWTHWAITE,
- Intelligence Officer – Lieutenant R. G. JORDAN,
- Company Officer – Lieutenant Mohammed SHERIF, I.D.S.M.,
- Reinforcement Officer – Lieutenant N. SAIN,
- Reinforcement Officer – Lieutenant ZIA-UL-HASSAN,

'A' and 'B' Companies were composed of Jat soldiers, with 'C' Company comprising Punjabi Mussalman, and 'D' Company Mussalman Rajputs. Each rifle company had three platoons, each of three sections. A Subadar was the second-in-command of each rifle company, with one Subadar and two Jemadars commanding the platoons in that company.

On New Year's Day 1944, the battalion joined the rest of the 9th Indian Infantry Brigade at Razabil in the Arakan. It went into action immediately, taking over a feature where sporadic sniping and skirmishing occurred over the few days. The next move was to Maungdaw on 14 January. The battalion occupied an area around an iron bridge on the road from Razabil to Maungdaw. The battalion, particularly 'C' and 'D' Companies, suffered nightly attacks by the Japanese. Late on 19 January, the Japanese again attacked 'D' Company's positions in a heavily wooded village overlooking the bridge. Although the Japanese were repulsed, they dug in only twenty yards away from some of the company's positions.

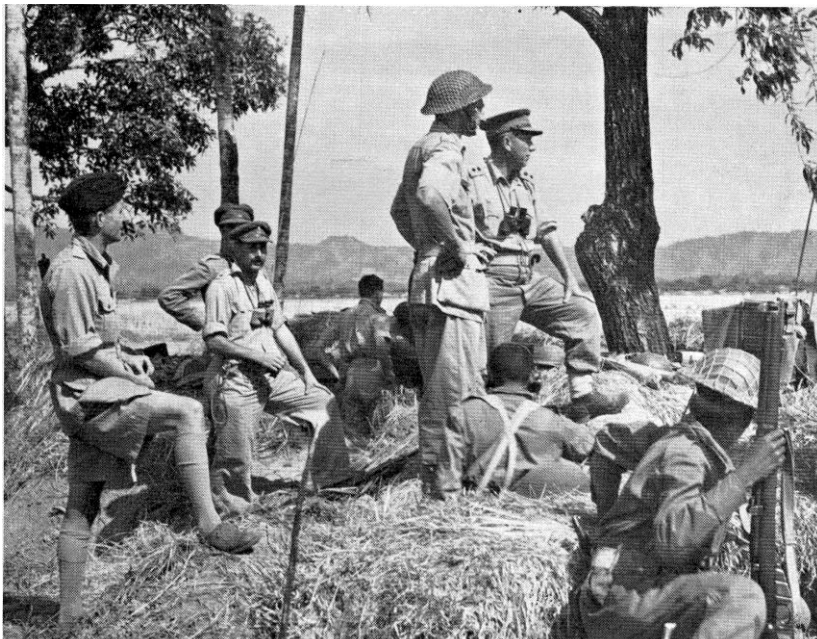
The Japanese were able to bring down fire onto the track that led from 'D' Company back to the iron bridge, so Lieutenant Colonel GERTY decided to launch a counter-attack. He had available some Bren gun carriers from the 81st (West African) Reconnaissance Regiment, and they were used to support 'A' Company in the attack. As the Jats attacked, they were subjected to machine gun fire from the flanks, and an anti-tank gun knocked out three of the carriers. The attack failed in its objectives, with Major Richard Herbert WHITE (the second-in-command) killed, when he went forward to coordinate the attack.⁵

⁵ Major AI/122 Richard Herbert WHITE was a pre-war Regular Indian Army officer. He died on 20 January 1944 aged thirty-five years. He is buried in Grave 11.F.16 of the Taukkyan War Cemetery in Burma (Myanmar).

Subadar MAKSUD KHAN from 'D' Company was killed by a sniper, and Major PETRIE-HAY was seriously wounded.⁶ In addition, one sepoy from 'A' Company and six from 'D' Company were killed, and twelve sepoys from both companies were injured.

Lieutenant Colonel GERTY decided to maintain an offensive attitude, and launched a raid undertaken by a platoon from 'B' Company on a village nearby that the Japanese were using as a laying up point. Fifteen Japanese were killed, and the rest driven from the village, for which Subadar BAKHTWAR received the Military Cross. Further attacks were made on the dug in Japanese near 'D' Company on 22 January by a company of the 2nd West Yorkshire Regiment. This also failed, but on 23 January, the Japanese withdrew from that position. As a result of their leadership during this period, Lieutenant Colonel GERTY successfully recommended Major RITCHIE for the award of a Military Cross, and Naik MAQSUD for the award of the Indian Distinguished Service Medal. Major RISAL SINGH was posted from a staff appointment to take over command of 'A' Company.

On 14 March, the battalion moved into the foothills of the main Mayu range of hills. 'A' Company made for its objective, a spur on a thickly wooded hill, which they captured. The company was attacked repeatedly but fought off all of them. For his leadership in this action, Major RISAL SINGH was awarded a Military Cross on the recommendation of Lieutenant Colonel GERTY.



Lieutenant Colonel GERTY with his battle headquarters on the Arakan battlefield in 1944. Lieutenant Colonel GERTY is in the centre of the picture with the binoculars.

Taken from: War Services of the 9th Jat Regiment.

⁶ Subadar 10657/IO MAKSUD KHAN came from Baliali, Hissar in India. He is buried in Grave 2.B.20 of the Taukkyan War Cemetery, Burma (Myanmar).

The overall strategic picture on the border between Burma and India changed with the launching of the main Japanese offensive called U-Go. There were signs of increased Japanese activity in central Assam, with new Japanese formations and units being identified. Then the storm broke with significant Japanese thrusts towards the Imphal plain, Sangshak and Kohima. These were intended to break through into India, capturing materiel and provoking a nationalist uprising in India. General George GIFFARD, the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the 11th Army Group ordered the 5th Indian Division and 7th Indian Divisions to be transferred to the central front. As part of the 5th Indian Division, the 3rd Bn. 9th Jat Regiment was flown from Dohazari to Imphal by plane. This was not the first occasion that British troops were transported by air to effect a strategic redeployment, as about two-hundred men of the King's Own Royal Regiment were flown from Karachi to Basra in 1941. This was however the first large scale movement of British troops by plane. This was possible because the Allies enjoyed air supremacy over Burma, and the availability of enough suitable aircraft (Dakotas) to undertake the transfer. The rapid redeployment of British formations from the Arakan and India was one of the factors that resulted in the failure of the Japanese offensive U-Go.

The Battle for Imphal

On 27 March, the rest of 9th Indian Brigade was in place, but the next day, the Japanese cut the road between Kohima and Imphal. This was the main supply route for IV Corps based on Imphal plain, but fortunately, 11th Army Group and 14th Army had developed excellent relationships with the Royal Air Force and U.S. Army Air Force to enable supplies to be delivered by air. The 9th Indian Brigade was deployed on the northern side of the Imphal plain, covering the valley of River Iril and surrounding hill features. There are various tracks and roads that lead onto the Imphal plain from this direction, and 9th Indian Brigade was ordered to defend these approaches to Imphal.

On the evening of 29 March, the Intelligence Officer Lieutenant R. G. JORDAN saw a battalion of Japanese troops coming down a hill into the village of Pukhao. Lieutenant Colonel GERTY called for an air strike, so at dusk six Hurri-bombers arrived over the village and delivered their deadly cargos with accuracy. After the strike, patrols recovered documents showing that the enemy were from the Japanese 51st Regiment, with over two-hundred men being killed in that one strike.

