# Vignettes

In addition to the memoirs/diaries reproduced above, many of those who had been in South East Asia submitted significant comments and observations.

## On Gandhi and his campaign to win independence for India by peaceful means

### Chuck Ells

I had been on leave in Nanital. As the leave ended I went by truck to the rail head at Bareilly, thence on the narrow gauge rail to Lucknow. On the rail trip a fellow passenger was Nehru—he had just been let out of jail. At each station he was greeted by a horde of followers in white hats. At some of the stops, I left my seat to have a look. Probably all was well, but once again many of the white hats regarded me as the enemy, and probably gave little credit that four years of my life had been devoted to keeping them from becoming a member of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Or, would that have been good for them?

### Douglas Evans

I had the good fortune to see Mahatma Gandhi from about two hundred feet at a huge rally. He sat alone on the verandah of a small cottage with hundreds of his followers sitting on the ground in front of him. I don't remember how we got there but I do remember that the military police grabbed the three of us and took us away. They said: "That crowd could have turned on you and torn you apart."

### Joe Nelischer

I was riding in a military vehicle through an area of Bombay one day where I saw history in the making: Mahatma Gandhi was in a street rally shaking hands with Jawaharlal Nehru and spreading his independence gospel. I thought, "How ironic, here we see him yelling for independence when a second major power is threatening to invade his country! Yet, we are here helping to defend his country, and we are not welcome as far as he is concerned!"

## On Japanese non-military activities

### Clark MacDonald

One vivid memory is that honey-voiced woman on the radio known as Tokyo Rose. She broadcast propaganda from Japan to help demoralize us. She played all the latest music and would ask thought-provoking questions such as: "What are you doing out here fighting a useless war? Wouldn't you much rather be in your own home town listening and dancing to a jukebox with your favourite girl friend at the popular corner hamburger stand?" We listened every night and got homesick.

**Bob Ball**

In a philatelic journal I found a note headed "These stamps will never be catalogued."

**India—under Japanese occupation**

So confident were the Japanese of the successful conclusion of their plans to capture India that they produced an issue of postage stamps to be used during their occupation of "Azadhind" (Greater India). Among other interesting designs the 8a and 12a denominations depict the map of India with the encircling chain of "British Imperialism" being severed.

## Other Canadian teenagers

**Don Munro**

On the Polish ship *Sobieski* from Suez to Bombay I'd overheard a young deckhand with a Canadian accent. Eventually I got the story of how a Canadian teenager was working on a Polish ship in the Middle East.

Along with three other sixteen-year-olds he had signed on with a Park ship in Montreal. [Park was a Canadian shipping company.] When their ship had docked at Suez the skipper of an oil tanker had bribed them to jump ship and sign on for a year making the round trip of the Arabian Peninsula up to the Persian Gulf. On their twelfth trip they left Aden at midnight and were torpedoed at daybreak. The torpedo hit in the bow. The crew flooded the empty stern tanks raising the bow out of the water so that the ship could make it back to Suez. I had seen this tanker moored near the *Sobieski* with a fifteen foot diameter hole below the forward hatch. My informant and two of his buddies had been sleeping out on the stern and were not hurt but the fourth Canadian teen had been sleeping on a cot on the forward deck. He went straight up and came down hard on the bridge. He was still in hospital.

## Ode to Perspiration

**Lindy Peebles**

Written while steaming (pun intended) down the Red Sea in the "tropical" troopship, S.S. *Dunera,* in the fall of 1943.

Hail to Perspiration, friend in damp disguise,
Impartial as to rank or race or size.
Democrat unrivalled, leveller of men,
That favors neither erk nor Abou Ben
And draws from haughty Winco's humble sighs.

Some people sweat in trickles and some in little streams,
And some perspire in cataracts unheard of save in dreams.
The sun pours down relentless fire
Until the very decks perspire
And all humanity with moisture gleams.
On lean, or stout, it matters nowt -
The salty droplets must ooze out.
It smites alike the wise man and the fool,
And even Jove himself is hard put to keep cool.

Regardless of his rank or race or size,
Each mortal has to sweat before he dies.
Then let us sing with fiendish exaltation:
"ALL HAIL TO THEE, O MIGHTY PERSPIRATION."

