WHAT SHOULD WE REMEMBER ABOUT THE 'FORGOTTEN ARMY'?

An extract from an article on British veterans commenting on the Burma Campaign

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4143196.stm
By Courtesy of the BBC.

By Katherine O'Shea
BBC News website, 14th August 2005.

For many veterans, VJ Day meant release from POW camps

As they prepare to mark the 60th anniversary of the Victory in Japan, three veterans have described their own reasons for remembering the event.

British soldiers in the Far East are often called the "forgotten army".

But their contribution will be honoured in a service at the Imperial War Museum on Monday.

Neville Hogan, John Hamilton and Gordon Graham reveal very different memories of VJ Day.

NEVILLE HOGAN MBE Second Battalion Burma Rifles

Deep in the Burmese jungle, Neville Hogan had no idea that the war was over. He suspects he carried on fighting for several days unnecessarily.

"News just took a while to filter through. We had no radios, and no time to listen to the BBC."

Mr Hogan has never forgotten the contribution of his people, the Karen, an ethnic minority in Burma, who he describes as the "backbone of the army" in the region.

They are now living on the Thai-Burmese border, having been forced out by the government. Mr Hogan, unable to return to Burma under the current regime, lobbies for them in London.

Mr Hogan cannot forgive the Japanese for brutalities that he witnessed in Burma.

"As a soldier, I admire them. As a man, I detest them".

JOHN HAMILTON First Gambia Battalion

In Madras, John Hamilton was with a group of Indian Army engineers, preparing to invade Malaya.

For these men, Victory in Japan was a miraculous reprieve, and celebrations lasted well into the night.

This Monday Hamilton will remember his Battalion of 100,000 African volunteers. He calls them "the forgotten part of the forgotten army".

He feels that the African contribution to the war is not sufficiently appreciated by either Britain or Africa.

"The Africans participated entirely voluntarily, and were fearless and skilful fighters" he said.

What is this source?

This source is an extract from a news report that was published on the BBC news web site in August 2005.

The report was one of many reports produced around this date because 2005 marked the 50th anniversary of the end of WW2

What's the background to this source?

WW2 broke out in Europe in 1939. In the Far East war broke out on December 7th 1941 when Japanese forces destroyed the US fleet at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. The Japanese quickly followed up this victory with attacks on British held possessions in Malaya, Singapore and Burma. There were real fears that the Japanese would reach India. However, troops from Britain and many parts of the Empire fought a hard campaign to stop the Japanese advance by May 1942. It was not until late 1943 and early 1944 that the Allied forces began to drive the Japanese back. Rangoon, capital of Burma, was finally taken in May 1945.

Burma was a key territory for the Japanese because the Allies used road networks through Burma to supply the Chinese forces fighting Japan. The fighting conditions in this campaign were some of the toughest in any campaign of the war.

It's worth knowing that...

The main British force in the Burma campaign was the Fourteenth Army commanded by General Slim. The Fourteenth Army was a truly multinational force made up of British, Indian (including Ghurkas), West African, Australian and New Zealand troops.

The largest group in the Fourteenth Army were the Indian troops. There were also British and USA air forces in the Burma campaign.

How will you use this source?

1. Why do you think the British troops in the Far East felt forgotten?
2. Why did Neville Hogan not know the war had ended in 1945? What does this tell you about the conditions he was fighting in?
3. Which group did John Hamilton think had been forgotten?
4. How would you summarise the feelings of each soldier about the Burma Campaign?
5. What points from this source will you use in your presentation?

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