The Japanese attacked a standing patrol of four men from 'D' Company, the foremost company of the battalion, on the night of 5 April. The enemy occupied a feature that overlooked 'D' Company's position thus posing a real threat to the battalion. A patrol estimated that some forty Japanese soldiers were in place on the feature, and were probably digging in. 'D' Company commander, Major W. D. RITCHIE, M.C. ordered Jemadar ABDUL HAFIZ to attack the feature with two sections of his platoon that morning. The attack was to commence at 09.30 am, preceded by an artillery bombardment. The problem for Jemadar ABDUL HAFIZ was that the feature was on top of hill with steep sides and bare slopes on which there was no cover. ABDUL HAFIZ assembled his men and briefed them about the attack.

He told them they were invincible, and no matter how many enemy soldiers there were on the feature, they would be killed or put to flight. The Mussalman were so inspired that they charged up the slopes. ABDUL HAFIZ led the charge shouting the Mahomedan battle cry. Just short of the crest, the Japanese opened up with machine gun fire and threw grenades at the advancing Mussalman. ABDUL HAFIZ was wounded in the leg, but seeing a machine gun firing from the flank, he went and seized the barrel allowing another soldier to kill the Japanese soldier using the gun. ABDUL HAFIZ then picked up a Bren gun and led the rout of the Japanese on the feature. By now, the enemy survivors had had enough, so ran away down the opposite slope.

Major RITCHIE, the company commander was following up the attack, together with Sudadar SHER MAHOMMED. Both were wounded by machine gun fire hitting them in the shoulder. The feature was secured, with the losses to 'D' Company being four killed and seventeen wounded. Lieutenant LEWTHWAITE, now recovered from the injuries he sustained in the Arakan, went onto the feature and counted forty-five dead Japanese soldiers. This was despite he was unable to check all the dug outs and locations used by the Japanese in defending the feature.



The actions that day of Jemadar ABDUL HAFIZ were brought to the attention of Lieutenant Colonel GERTY. He must have seen or had reported to him many acts of bravery and gallantry, but this one was so remarkable that he recommended ABDUL HAFIZ for a posthumous award of the Victoria Cross. His recommendation was written so well that it was endorsed all the way up the chain of command.

The award was duly reported in the London Gazette dated 27 July 1944. ABDUL HAFIZ had been born in Kalanaur Village in the Punjab region of British India, a son of Nur MUHAMMAD and Hamidan.⁷ He was a Muslim and was the first soldier of his faith to be awarded the highest British award for gallantry. He was married to Jigri BEGUM of Kalanaur, Rohtak, India.

⁷ There is a discrepancy on the date of birth of ABDUL HAFIZ in some sources. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission cites the date of 4 September 1925, making him nineteen years of age, see: <http://www.cwgc.org/foreverindia/military-honours/abdul-hafiz.php> His headstone in the Imphal Indian War Cemetery states he was twenty-five years of age at his death, as does the Commission's own entry of him (see: <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2175315/ABDUL%20HAFIZ>). Being a Jemadar, usually promoted from the ranks within his company, the age of twenty-five is most likely.

The citation published in the London Gazette reads:

The War Office, 27th July 1944.

The KING has been graciously pleased to approve the posthumous award of the VICTORIA CROSS to: — Jemadar Abdul Hafiz (11460), 9th Jat Regiment, Indian Army.

In Burma, in the early hours of the 6th April, 1944, in the hills 10 miles North of Imphal, the enemy had attacked a standing patrol of 4 men and occupied a prominent feature overlooking a Company position. At first light a patrol was sent out and contacted the enemy, reporting that they thought approximately 40 enemy were in position. It was not known if they had dug in during the hours of darkness.

The Company Commander ordered Jemadar Abdul Hafiz to attack the enemy, with two sections from his platoon, at 0930 hours. An artillery concentration was put down on the feature and Jemadar Abdul Hafiz led the attack. The attack was up a completely bare slope with no cover, and was very steep near the crest. Prior to the attack, Jemadar Abdul Hafiz assembled his sections and told them that they were invincible, and all the enemy 'on the hill would be killed or put to flight.

He so inspired his men that from the start the attack proceeded with great dash. When a few yards below the crest the enemy opened fire with machine guns and threw grenades. Jemadar Abdul Hafiz sustained several casualties, but immediately ordered an assault, which he personally led, at the same time shouting the Mohammedan battle-cry.

The assault went in without hesitation and with great dash up the last few yards of the hill, which was very steep. On reaching the crest Jemadar Abdul Hafiz was wounded in the leg, but seeing a machine-gun firing from a flank, which had already caused several casualties, he immediately went towards it and seizing the barrel pushed it upwards, whilst another man killed the gunner. Jemadar Abdul Hafiz then took a Bren gun from a wounded man and advanced against the enemy, firing as he advanced, and killing several of the enemy.

So fierce was the attack, and all his men so inspired by the determination of Jemadar Abdul Hafiz to kill all enemy in sight at whatever cost, that the enemy, who were still in considerable numbers on the position, ran away down the opposite slope of the hill. Regardless of machine-gun fire which was now being fired at him from another feature a few hundred yards away, he pursued the enemy, firing at them as they retired. Jemadar Abdul Hafiz was badly wounded in the chest from this machine-gun fire and collapsed holding the Bren gun and attempting to fire at the retreating enemy, and shouting at the same time "Re-organise on the position and I will give covering fire." He died shortly afterwards.

The inspiring leadership and great bravery displayed by Jemadar Abdul Hafiz in spite of having been twice wounded, once mortally, so encouraged his men that the position was captured, casualties inflicted on the enemy to an extent several times the size of his own party, and enemy arms recovered on the position which included 3 Lewis Machine-guns, 2 grenade dischargers and 2 officers' swords.

The complete disregard for his own safety and his determination to capture and hold the position at all costs was an example to all ranks, which it would be difficult to equal.

The Victoria Cross was presented to the widow of ABDUL HAFIZ at a ceremony held at the Red Fort, Delhi on 24 October 1944. Three other Victoria Crosses and one George Cross were presented by the Viceroy, Field Marshal WAVELL at the same ceremony.

General Claude AUCHINLECK, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army in India wrote to the Commandant of the 9th Jat Regiment Centre: *'Please accept my warmest congratulations on the award of the Victoria Cross to Jemadar Abdul Hafiz....his wonderful courage and magnificent leadership will remain as an inspiration to the Regiment, and to his clan, and to the whole Army. Please convey my congratulations and my deep sympathies to the relatives of Jemadar Abdul Hafiz.'*

Lieutenant General 'Bill' SLIM, the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Fourteenth Army wrote to his mother saying, *'The Army Commander and all Officers and Men of the Regiment wish to express their sympathy on the death of your son. Jemadar Abdul Hafiz has won the highest admiration of the whole Army and his courage has won for him the highest award of the King Emperor – the Victoria Cross. This award will prove a comfort to you in your loss, and an inspiration to the whole Fourteenth Army.'*

The widow of ABDUL HAFIZ wrote back to the Commandant of the 9th Jat Regimental Centre in August 1944. She wrote: *'Abdul Hafiz would have to die some time, but he could not have died better than by bringing honour and fame to his Regiment and family. Such a death is not death, but life continuous.'* The body of Jemadar ABDUL HAFIZ now lies in Grave 3.Q.2. at the Imphal Indian Army War Cemetery.