## Food

**Ashley McGain**

There were about twenty five with 5042 AMES, a mile south of Cox's Bazaar and less than twenty miles from the border of Burma, the Japanese front line. Our CO was F/O Harry Hindle. Three or four if us were nominated to visit our CO and discuss our food situation—the endless meals of bully beef, soybean sausages and dehydrated potatoes and onions. H.H. launched into an impassioned rejoinder on the health-giving qualities of soy. Now fifty odd years later soy is one of the wonder foods. I wonder where Harry, the prophet, is now.

## People

**Ashley McGain**

One reality which confronted us was the regular visits to our mess after each meal by local natives who collected the leftovers from our plates. We may have complained about our meals but we were not on the verge of starvation. One of the youngsters who appeared regularly was Abdul, a ten year old who came from a small village just south of our site. How Abdul became our batman I'm not sure. He was willing to do little jobs, then he assumed responsibility for keeping the basha clean and tidy and doing messages. I can remember his elation when we took him to a tailor to be measured for his own outfit. He looked smart, he was smart. He learned English and showed an aptitude for mathematics. I have often wondered about him.

## c/o Canada

**Gordon Anderson**

A chum and myself received a special short detachment to a station on the coast north of Madras, called Cocanada. It was the site of a former Canadian mission and goods sent there were addressed "Care of Canada"—CO: CANADA—hence the name. When we arrived, we found what they needed and what they had requested was two instrument repairmen, not radar mechanics, so they repeated the request. In the meantime, our station forgot to recall us and we sat around for a week just waiting. We might still have been there, but life was so dull, we finally demanded that we be sent back to Redhills. [On recent maps Cocanada has become Kakinada.]

## A Good Samaritan

**Clark MacDonald**

One personal experience, the memory of which will never fade, happened to me while stationed at Cawnpore in central India. I had suffered from heat exhaustion and the M.O. decided I should have a month's sick leave in Kashmir, in a cooler climate. This, of course, is the garden spot of India where many rich people go in the hot season. So when I was well enough to travel, I set forth alone by train in a second class coach with little ventilation. Before the first day was half over the heat exhaustion came back: no sweating but burning up with fever. My water bottle had long been emptied and, about midnight, I decided I just had to have water so, at the next stop, a small station, I decided to try and find some water. About half way across the platform I collapsed, kit bag and all.

The next thing I remembered was the sensation that it was raining and I gradually realized that someone was sprinkling water on my face. Much to my surprise, an old man, dressed only in rags, was squatted beside me sprinkling the water. He helped me to the end of the platform where there was a water tap about three feet off the ground. I crawled under, uniform and all, and have never felt such relief, before or since. This old man, in the meantime, rescued my kitbag which, fortunately, hadn't been stolen and he filled my canteen with water. In the meantime, of course, the train had left. That little old man stayed with me for about three hours until the next train came along. Several times I crawled back under that tap, so I certainly didn't have the look of a well dressed airman. Our communication was mostly done with gestures since he knew only a few English words and my lessons in Hindustani had been neglected. He helped me to the next train and not once held out his hand begging for money. When I finally forced some rupees into his hand, he bowed, and as I looked from the window of the train on leaving, he made his way back to his sleeping place on the platform, which I presume was his home.

This was a sequel to the parable of the Good Samaritan as far as I am concerned. I can never forget the look of concern on that old man's face when I gained consciousness on the station platform. Here was a kind soul with nothing of his own, of a different colour, race, and religion, yet he did everything he could to help me. I've never been able to understand.

# Looking back from 1998

## Rehabilitation and a Tribute to the Canadian Legion

In the slow days of 1943 when there was a stalemate on the Burma front some of us began to wonder what we might do "after the War"—whenever that might be. Several of us started calculating how far our savings would go towards a university education; others were keen on getting back to the family farm and quite a few were simply looking forward to getting back to their old jobs.