The grave of Jemadar ABDUL HAFIZ in the Indian War Cemetery at Imphal and us paying our respects at his grave during a Royal British Legion organised visit to Kohima and Imphal.

Taken by: Author (2011)

The death of ABDUL HAFIZ was sadly just another small part of a larger story, and life went on for Lieutenant Colonel GERTY and the rest of the 3rd/9th Jats. Major WATSON took over the responsibility for 'D' Company but, because of the strength of the enemy in the area, Lieutenant Colonel GERTY decided to pull back 'D' Company from its exposed position. The key to holding this northern section of the plain was the Nungshigum ridge. This ridge extends some seven-thousand yards (nearly four miles) from north to south and rises one-thousand and two-hundred feet above the plain over which it towers. On 8 April 1944, Lieutenant Colonel GERTY sent one platoon from 'B' Company and the Guerilla Company up to the ridge. They were led by Lieutenant SAIN, and the climb took about an hour and half to reach the top where they dug-in.

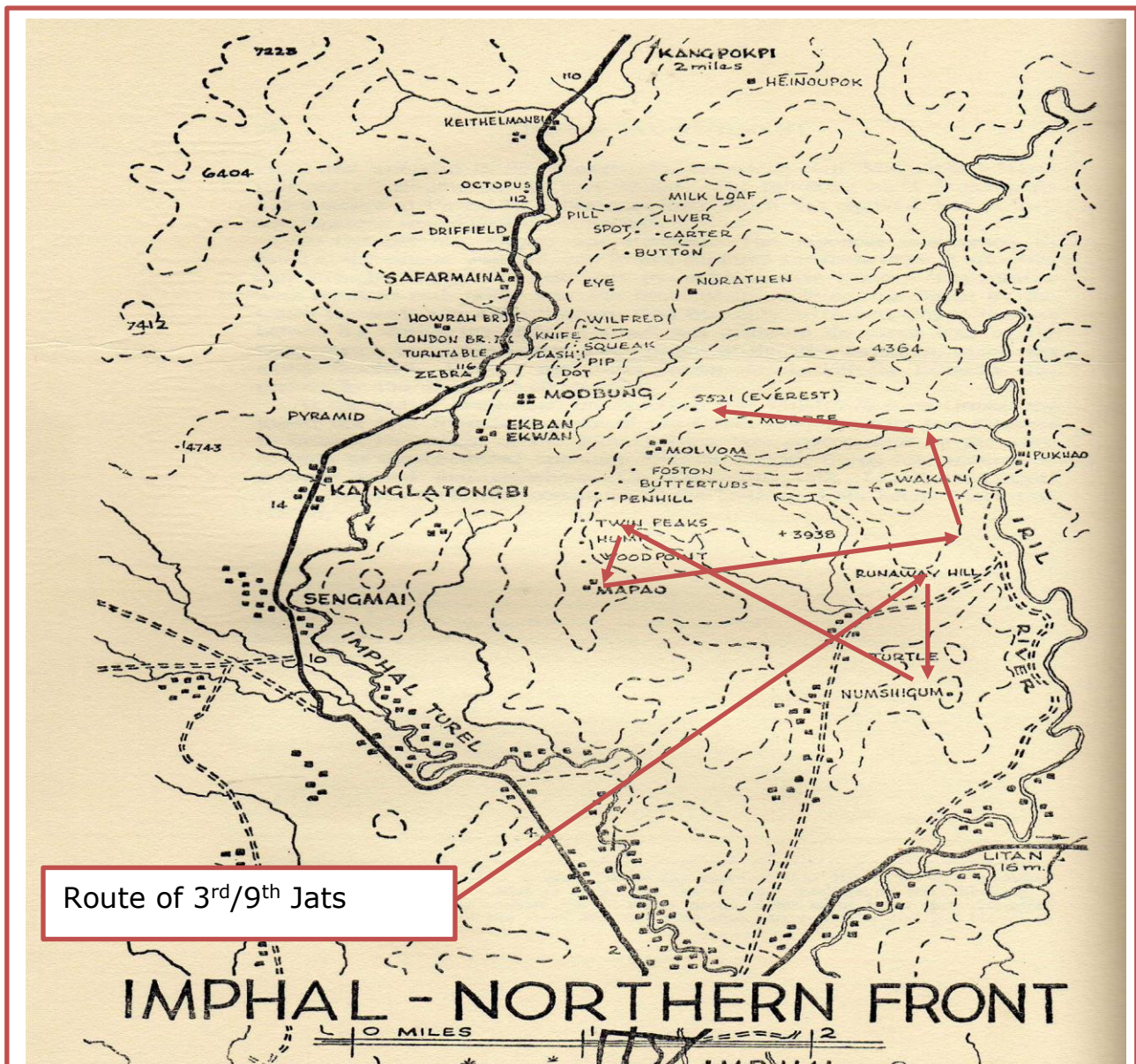
At about 03.00 hours the next morning, the Japanese attacked in force. 11 Platoon from 'B' Company bore the brunt of the attack. The Havildar commanding the platoon was killed early in the battle, so Havildar MUNSHI RAM went forward to the most exposed position and inspired his men to keep fighting. Several intense enemy attacks were repulsed, during which MUNSHI RAM had his hand shattered by a grenade and was also badly wounded in the foot. The casualties amongst the Indian troops grew, so permission was asked of Lieutenant Colonel GERTY for the force to withdraw. He agreed and the Jats withdrew. Havildar MUNSHI RAM was left for dead on the ridge. As the Indian troops left the ridge, an aerial attack by British fighter-bombers was made on the ridge. Having survived that, MUNSHI RAM was found by the Japanese who also took him for dead, so threw him down the side of the ridge. Summoning his last reserves of strength, MUNSHI RAM got himself up and struggled into battalion headquarters. Sadly, he died shortly afterwards from his wounds. Havildar MUNSHI RAM came from Kajla, Hissar in India and was twenty-seven years of age when he died. He is commemorated on Face 38 of the Rangoon Memorial. Lieutenant Colonel GERTY recommended him for a posthumous award of the Indian Order of Merit, which was duly given to his widow, Ginna. Naik Dod RAM of 'B' Company was also awarded the Military Medal for his conduct in this battle.

At about 1.30 pm, some Hurri-bombers attacked the ridge, followed by an artillery bombardment. Then 'A' Company attacked from the south-west and reoccupied the position. Within two hours, the Japanese assaulted the Jat's position, and further attacks against 'A' Company continued for the next few days, but these were all beaten off. The battalion captured its third Japanese officer's sword during these attacks. The battle for Nungshigum continued and the Japanese poured more reinforcements in the area. 'A' Company had by now lost a quarter of its strength with eleven men killed, fifteen wounded and four missing; and ammunition was nearly exhausted. 'D' Company had attempted to get through to 'A' Company but was held up short. Reluctantly, Lieutenant Colonel GERTY sought permission from the Brigade Commander to withdraw from Nungshigum.

On 12 April, an air strike was ordered following which 'B' and 'C' Companies attempted to re-capture the Nungshigum feature, but they came under heavy machine gun fire. Major IA/1201 Graham Ross SELL, who was commanding officer of 'C' Company during this attack was mortally wounded.

As a pre-war Regular Indian Army officer, Graham SELL was well known to Lieutenant Colonel GERTY. The son of the Reverend Charles Edward SELL, M.A. and Olive Amy SELL, his home was Newton Rectory, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire. He is buried in Grave 9.C.12 of the Imphal War Cemetery.