When we were at Warrington, homeward bound, we found an excellent counselling section where many of us took an aptitude test to determine our suitability for university. I still recall the numbers for four of us. To my surprise the scruffiest member of the four got eighty out of eighty; after that it was not a surprise to watch him breeze through the honours mathematics and physics program at the University of Toronto and then quickly rise to the senior executive ranks of the US. insurance business. The one with the next highest mark, also somewhat scruffy and our chess champion, breezed through Arts and Law and, in time, became the patriarch of a large law practice. The other two of us had quite respectable marks and were assured that we had the ability to cope with any university program; we ended up becoming university professors. The counselling service also assured us that there would be financial support for university but we didn't quite believe it. We had learned to be wary of promises. Our skepticism was unfounded; the support did come through, and at a much higher level than we had ever dreamed.

We were so inured to accepting whatever happened—good or bad—that we gave little thought to why or how this had all come about. I remember hearing that the Legion had been lobbying on our behalf but I didn't give it a second thought. It wasn't until I started putting these notes together that I realized how much the Legion did that benefitted all of us. Be it ever so late, I want to express a belated but heartfelt "Thank you" to those dedicated members of the Legion who, behind the scenes, worked so hard on our behalf.

The role of the Canadian Legion [It didn't become "Royal" until 1948] in Canada's rehabilitation of its service people is described clearly in a chapter entitled "Rehabilitation" in *Service: The Story of the Canadian Legion 1925 - 1960* by Clifford H. Bowering. In this chapter the author has summarized the activities of the Legion that influenced the Federal Government in establishing the rehabilitation program. On the first page of the chapter he sets the scene :

> To the veterans of the First War, and particularly to the members of the Legion, rehabilitation or re-establishment was a subject of which they could speak at great length, for rehabilitation to them, in most instances, had been a hollow mockery. What legislation was eventually passed had come slowly, almost painfully. Even when the Second World War broke out there were important issues which had still not been resolved.

> Almost simultaneously with the outbreak of that conflict the Legion made known its feelings on the subject, determined that what had befallen so many of its present ranks should not affect their sons. Some well-meaning but short-sighted people in authority cried, "Let's win the war first and worry about this thing you call rehabilitation when it is over." This was, of course, arrant nonsense and the Legion was quick to say so and to point out that it is too late to start planning when the incident is upon you. Fortunately, the Government listened to the Legion's advice.
>
> It goes without saying, at least it does today, that you cannot remove hundreds of thousands of the fittest and best from the economic structure of your country without a considerable measure of dislocation; neither can you fit them back into the scheme of things without careful study of the problems and intricate planning. This was the line of thinking adopted by the Legion and by early 1940 it was ready with the first of its proposals to the Government about this and other vital aspects of the cost of war.
>
> In its proposals submitted in May 1940, the Legion did not suddenly drop its concern for the veterans of the First World War; quite the contrary. It presented its views under two separate headings: problems created by the Great War and problems which were sure to be created by the Second World War. In doing so the Legion, in effect, broke new ground because formerly it had been dealing with problems presented by veterans and their dependents but now, as it pointed out, it was executing that portion of its constitution which gave the Legion responsibility for giving assistance to those men and women "now serving in His Majesty's Forces"
>
> The Legion said it would be the last organization to say that because a man served during war, the nation owed him a living for the rest of his life. But it did say that the country owed these men the opportunity to make a living. "It is our concern to see to it that in the pre-occupation of the new war, the veteran of the last war is not forgotten and that the men of the new forces may go to meet the enemy with the knowledge that on their return they may expect a fair deal and an opportunity to make a living.

Starting in 1940 the Legion made many submissions on rehabilitation and all were taken seriously by the Government. Its first submission, made in May 1940, resulted in an announcement of the details of a rehabilitation grant that would ease the veteran's transition from soldier to civilian.

Early in 1941 a brief was presented to the House of Commons Committee on Pensions and Rehabilitation which reiterated the need to ensure that those who served their country should not be penalized and that rehabilitation should be regarded as part of the war effort. At the end of the brief there was a clear admonition to the Government:

> The Legion believes it will be fatal if the adequacy of rehabilitation measures should be curtailed due to financial alarm or panic. The Legion realizes that this is a natural tendency and wishes to record its opinion that this tendency must be strongly and firmly resisted and the necessary money found to do the job properly. Any other policy will, in our judgement, prove more costly in the long run and the resulting dissatisfaction and unrest will be anything but an asset to our country.