In this attack, Subadar BARKAT ALI also died. A Muslim from Haqika, Gujrat, in what is now Pakistan, he is buried in Grave 3.Q.5 of the Imphal Indian War Cemetery. The two companies sustained forty-one other casualties, so Lieutenant Colonel GERTY called the attack off. One of the stretcher bearers, Naik YAKUB, was awarded the Military Medal for his conduct on the day.



Route of 3rd/9th Jats

Map of the Northern Front of the Imphal Plain, taken from the Official History of the Burma Campaign and annotated with the route of the 3rd Bn. 9th Jat Regiment.

The 3rd Bn 9th Jat Regiment was in need of a break, so returned to its original position near the track leading down the Iril valley. On 13 April, another battalion, the 1st Bn. 17th Dogra Regiment was tasked with assaulting Nungshigum. It had in support a squadron of Lee Grant tanks of the 3rd Carabiniers. Following a heavy aerial bombardment, the troops attacked. All the officers were killed or wounded, but led by their senior non-commissioned officers, the Dogras and Carabiniers fought their way to the top of a peak on the feature. Here they dug in and resisted two days of counter attacks. Then, on 15 April, the whole of the feature was found to be deserted by the Japanese. The 3rd Bn. 9th Jats had therefore played a key role in keeping the Japanese from advancing onto the Imphal plain.

The battalion spent the period from 17 April until 21 April patrolling the area of a ridge around Mapao village. On 23 April, the battalion occupied the ridge, with 'A' and 'B' Companies in a position known as Wood Point, and 'C' and 'D' Companies in a saddle between Wood Point and Twin Peaks. Lieutenant Colonel GERTY sited his battalion headquarters in a valley east of Wood Point. Early on the morning of 24 April, 'A' Company attempted to drive the Japanese out of their positions in the north part of Wood Point. They did not succeed, with Major RISAL SINGH being wounded by a grenade. 'C' Company, now commanded again by Major Sandy LAMBERT, moved forward to Wood Point, 'A' Company formed a secure base so that 'C' Company followed by 'B' Company could clear the Japanese between Wood Point and Mapao village. They cleared all the features down to Mapao, but left the assault on the village until the next morning. During the night, the two companies were counter attacked by the Japanese, with all attacks being repulsed. In the morning, the Japanese were found to have evacuated the village in a hurry, leaving some fifty bodies and much equipment. For this operation, Lieutenant Colonel GERTY received the personal congratulation of Lieutenant General SCOONES, the General Officer Commanding IV Corps.

The battalion was relieved by another and moved back to the Iril Valley. They moved up the valley with orders to capture a feature called the Molvom Ridge. This was a northern extension of the ridge the battalion had recently been operating on. One of the main features became known as 'Everest', standing some five-thousand four-hundred feet above sea level. Another feature called 'Murree' lay about one-thousand yards north-east of Everest, and this had to be captured first.

On 4 May, 'A' Company and 'D' Company assaulted Murree after an artillery bombardment and succeeded in capturing it. 'A' Company had three casualties and 'D' Company nineteen. Havildar ABDUL RAHMAN later received the Military Medal for his conduct in this attack. That evening, 'C' Company led by Major 'Sandy' LAMBERT moved to within five-hundred yards of Everest. The following morning, the artillery opened up on Everest, and then 'C' Company went into the attack. Two platoons led the assault, with one in reserve. The one advancing up the right flank climbed a near vertical slope to within twenty yards of the top. They were then halted by a shower of grenades thrown by the Japanese defenders. The left flank platoon had a more open approach, but it was halted by heavy machine gun fire and grenades launched at them by the enemy.

Mortar shells burst in the company headquarters, damaging the radio set and injuring Major LAMBERT in the head. LAMBERT committed his reserve platoon further to the right flank, and he went forward himself to assess the situation. As he reached one of his forward platoons, a Japanese hand grenade burst directly on him, and he was killed instantly.

Major W. A. WATSON, commanding officer of 'B' Company took command of 'C' Company as well, and he made another attempt to gain the summit of Everest. This was stopped by machine gun fire from the flank. The brigade commander told Lieutenant Colonel not to make further attempts, so the troops from the two companies came down to the bottom of the slope. The casualties had been severe. Apart from Major LAMBERT, Subadar ALI HAIDER was wounded as well. 'C' Company suffered forty-seven casualties, and 'B' Company thirteen. Naik ATTA ULLAH was later awarded the Indian Distinguished Service Medal, and Sepoy MAHOMMED DIN the Military Medal. Some men had died on top of the Japanese trenches and bunkers; others had died trying to rescue friends and colleagues. The soldiers themselves had not given in, they had to be ordered down.

The brigade commander discussed the situation with Lieutenant Colonel GERTY, and they decided to contain the Molvom Ridge as it was obviously strongly held, and no longer a direct threat to Imphal itself. The battalion remained in the area until 3 June 1944, undertaking active patrolling to keep pressure up on the enemy.

Part of Lieutenant Colonel GERTY's role as a commanding officer of a battalion was to write to the next of kin of the deceased. As another pre-war Regular Indian Army officer in the battalion, Lieutenant Colonel GERTY knew 'Sandy' LAMBERT well. His letters to the wife and parents of 'Sandy' LAMBERT give a good indication of the care and affection in which Bernard GERTY held his officers and men. These letters cannot have been easy to write, especially to people that he knew so well. The fact that these letters were so well received is a testament to the care and time taken to write them by Lieutenant Colonel GERTY.

3/9 Jst Regt. S. E. A. C. 9 May 44.

----- You must by now have received the official news of Sandy's death on the 5th May. He died, like he lived, in a truly gallant manner. This was the way of it.

Another company had captured a hill on a high ridge on the 4th May, & we were ordered to capture a still higher one which overlooks the one we had just captured. So, on the morning of the 5th May, after an artillery concentration, Sandy's company advanced up a steep slope towards the enemy's position. The climb was some 400 feet up to the position, which was some 5,500 ft above sea level.

All went well until the men of his leading platoons reached within about 10 yards of the Jap forward trenches. Then the Japs reacted violently with automatic fire & grenades. Some of his men actually got as far as the forward trenches, & one man died with his hand on a Jap rifle. The platoons were definitely held up & he went forward to see what had happened.

As he was nearing them a splinter from a Jap grenade cut him just above the eye & he had it bandaged. He spoke to me shortly afterwards on the wireless & said he was quite alright. We talked of the situation, & agreed to try another route with his third platoon.

As he was nearing them a splinter from a Jap grenade cut him just above the eye & he had it bandaged. He spoke to me shortly afterwards on the wireless & said he was quite alright. We talked of the situation, & agreed to try another route with his third platoon.

He went forward to fix it up & while forward another grenade burst very close to him. He was killed on the spot, I'm afraid. His men recovered his body & he is buried on the same ridge at a height of 5,000 ft & about 14 miles north of Imphal.

He was leading the same company that I gave him in January '43 when he rejoined us in Paiforce. There is only one word to describe them that day & that is by the word magnificent. They suffered rather heavy casualties themselves, but never budged an inch although they were in a rather sticky position. He must have known before he died how really splendid they were being.

I am feeling very bad about it, and his place in the Bn will be quite impossible to fill. It would be difficult to find anywhere someone who was so essentially fair & honest, and all of us in the Bn feel a great sense of loss. -----

Yours sincerely,
Bernard Gerty.