The Committee agreed with the Legion and its report to the House of Commons led quickly to an amendment making the Pension Act applicable to those who served in the Second World War. By the spring of 1942, as a result of the Legion's efforts, Pensions Minister Ian Mackenzie introduced a bill that was the forerunner of the Veteran's Land Act and by early 1943 three important measures had been passed by Parliament: The Civil Employment Reinstatement Act, the Post-Discharge Re-establishment Order and the Veteran's Land Act.

Bowering cites the punch line in a submission made in July 1943 and then comments on it:

> Canada can never survive, nor indeed will her people tolerate, another period of depression such as they experienced before the war.
>
> It was a clear concise analysis of the problems to be considered and in fact presented to the Government and the people of Canada a strong pattern for the future, a pattern which was widely acclaimed throughout the country. The Legion's blueprint for rehabilitation was published in pamphlet form and 150 000 copies were distributed to Canadian servicemen and women overseas.
>
> In retrospect there can be little doubt that the brief spurred the country on to greater activity and eventual sound results in its handling of the rehabilitation programs.

In the fall of 1943 the President of the Legion expressed his concern about the many agencies that were dealing with various aspects of rehabilitation and he campaigned for the consolidation of these services into one department. At that time the Veterans Land Settlement administration was with the Department of Mines and Resources, vocational training of veterans was under the Department of Labour and, of course, pensions were under the Department of Pensions and National Health. Fortunately the Government heeded the Legion's advice and formed the Department of Veteran's Affairs.

Late in 1944 *The Legionary* was able to editorialize:

> No other nation is doing better for its fighting men by way of monetary reward. Not that Canada's debt to her sailors, soldiers and airmen can be adequately paid in money, but it is heartening nevertheless that more than five times the amount will be spent on this phase of our servicemen's and servicewomen's rehabilitation than was spent after the last war, in addition to the great sums which will be spent on vocational and university training, land settlement, etc. Given adequate employment opportunities at reasonable wages, the present war gratuities and other benefits will give the veterans of this war a much better start in civilian life than the veterans of the Great War had.

The benefits were:

> War service benefits . . . included a rehabilitation grant (30 days pay and allowances), a clothing allowance of $100, a gratuity ($7.50 for every 30 days' service in the Western Hemisphere; $15 for every 30 days' service overseas; seven days' pay and allowances for every six months' service overseas), and a re-establishment credit to be used for such purposes as acquiring a home,

> furniture, etc, and to be awarded as an alternative to other re-establishment schemes such as vocational or university training or benefits under the Veteran's Land Act.

Support for education was available for as many months as one had served. This included the full cost of tuition, an allowance for books, and a living allowance of $60 per month for a single person and $80 per month, later increased to $90, for a married person. I received this allowance at the single rate for thirty two months [four academic years] and at the married rate for sixteen months [two academic years]. In those days it was enough to live on, although most of us dipped into our deferred pay from time to time.

About 50 000, i.e. five per cent, of Canada's veterans opted for higher education but the percentage of radar mechanics was much higher. Of those I have contacted in putting the South East Asia story together, approximately thirty per cent went on to university. This is probably higher than the percentage for all ex-SEACs however I expect that more than twenty per cent did go to university. Of the seven with whom I remained in contact after 1945, one used his DVA credits to take over the family farm and the other six all went to university.

There is no way of knowing precisely how the other seventy five or eighty per cent of those who were in South East Asia benefitted from each of the DVA programs. I know that a few went back to the farm, a few went into business for themselves, a few took vocational training, many went back to their former employment or to similar employment, and a few stayed in the Air Force. Whatever we did we did well at it. I've never heard of anyone who ended up "down and out." For us, Canada's rehabilitation program worked.

Bowering concludes his chapter on rehabilitation reflectively:

> One wonders, looking back on the hectic, happy days of discharge after the war, if the veteran of the Second World War appreciated or even knew what had been done by the Canadian Legion on his behalf while he served in foreign lands. World War II veterans have often wondered why their fathers should say, "Boy, we never had it *that* good!" The Great War veteran was right, and he had fought hard within the Legion to make it so. Thus for the "young" veteran such things as gratuities, clothing allowances, pensions, medical treatment, preference in civil service, vocational training, land settlement and education came to him almost as a matter of course. Reviewing the development of Canada's rehabilitation program, one cannot help but wonder why the Legion did not receive fuller credit for the magnificent role it played in achieving this first-rate program.