Battle is Resumed – Clearing the Kohima Road

It was not until 10 June 1944 that the battalion went back into action. They were tasked with securing the village of Modbung. This location was some sixteen miles north of Imphal, near Kanglatongbi. It lies on the main road to Kohima, and at this location a ridge starts running parallel to the road. Between the ridge and the road is a small river called the Imphal River that flows into a lake in the plain. On the ridge heading north from Modbung are some features known to the Army as 'Dot', 'Dash', 'Pip', 'Squeak' and 'Wilfred'. The 2nd Bn. The West Yorkshire Regiment had fought north along the road from Imphal as far as Modbung. The 3rd Bn. 9th Jat Regiment advanced along the ridge, with companies leapfrogging each other from one feature to the next. At Squeak, they met the 3rd Bn. 14th Punjab Regiment which had captured the feature from the west.

North of Wilfred, the ridge drops to a valley before continuing again at a lower level. On 13 June, Lieutenant Colonel GERTY led his battalion onto this northern section of this ridge. The jungle was very thick, and with three days of heavy rain having fallen, the slopes were very slippery. The next feature was called 'Button' and then the next was a higher feature called 'Liver'. From this feature, a small ridge ran to the south-east, which was called 'Carter'. Another larger spur ran to the west, and this was called 'Pill'. The battalion had not met much opposition so far, so two platoons (one from 'B' Company and the Guerilla Platoon) made the assault on Liver. When only twenty-five yards short of the objective, the Indian soldiers were met by a hail of machine gun fire and grenades. Twenty-four-year-old Captain EC/8101 Stuart ARMSTRONG who was leading the assault was killed. He had only joined the battalion on 2 June and is now commemorated on Face 38 of the Rangoon Memorial in Myanmar.

Jemadar (10694/IO) DARYAO SINGH was wounded in the leg, and half the two companies had become casualties, but DARYAO SINGH told them one more effort would secure the objective. As he rallied his men, he was singled out for attention by the Japanese. Several grenades burst near him; nevertheless, he led the survivors forward. They were cut down and twenty-three of the twenty-five men became casualties. Although badly wounded again, DARYAO SINGH grabbed a Bren gun and continued to work his way forward by himself. He reached the top of an enemy trench when he was killed by a burst of machine gun fire. He was awarded a posthumous Indian Order of Merit and is commemorated on Face 38 of the Rangoon Memorial. Aged twenty-nine years, he was married to Sarti and came from Jhanswa, Rohtak, India. Apart from Captain ARMSTRONG and Jemadar DARYAO SINGH, Lieutenant H. T. MUSKETT (commanding officer of the Guerilla Platoon) and Major W. D. ROWLING (commanding officer 'B' Company) were both seriously wounded.

The rain continued unabated, and everyone was wet through. At 09.00 hours on 15 June, the position at Liver was subject of an aerial bombing raid. At 11.00 hours, the artillery opened up. 'A' Company then attacked from the south-west supported by Lee Grant tanks of the 3rd Carabiniers; with 'C' Company attacking Liver from Carter, i.e., from the south-east.

Pill was found to be occupied, and three machine guns held up the advance. Lieutenant Le MOTTEE (who had only joined the battalion on 9 June) was badly injured. Major RISAL SINGH with 'A' Company reached within a hundred yards of Liver but was then held up by machine gun fire from Spot. 'C' Company also got within twenty yards of the top of Liver, but again were stopped by machine gun fire. 'A' Company (Major RISAL SINGH) lost seven killed and six wounded; and 'C' Company (Major CAMPBELL) suffered six killed and eight wounded.

For the next five days, whilst the rain continued, the battalion held its ground and sent out patrols that reported the Japanese to still be in position. On 21 June, Liver was again attacked by Hurri-bombers, and then 'A' and 'C' Companies attacked again. This time, they managed to capture Liver before the Japanese could re-occupy it having left during the bombing. At about 13.00 hours, another air strike preceded an assault on the next feature called 'Milk Loaf'. Joined by 'D' Company (Major SANSON), the three companies attacked. Spot was captured and the Jats worked their way around the objective. At this stage, Major RISAL SINGH, M.C. was killed by a burst of machine gun fire. Another of the stalwarts of the battalion, Major (IC/275) RISAL SINGH was twenty-eight years' of age when he was killed. His father was Lieutenant RAM SARUP, O.B.I., from Nora Mazra, Rohtak, India; and RISAL SINGH was married to RAJ KUMARI. He is commemorated on Column 15 of the Imphal Cremation Memorial.



Major CAMPBELL assumed command of both companies attacking from the west. 'D' Company gained a foothold on the southern slopes of Liver but were then unable to move due to machine gun fire. Sepoy MUZAFFAR ALI managed to get to a Japanese bunker and throw in grenades. He was wounded twice but continued fighting. Havildar MAHOMMED SADIQ, a battalion clerk, led the evacuation of the wounded and distributed ammunition.

The enemy made counter attacks, so Lieutenant Colonel GERTY decided that the Jats should dig in where they were, and no further attempt was made to secure the area that night. Sixteen soldiers had been killed and sixty-four injured. Havildar ABID ALI was awarded the Indian Order of Merit for his leadership of his platoon during the attack, and Naik ABDUL RAZAK the Indian Distinguished Service Medal. Havildar MAHOMMED SADIQ, Naik PAHLWAN KHAN and Sepoy MUZAFFER ALI were all awarded the Military Medal.

At first light, patrols found that the Japanese had evacuated the entire area. This forced the Japanese to abandon their roadblocks on the Kohima Road, and on 22 June the road was reopened by the Allies.

Gerty Receives a Gallantry Award

Lieutenant Colonel GERTY received a congratulatory message stating '*Well done. An excellent job of work*'. Having written so many recommendations himself, Bernard GERTY was himself given an immediate award of the Distinguished Service Order. The award was published in the London Gazette of 5 October 1944. His citation states:

On 15 June 1944 Lt-Col GERTY was ordered to capture the features Pip, Squeak, Wilfred and finally Liver on the main Imphal – Kohima road. All these positions were heavily bunkered and swept from the flanks.

Due to his skilful planning and determination, he had succeeded in overcoming all opposition by 21 June in spite of the most difficult country and monsoon conditions. Though often he failed in his first attempts, by hanging on precariously to every footing gained he finally outfought the enemy.

It was greatly due to his personal efforts of this officer that this division's share of opening the road was accomplished.'

With the road open, the battalion had a period of rest from 22 June until 9 July 1944. It was then tasked with 9th Indian Brigade in advancing in pursuit of the retreating Japanese. Sickness was now the main problem for the battalion.

Deputy Brigade Commander

On 12 September, Lieutenant Colonel GERTY left the battalion he had commanded with distinction for two years and two months. He was posted to the 2nd Infantry Division (a British infantry division in Burma) and on 15 September he was promoted to the rank of Acting Colonel on appointment as the second-in-command of the 4th Infantry Brigade. He actually took up his new appointment on 20 September 1944.

The 2nd Infantry Division was part of XXXIII Indian Corps advancing across the River Chindwin towards Mandalay. Bernard GERTY's commanding officer, Brigadier McNAUGHT reported on GERTY, '*Has a sense of humour and plenty of common sense. Very industrious and thorough in his work. He has wide experience of fighting in this war and uses his knowledge with foresight and sound judgement. Since being my second in command he has been of the greatest assistance.*'

Brigade Commander

GERTY impressed as a second-in-command and was selected therefore for command of a brigade. He was granted the substantive rank of Lieutenant Colonel on 16 December 1944. It was on 26 December 1944 that GERTY was promoted to the rank of Acting Brigadier. On 29 December, he assumed command of the 53rd Indian Infantry Brigade. Bernard GERTY was at this time forty-four years of age and had twenty-six years' service with the British Indian Army.

He had made his mark as an operational commander and the command of a brigade was a logical step in his progression. The 53rd Indian Infantry Brigade was part of the 25th Indian Division under the command of Major General WOOD. It had already seen significant action in the Arakan, and when GERTY joined the division, it had just secured the Mayu peninsula. Under his command he had three infantry battalions, namely:

- 9th Bn. The York and Lancaster Regiment,
- 17th Bn. 5th Mahratta Light Infantry,
- 4th Bn. 18th Royal Garhwal Rifles.

Akyab Island was an important location for the Allies. It is a low lying and flat with a natural harbour. The island is about nine miles long and ten miles wide at its furthest extremes. The town of Akyab was the political centre for this area of the Arakan and, it had a well-established airfield. The plan was for an amphibious assault to be carried out by the 26th Division and the 3rd Commando Brigade. D-Day was fixed for 18 February 1945. In the light of the speed in which the 25th Indian Division had secured the Mayu peninsula, the date of the invasion was brought forward to 20 January 1945. As the 25th Indian Division had reached Foul Point opposite Akyab in a good state, the plan was changed and the 3rd Commando Brigade and the 53rd Brigade were to lead the assault. The 53rd Brigade was to cross the two-mile wide mouth of the Kwede River, whilst the 74th Brigade was to be ferried across the four-mile-wide mouth of the Mayu River. As speed was essential to keep the Japanese on the back foot, D-Day was brought forward to 3 January 1945. On 1 January 1945, reconnaissance aircraft reported that civilians were to be seen working on Akyab airfield and appeared unconcerned about the presence of Allied aircraft.

On 2 January, messages in Urdu and Burmese were dropped on the island, with a signal for the locals to indicate whether or not the Japanese were present on the island. The signal on the locals standing with their hands above their heads was given (if the Japanese were present, they were told to sit down) and a pilot of an air Observation plane found an airstrip apparently prepared for him and so landed. On being told that the Japanese had left the island, he flew back to Corps headquarters. By this time, the assaulting troops were at sea and, it could not be confirmed that there would be no opposition whatsoever, so the plan went ahead, but with the bombardment would be held back unless required.

On the morning of 3 January 1945, the 8th/19th Hyderabad Regiment landed unopposed on the north-west beach of the island. They then marched inland to secure the area. By nightfall, the entire 74th Brigade was ashore, together with supporting vehicles and equipment. The first troops ashore on the island were some men of the 4th/18th Royal Garhwal Rifles from 53rd Brigade who landed near Padali before dawn to intercept any Japanese who might withdraw through this village.

Early on the morning of 4 January, the 74th Brigade formed up behind the commandos, and passed through them to enter Akyab town and harbour. The locals gave a rousing reception to the Allies and civil administration was resumed immediately; however, the harbour was unusable as were many of the airfield facilities. A squadron of Spitfires was able to fly from the airfield on the island on 7 January to deal with the first Japanese air raid on the island. It became clear that the Japanese had left the island on 31 December and moved north to the west bank of the Kaladan River. The decision was taken to blockade the Japanese to the north of the island and to strike at their line of retreat. 53rd Brigade under the command of Brigadier GERTY started mopping up and blockading operations as ordered.

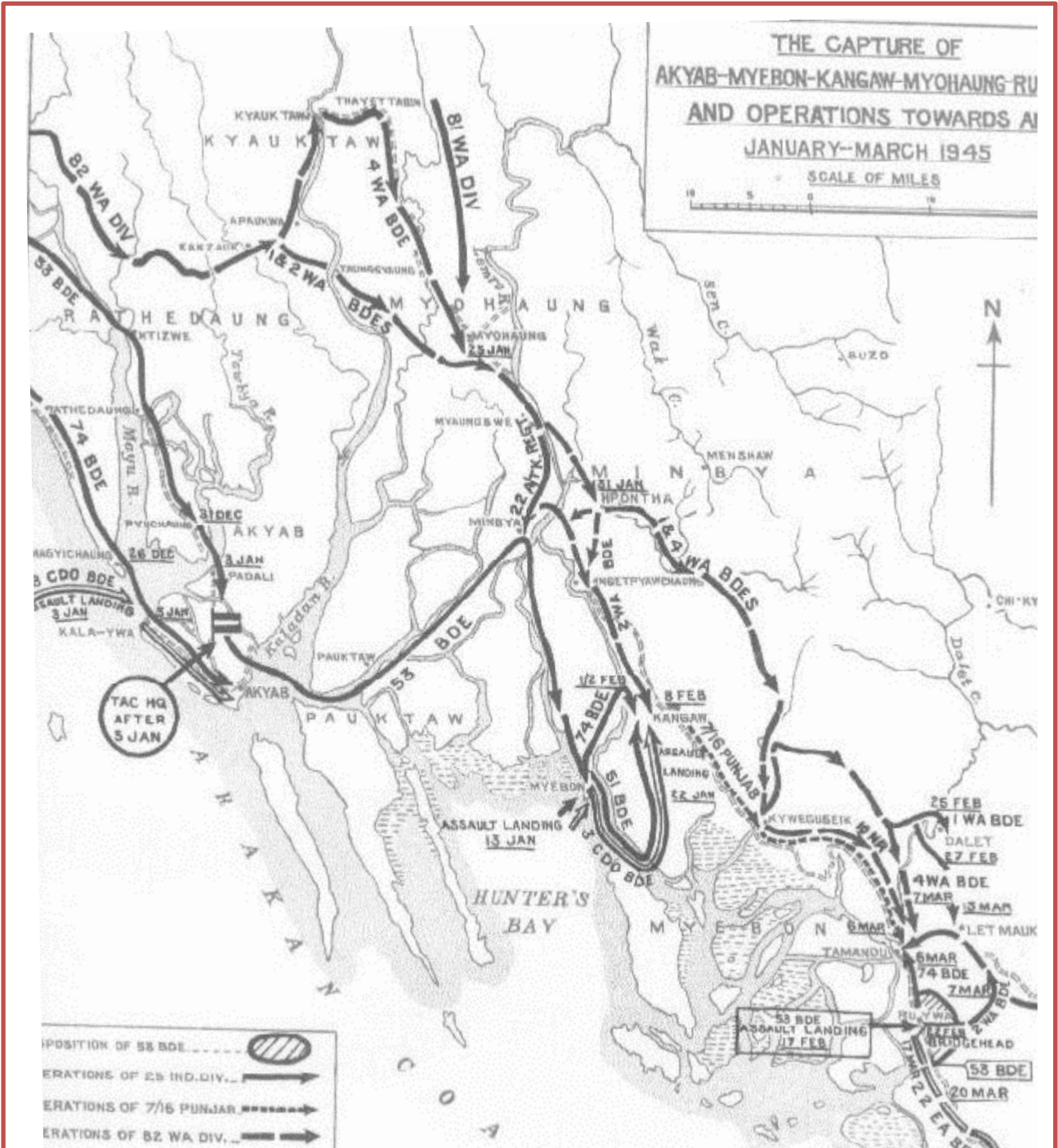
The 9th York and Lancaster Regiment moved to Ponnagyun north-east of Akyab on 6 January. The 4th/18th Royal Garhwal Rifles followed them shortly afterwards. The York and Lancaster battalion found that the Japanese were still holding Ponnagyun in strength. Therefore, the battalion decided to make a detour and head up the Kaladan River to a point off the north-east tip of Akyab island. However, the 4th/18th Garhwalis landed near Ponnagyun and entered the town without any opposition. Once this became known, the York and Lancaster's came back to the town and put a block on the Yo River. During the night of 6 – 7 January, the Japanese landed a strong force on the jetty at Ponnagyun. 'C' Company of the Garhwalis engaged them but could not prevent them landing. A fierce fight took place, which resulted in the Japanese being driven off the jetty area with heavy casualties.