To which I say "Amen."

## In retrospect: Our Relationship with the RAF

The casual reader of Part I might get the impression that Canadians were the only people on radar in South East Asia. Far from it. We were the pinch-hitters, we were there because the RAF team was short-handed. The RAF had been there for a long time before we arrived and they

remained many months after we left. Only about half of the radar mechanics in SEAC were Canadian [See the Table on page 26]. There were a few New Zealanders and, towards the end of the war, there were a few Indians on ground stations. However, almost half of the radar mechanics were British, as were all the operators, the filter room staff, the controllers, the clerks, the cooks, the drivers, etc, on the ground stations and most of the aircrews, and all of the flight mechanics, armourers, electricians, parachute packers, and the countless trades that are needed to enable aircraft to get airborne and do their job. In all, Canadian radar mechanics were just over one per cent of the RAF's personnel in SEAC.

In *The Forgotten Air Force: The Royal Air Force in the War against Japan 1941 - 1945* Henry Probert has described the trials, tribulations, and successes of the RAF in South East Asia before and during World War II. Having some seventy squadrons and tens of thousands of sorties to address, it is not surprising that he could do no more than give a general, though generous, tribute to the ground crews and other support units, including radar. Similarly, in *Canadian Flying Operations in South East Asia 1941 - 1945*, T.W. Melnyk had to keep his focus on the three Canadian squadrons and the three thousand Canadian aircrew who were flying with the RAF in South East Asia. In the RAF's *Signals History* —the dry, official account of the technology and its role in the RAF—"people" are treated the same as the technology—as anonymous entities! To the best of our knowledge, the story of the people, *per se,* who were on radar in South East Asia has never been told. Thus, it was apparent that, if the story of the Canadians who were part of the radar team were to be told, we would have to do it ourselves. Regrettably, the task of telling the whole story of the people on radar in South East Asia was beyond our capabilities.

Now, to the question, "How did we get along with the RAF at the one-to-one level and at the institutional level?" The short answer is, "Very well, indeed."

Douglas Gooderham, the senior radar officer in Eastern Air Command [EAC], has sketched some basic differences in the two groups and the way that, in general, relationships had been established when we first came together in the UK.

**Douglas Gooderham:**

> Compared to his RAF counterpart, the average RCAF serviceman tended to be somewhat brash and outspoken—usually quite prepared to volunteer comments and recommendations running counter to the known opinions and to the orders of his superior in the military structure. Additionally, most of us reached the UK having received very little instruction in military discipline and no experience at all of discipline on operational units.
>
> Having regard for these potentially negative factors, the speed with which good working RCAF-RAF relationships were established was remarkable, and reflects much credit on the RAF as a whole and on the RAF radar individuals with whom we worked. With few exceptions the latter displayed tolerance and maturity—they tactfully ignored our occasional departure from RAF "norms" and patiently explained "the drill". Most importantly, RAF commanders, at all levels were

> given freedom to give RCAF personnel challenging assignments enabling us to prove ourselves, to pull our weight and, not infrequently, to obtain accelerated promotion.
>
> When I was the Senior Radar Officer at Eastern Air Command, AMES commanders, RAF or RCAF, routinely brought to my staff various problems affecting the operational and technical performance of their units and sometimes trouble was attributed to inadequacies on the part of the unit's personnel. Since most AMESs in the EAC area had both RAF and RCAF radar mechanics there was a possibility of bias on the part of the officer commanding the unit but at no time did I or any member of my staff (a mix of RAF, RCAF and RNZAF officers) find any evidence of friction or lack of trust between RAF and RCAF individuals. If there was any inter-service effect it took the form of slightly more forbearance in the face of shortcomings of the "other" Force.
>
> As evidence that the same good camaraderie existed further up the chain of command, I cite a telephone conversation I had with a staff officer in Delhi: Me, at EAC in Comilla: " . . . how come you are sending so many RCAF men to this area?"
> Senior RAF officer, in Delhi: " . . . it's quite simple, Goody, I try to keep all my troubles in one place!"

Bill Barrie was the Senior NCO in the ASV section at Korangi Creek, near Karachi, from December 1942 until June 1944.

**Bill Barrie:**

> Running the RAF Special Equipment (Radar) Section at Korangi Creek was no picnic. The finicky high-tech equipment required all the ingenuity and skill and persistence the staff could muster. The mix of RAF and RCAF personnel was a competent and congenial one. There were no problems with the differences in accents, vocabularies and mannerisms. On the contrary they spiced things up. As Canadians we were truly an integral part of No. 212 Coastal Command Squadron, Royal Air Force. Similarly our RAF mechanics were an integral part of our working section. I note this because the majority of radar personnel, including the radar officer, were from Canada. On a more personal note I made many good RAF friends, both aircrew and ground crew and stayed in contact with them for a long time by correspondence and visits.

In compiling this volume I have received input from more than ninety ex-SEACs and not one of them has indicated any resentment about the treatment he received from his RAF colleagues. In fact, many, like Bill Barrie, have mentioned the warm, lifelong friendships they have had with former RAF co-workers. There were, of course, a few individuals in both services who were difficult to get along with. Many of the ex-SEACs recounted some unpleasant incident with a "discip" corporal at transit camps in the UK. Generally, the discips had an unenviable job for which they were ill prepared. Their role in our total RAF experience was, perhaps, comparable to that of a drunken gatekeeper in a Shakespearean play—i.e. not to be taken seriously!

In the radar section on 176 Squadron there was a Canadian officer, RAF senior NCOs and about half RAF and half RCAF airmen and to the best of my knowledge in the twenty months that I was on the Squadron there was never the slightest trace of an inter-service problem.

I remember having long chats with one of the armourers who had joined as a "Boy" [Yes, there had been a rank of "Boy"] He had joined during the Depression at age fourteen or fifteen and had been given excellent training in his trade and, through sports, the parade ground, and a well-structured environment he had been encouraged to develop self-discipline—the key to all forms of effective discipline. It was not surprising that, with a nucleus of young airmen such as this armourer, the RAF had been able to expand rapidly and effectively in 1939 and 1940.

Another former "Boy" had, after qualifying as an aircraft mechanic and working at his trade for some time, remustered and eventually risen to become CO of 176 Squadron. He was one of the very few officers who played soccer with the airmen and, on the field, one often heard one of the airmen shouting "Come on, George, get your finger out." He knew and they knew that this would not, in any way, detract from his authority when he was in the CO's office next morning.

There was no parade square and, except for funeral parades, there were no formal parades while 176 was at Baigachi. On an operational RAF squadron, the priority was very clear—get the job done! Formalities of every sort were secondary. Rank, nationality, or race were incidental. If we could do the job, or even if we couldn't do the job but were willing to learn, we were accepted as full colleagues. It was not unusual for a RAF AC1 with many months' experience to have to show a Canadian LAC with no experience how to do a job. The fact that our pay scale was higher and that our promotions, especially "shadow" promotions, came faster than promotions in the RAF, did not seem to create any resentment. Had the situation been reversed I'm not sure I'd have been able to be as accepting as they were.

In summary, I developed a very high regard for the RAF as an institution and for the individuals in it and I think this view is shared by most of those who were in South East Asia.

## Some Thoughts on India and the Break-up of the British Empire

We witnessed history in the making. We saw the penultimate scene in the two-hundred-year drama of British rule in India. The final scene occurred just two years after we left when Lord Louis Mountbatten, by then the Viceroy, accepted the division of British India into two countries: India and Pakistan (East and West)

Students of British history will know that the East India Company and the Hudson's Bay Company were both established in the 1600s and both for the same purpose: to extend British influence and to increase British wealth through international trade. These two companies were the keystones in the expansion of the Empire that played a leading role in world affairs for over two hundred years.

As a schoolboy in the 1930s I found it reassuring to look at all the red on the map of the world and to know that I was part of this prestigious empire. When I was growing up in rural Southern Ontario our community was pro-British and anti-English! We valued the British connection and we proved it when World War II started—we joined up as fast as we could. The reason we were somewhat anti-English was because of a few English immigrants who assumed that, coming from "the old country", they were superior to us "colonials" They were a minority but, regrettably, there were enough of them to create an "image" that hurt all of their countrymen.