On 10 January, the York and Lancaster battalion established a block on the Yo River as ordered. On the night of 11 – 12 January, the Japanese attempted to withdraw through the village of Yongon where the battalion was gathered. This proved costly to the Japanese, with at least twenty-five bodies being counted in the morning. On 13 January, patrols from 'B' Company of the York and Lancaster Regiment made contact with the 81st West Africa Divisional Reconnaissance Regiment. By 18 January, the battalion had been relieved by the 82nd West Africa Division, allowing it to return to Akyab for a rest period.

On 22 January, the 4th/18th Royal Garhwal Rifles from the brigade relieved the 7th Bn. 16th Punjab Regiment. Whilst this was going on, the 17th/5th Mahrattas were involved in considerable patrolling activity. They crossed to Akyab on 6 January and concentrated in Akyab on the fifteenth. From there they moved onto Ponnagyun on 20 January. The battalion was ordered to make for Minbya, going via Hinkaya, Pyinkala, and Kula.

On 26 January, the Headquarters Company and 'C' Company reached Mingan. Some Japanese vessels in the river were fired upon, with fire being returned from Minbya. After this, no more Japanese were seen, so the battalion was transported to Myebon in steamers on 2 February 1945. The 53rd Brigade continued to move south overland towards Minbya, with the 7th/16th Punjab Regiment. Lieutenant General CHRISTISON, the corps commander decided to use the rest of the 25th Division, plus the 3rd Commando Brigade to carry out the assault. At the same time, he decided to press on with the capture of Ramree Island with the help of the 26th Division.

The 53rd Brigade transferred from the command of the division to the direct command of XV Indian Corps on 12 January 1945. This was to allow the 25th Division to concentrate on the planning and execution of the assault on Myebon. The rest of the division and 3 Commando Brigade had been engaged in a fierce and sustained battle at Kangaw as 53rd Brigade moved southwards. The 53rd Brigade was brought down from Minbya to concentrate at Myebon to return to the command of the division. With the 1st and 4th Brigades from the 82nd (West Africa) Division nearing Kangaw, they were put under the command of the 25th Indian Division.



The Campaign in the Arakan 1944-45

Taken from: *The Arakan Operations 1942-45: Official History of the Indian Armed Forces in the Second World War 1939-45, campaigns in the Eastern Theatre*

The Landings at Ruywa

The corps commander decided to establish a bridgehead at Ruywa near An. Major General WOOD chose the 53rd Brigade to lead the assault. The commandos conducted several reconnaissance patrols and landings in the area to select suitable sites for the landings. With their work complete, they said goodbye to the 25th Division. The Commander Royal Artillery of the 25th Division devised a fire plan using naval, land and air bombardments.

It was appreciated that the Japanese had elements of the 111th Regiment, where although the 1st and 3rd Battalions had suffered heavy casualties, the 2nd Battalion had not been engaged. The 154th Regiment was also in the area, where again the 1st and 3rd Battalions had suffered heavy losses, but the 2nd Battalion was on detached duty in Mandalay. The third regiment of the 54th Division, the 121st had not been heavily engaged as was therefore relatively up to strength. Also, the 54th Reconnaissance Regiment was present, minus its 2nd Squadron which was wiped out at Myebon.

At 10.30 hours on 16 February, the two leading battalions of the 53rd Brigade touched down on their selected beaches. The 9th York and Lancasters made an unopposed landing and quickly formed a beach head some two miles deep. The 17th/5th Mahrattas followed through and with great dash secured their objectives. On 17 February, the rest of the Brigade Group were landed. The 4th/18th Royal Garhwal Rifles proceeded towards Ruywa. On 18 February, a lorry containing a party of twelve Japanese soldiers drove at great speed into the Indian lines. It was fired at and halted by a combined Mahratta and Garhwali ambush. Two of the men inside were Captains from the 54th Artillery Regiment. One was killed, but the other was captured and interrogated. This confirmed that the Allies had achieved complete surprise.

It took the Japanese three days to react against the landings. Two guns were brought down to shell Oboe Red beach, making further landings on this beach impossible. On the night of the 18 – 19 February, the Japanese launched a strong attack on the northern side of the beachhead. This location called 'Alps', was held by a company of the 17th/5th Mahrattas. After hand-to-hand fighting, the attackers were repulsed and broke contact, leaving their commander dead on the battlefield. The portion of the block held by 'A' Company was subjected to determined Japanese shelling and fierce attacks. On one occasion, several Japanese soldiers penetrated the Mahratta's position before being killed. Sepoy KRISHNA RATHMORE, in the darkness and confusion, succeeded in hitting the Japanese Captain on the head with a shovel and, seizing the sword from his grasp, killed the officer with his own sword. The Sepoy was presented later officially with the sword as a souvenir of his exploits.

On 20 February, because of the intense Japanese shellfire on Oboe Red beach, another beach was opened up called Roger Green. The 2nd West Africa Brigade was transported down from Kangaw and landed on the beaches between 18 and 22 February. The West Africans passed through 53rd Brigade and advanced some four miles east.

Next, elements of the 74th Brigade were taken from Myebon where they had concentrated and also landed at Ruywa. The 14th/10th Baluch and 7th/16th Punjab Regiments were ferried direct from Kangaw to Ruywa. This placed a strain on the transport arrangements, but they coped well to reinforce the landings. After the success of the landings at Ruywa, the 25th Indian Division was withdrawn from the Arakan and returned to India. It was sent via Madras to concentrate in the Nilgiri Hills. Most of the personnel were granted one month's leave.

Post Hostilities Operations

The 25th Indian Division became part of XXXIV Corps, commanded by Lieutenant General O. L. ROBERTS, formerly the commander of the 20th Indian Division. The 25th Indian Division had the task of assaulting the Morib beaches south of Port Swettenham, in order to secure the port and capture Kuala Lumpur. The division moved to Klang and sent patrols into Kuala Lumpur on 12 September to restore law and order, in particular to prevent looting. With order restored, a full ceremonial entry into the capital took place the next day.

The 25th Indian Division extended its area of control across the whole of the southern part of Malaya to the northern boundary of Jahore. This period was before the communist uprising in the country, so the division had no further operational role to play. Dispersal commenced in February 1946, a process completed the following month when the 25th Indian Infantry Division formally disbanded and ceased to exist. For Brigadier GERTY, he received promotion to the rank of Temporary Colonel on 15 March 1945, and Temporary Brigadier on 26 June 1945. He was Mentioned in Dispatches of 5 April 1945 for his services in Burma. On 13 March 1946, he received further recognition with the award of the Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (C.B.E). His citation reads:

During the period under review, Brig GERTY has displayed exceptional qualities as a leader and planner. On relief from the Arakan his bde had to be re-formed. Subsequently he trained it in an isolated and unhealthy station maintaining its morale and improving its efficiency to a marked degree. Subsequently he re-equipped and embarked his bde with little help and supervision from his superiors. Operation Zipper proved the soundness of his training and planning, and in the advance on K. Lumpar he demanded and obtained great exertions from his brigade. Previously Brig GERTY had commanded his brigade during the winter offensive of 1944/45 with great distinction. He assumed command at a critical stage of the advance down the Kalapanzin.