Disembarking at Bombay we all suffered from "culture shock"—before the term was invented! We weren't prepared for the crowds, for the poverty, for the diversity that is India. We were appalled to see "QUIT INDIA" graffiti everywhere. What were we doing defending a country that didn't want us?

We'd read in the British papers about the "India problem" just as we'd long heard about the "Irish problem". When we first arrived we were told by the old hands that: "After a week in India you'll be sure you have the answer to the India problem, after a month in India you'll have some doubts, and after a year you'll realize that you have no idea how to resolve the 'India problem' ". They were right!

Mahatma Gandhi and his Congress Party with their non-violent resistance campaign were in the news every few days. Many of us witnessed demonstrations of Gandhi's "Congress-wallahs" and felt their barely suppressed resentment. Thanks to Gandhi's emphasis on non-violence and to the unobtrusive but efficient British-controlled police force, none of us were harmed in any way.

Jack Wadham, in Chapter 6, has described the activities of some of the JIFs—Japanese Indian Forces. These were Indians who had volunteered to work as spies and saboteurs for the Japanese. This made every civilian in the battle zone a suspect.

In London, immediately after the War, there was conflict between the British Government's pledge to withdraw from India as soon as possible after the end of the war and Prime Minister Churchill's famous statement: "I was not elected to preside over the dissolution of the British Empire." In the first election after the War the Labour Party defeated the Conservatives and Clement Attlee became Prime Minister. One of his first acts was to appoint Lord Louis Mountbatten as Viceroy of India and give him authority to negotiate the transfer of power to the Indians. Gandhi had worked hard to reconcile the many different factions, especially Hindus and Muslims, so that all of British India—the whole subcontinent—could continue as one country. It was not to be. Muhammad Ali Jinnah persuaded Mountbatten that the Moslems should have their own country so, in 1947, the Moslem-dominated parts became Pakistan and all the rest became what is now India. Subsequently in 1971 East Pakistan separated forming Bangladesh. However, for better or for worse, "democracy", firmly implanted by the British, is still, in 1998,

the form of Government for all three of these countries.

Most of us, in our day-to-day jobs on ground stations, squadrons, or wherever, had no contact with either British administrators or Indian officials. A few of us, such as Bill Hilborn, who worked out of Madras installing beacons, did meet with local people and, sometimes hired some of them; Bill found that: " They were like people everywhere." Off-duty, we met British officials and British business people but, only rarely, did any of us become acquainted with Indians either in business or in government.

Although our observations are, of necessity, superficial, I think I speak for most of my fellow countrymen when I say that, by the time we were repatriated, we had come to admire the integrity and the dedication of the British people that we met in India. It was clear that they were genuinely trying to do the best they could for India and the Indians. For those in business, such as the tea-planters with whom I spent a couple of sick leaves, the first priority was to make a profit but they didn't do this without concern for their workers. In fact, the workers on tea gardens under British managers were treated better than the workers on gardens that were under Indian managers.

Despite the bad joke about the Indian Civil Service being neither Indian, nor Civil, nor Service, the country functioned quite well. Peace, order and good government prevailed. The police were in control but they were neither conspicuous nor openly heavy-handed; when Gandhi was put under house arrest, he was not mistreated. The railways worked, the post office worked, and the utilities in the cities worked reasonably well even under wartime shortages.

Many qualified observers have commented on the complexity—and the inefficiency—of the bureaucracy that the British established in India. We can vouch for the fact that it was cumbersome. For example, just buying a few stamps was a big job; you had to go to one counter, tell a clerk what you wanted, get an itemized list with the total cost, take this list to a cashier, pay the cashier and get a receipt for your payment, and finally take your receipt back to the first clerk and get your stamps!

To be in the second most populous country in the world, and to witness some of the events just before it became independent after two hundred years of occupation was a memorable experience. In 1998, as Australia begins serious discussion about ending its connection to the British Crown and as Canada mutters about doing the same, we recall, with some nostalgia, our memories of India just before its break from the British Crown.

## Was it all worthwhile?

This is a question the answer to which could become a book in itself. Here, we will make it a five part question and give short answers to each part.

• **Was World War II worthwhile?** The very short answer is "Yes." Had there not been a strong response by the Allied Forces there is no doubt that Hitler's brutal Nazi regime would have oppressed Europe for decades and that Japan's even more brutal war machine would have oppressed all of Asia for a long time. The Nuremburg trials and holocaust research have documented the sadistic methods of the Nazis and the stories of Oss Luce and Edward Goodchild, by themselves, are evidence of the brutality of the Japanese regime. There is overwhelming evidence that both these regimes were, at heart, as ruthless and brutal as any evil empire that had ever existed. Even the revisionist historians, who dispute the need for the massive bombing of Germany or the use of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, do not question the need to stop the Nazis and the Japanese aggressors.

• **Was Canada's participation worthwhile?** This question can, in turn, become a multi-part question: Did Canada's participation help the Allies to win the war? The obvious answer is "Yes, of course, it did." One could, perhaps, argue that the war could have been won without Canada's contribution; but, by the same token, one would have to concede that it would have taken significantly longer to win it. However, it was in the first two years of the war that Canada's contribution counted most. In the dark days of 1939, 1940, and 1941, before the United States entered the war, Canada's support of the UK was crucial. When Britain's very survival was in doubt, Canada's rapid response was invaluable.

Did Canada's participation contribute to Canadian unity? Regrettably, the answer to this question is not a clear unequivocal "Yes." We, who were in South East Asia, like those in other theatres of the War, made lifelong friends with men from provinces other than our own. This certainly contributed to Canadian unity. But we were almost all anglophones! There were very few whose mother tongue was French and they were fluently bilingual. With brilliant hindsight one can see that in radar, as in many other specialties, World War II was an opportunity missed.

Did Canada's participation contribute to Canada's economic development? The answer to this is an unequivocal "Yes." And we radar mechanics contributed significantly to it. In 1945 five thousand radar mechanics came home well grounded in leading edge technology—the technology that became digital technology. Documenting the contribution of the former radar mechanics to Canada's high technology industries would, I am sure, show that individually and collectively we made a significant contribution.

• **Was radar worthwhile?** Again, the short answer is "Yes" This answer is solidly documented by Charles Fisher's book, "A Race in the Edge of Time" for which the subtitle is, "Radar: the Decisive Weapon of World War II." The quotation cited in the prologue, page xii, makes this point unconditionally.

• **Was radar in South East Asia worthwhile?** The answer to this question is also "Yes" but the evidence to support this answer cannot be documented as dramatically as was the answer to the preceding question. Radar is most useful in defence against attack from the air and in South East Asia, after the battle lines were drawn in mid 1942, there were no air attacks comparable to those during the Battle of Britain. In time, the Allies did achieve almost complete control of the air in South East Asia and radar made a significant contribution to this achievement. Air superiority, in turn, helped the Army to win its battles on the ground and hence to drive the Japanese forces out of Burma.

• **Was the contribution of the seven hundred and twenty three Canadians on radar in South East Asia worthwhile?** Undoubtedly the RAF could have found seven hundred and twenty radar mechanics to serve in South East Asia if we had not been available. However, when it is recognized that every functional man and woman in the British Isles was contributing in some way to the war effort, this number could only have come by taking them from some other part of the war effort.

Were we indispensable? No! Did we help to win the war? Yes! Jack Phillips, who was on ground stations at Amghata and at Waltair near Vizagapatam, described his role—and the role of all of us—when he said:

"I didn't win the war, but I was there!"

## The Last Word

There were those among us who felt that their talents were being wasted. They did not believe the old saying:

"They also serve who only stand and wait."

Most of us, however, realized that fighting a war is not the same as producing goods in civvy street—that military organizations can not achieve the efficient use of manpower that has become the norm in a competitive industrial society. We believed in our hearts in the rightness of the cause we had volunteered to be a part of and we were willing to do what we were asked to do even if it was only "to stand and wait." We had mixed feelings about not being in the front lines—we wanted to be heroes but we didn't want to be dead heroes!

For most of us our assessment of our two, three, or more years in South East Asia—the poor food, the pests, the tropical diseases, and especially the monastic life style—was aptly summed up by my old friend and fellow-Draytonite, Don Reid, when he said:

"I wouldn't have missed it for a million dollars, but I wouldn't do it again for ten million."