After the capture of Akyab he conducted the successful operations which inflicted much loss on the enemy of the lower Kaladan. Subsequently his most outstanding service was the planning and execution of the landing at Ruywa, which was an exceptional triumph. During the last ten months he had proved himself a skilful and hard fighting commander in action and an inspiring leader at all times.

GERTY was recommended for the award by Major General WOOD, and endorsed by Lieutenant General ROBERTS, the General Officer Commanding XXXIV Corps. Major General WOOD obviously held Bernard GERTY in high regards, in his confidential report he described him as *'Determined, calm and confident'*.

Post War Career

Brigadier GERTY left the command of the 53rd Indian Infantry Brigade on 2 December 1945 to go on leave. He was formally posted from the 53rd Brigade to the Regimental Centre of the 9th Jat Regiment on 17 April 1946. As the foremost senior wartime operational officer of the regiment, he was an obvious choice to be the Commandant of the Regimental Centre. He took up the role on 16 May 1946, relinquishing the rank of Temporary Brigadier, and reverting to the rank of Temporary Colonel. After eleven months in command of the Regimental Centre, and with independence pending, GERTY was regranted the rank of Temporary Brigadier and posted to command of the Lahore Sub-Area on 14 April 1947. He assumed his new command on 23 April 1947. He was admitted to the X (II) District British Military Hospital between 26 June and 9 July 1947.

India and Pakistan gained independence on 15 August 1947, with the process accelerating of replacing British officers with Indian officers. At forty-seven years of age, like so many British Indian Army officers, Bernard GERTY faced early retirement. He was relieved of command of the Lahore Sub-Area on 11 September 1947, and he proceeded on leave pending retirement. GERTY embarked on the 'Strathnaver' at Bombay on 18 September 1947 with his wife and family bound for the United Kingdom. He officially retired from the British Army (ex-Indian Army) on 9 March 1948, and was granted the rank of Honorary Brigadier, his substantive rank being Lieutenant Colonel.

Personal Life

Bernard GERTY married Hazel Doreton MAYNARD at Mymensingh in India on 22 March 1933. Whilst serving in India, he and his wife had two children: David Hamilton GERTY was born on 31 December 1934 in Lucknow; and Christopher Doreton GERTY was born on 18 August 1937 at Shillong. Bernard's mother, now Muriel Isabel HOWSE, died in Llandudno, Caernarvonshire on 25 July 1945.

On returning to the United Kingdom, Bernard GERTY and his wife started up a fruit farm on the edge of Romney Marsh at a village called Kenardington in Kent. During his time living in Kent, Bernard GERTY served with Kent Special Constabulary, where he served for ten years being awarded the Special Constabulary Medal and ending up as the Commandant of the Ashford Division of the Special Constabulary.

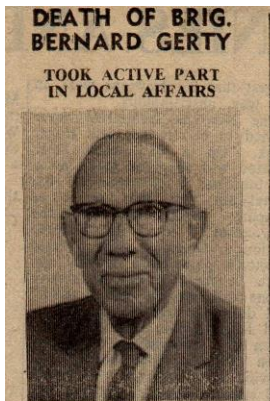
He remained in Kent until 1959, when he left to live at 'The White House', Everton, Lymington in Hampshire, with a cousin, Mrs Nancy GURNEY. The move was because Bernard GERTY sadly

separated from his wife, who went to live in South Africa. He kept active being involved in many local clubs and organisations.

From 1963 until 1970, he was the secretary of the Keyhaven Yacht Club. For a number of years, he assisted by being a driver in the hospital car service, supported Dr Bernardo's, the local church and the Royal British Legion. From 1970 onwards, arthritis took an increasing toll on him, severely restricting his mobility and activity.

Brigadier Bernard GERTY died on 2 September 1978 at his home. A funeral service was held at St, Mary's Church, Everton; followed by a private cremation at Bournemouth. His former wife, and their two sons survived him. At the time of his death, David was a Chief Superintendent in the Metropolitan Police, married with four children; Christopher was also married with a daughter and living in Bradford on Avon where he ran his own printing business and was an area manager for a vending machine company. He left an estate of £36,585.⁸

⁸ National Probate Calendar at www.Ancestry.co.uk



DEATH OF BRIG. BERNARD GERTY
TOOK ACTIVE PART IN LOCAL AFFAIRS

BRIG. BERNARD CHARLES HAMILTON GERTY, C.B.E., D.S.O., of The White House, Everton, Lyminster, died on Saturday. He was 78.

Born in Hampstead, Bernard Gerty was educated at St. Bede's, Cumberland, and joined the Indian Army as second lieutenant in 1918. His father, working in insurance, died aged 30, when Bernard was only a small boy. Having signed up with the 9th Jat Regiment, Bernard Gerty served with them intermittently until 1947, seeing action in India, Burma, the Middle East, and Malaya. He married in 1933 and returned from India in 1947, with a D.S.O. for his active service in Burma, and C.B.E. for his command of the 53rd Indian Infantry Brigade. As Brigadier he had been in command of the Lahore sub-area.

On his return to this country he started up a fruit farm on the edge of Romney Marsh, at a village called Kenardington, in Kent. There he remained until 1959, when with a cousin, Mrs. Nancy Burney, he set up home in Everton. During his time in Kent, Brig. Gerty had served with the Kent Special Constabulary, commanding the Ashford Division, and for his ten years' service he was awarded the Special Constabulary Medal.

Until arthritis severely curtailed his activities, Brig. Gerty had taken a keen interest in local clubs and organisations, an interest he maintained in a more passive role after 1970 when the handicap worsened. From 1963 until 1970 he had been secretary of the Keyhaven Yacht Club, and for a number of years helped transport the elderly for the hospital car service. He was also an enthusiastic supporter of Dr. Barnardo's and similar organisations, the local church, and the Royal British Legion, where he had been a president of the local branch whilst in Kent.

He leaves a wife, now in South Africa, and two sons. David is a Metropolitan Police chief superintendent, living in London, who is just about to assume responsibility for the Croydon area. He is married with four children. Christopher, married with a daughter, runs his own printing business in Bradford-upon-Avon, and is area manager for a vending machine firm.

The funeral service was on Thursday at St. Mary's Church, Everton, followed by cremation at Bournemouth.

THE WHITE HOUSE,
 EVERTON,
 LYMINGTON, HANTS.

MILFORD-ON-SEA 80 16th January.

My dear José,

I have just received this copy of the Jat 'History'. In case I don't find you in I am writing this note to say that I hope you & Josephine enjoy reading it, and having it as a memento of Dandy

Yours
 Bernard.

Left – The obituary of Colonel GERTY from a local newspaper.
 Above – A letter from Colonel GERTY to a colleague accompanying one of the hundred copies of the War History of the 9th Jat Regiment.
 Supplied by the late Jo ELLESON.

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Date: 16 April 1948 Issue number: 38262 Page number: 2414

Date: 27 April 1948 Issue number: 38276 Page number: 2689

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Additional material provided by the late Jo ELLESTON.

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(NOTE: Only one hundred copies of this book were published. This copy was kindly lent to me by Jo ELLESTON, the daughter of the late Major 'Sandy' LAMBERT and a good friend of Bernard GERTY.)

Brigadier B. C. H. GERTY

www.BritishMilitaryHistory.co.uk

Robert PALMER M.A.

Printed by: The Author
