



## Jack Grinham

I was born in 1918 in Stoke, Coventry. My father worked in the car industry as a coach builder. I left school at fourteen and I went to work in a factory, just for a few months but I found that I didn't like working inside so I found a job as an errand boy in the fruit trade in Coventry and I stayed there for about four years. I started driving a van and after that I changed my job to another shop, better work with more pay. The manager there suggested that I should join the police force, he said I had 'the build'. His son was in the Metropolitan Police and was enjoying it. So he put the idea into my head and I went for a medical examination and interview and was accepted and I joined the police on the 16 August 1939.



Jack Grinham

I went to Birmingham Police Headquarters for the interview but I finished up on the beat at a place called Moseley Street, an industrial and slum area of Birmingham and that's where I served for several years.

When the war began we didn't deal so much with crime. We had ARP training, dealing with incendiary bombs and that kind of thing, how to deal with unexploded bombs of which we had quite a few, and, of course, dealing with casualties and reporting to the ARP centre so that they could make a complete log. It was very hairy hearing bombs coming down, the earth would shake and you had to keep going along the streets very, very carefully because slates and the tiles were rushing off the roofs and they could do quite a lot of damage.

The things I used to hate having to deal with was the injured and terrified animals, hysterical people, and there were quite a few, and children that had been hurt or trapped. They were terrible things to deal with. I didn't deal so much with fires, the fire brigade would deal with those but we used to co-operate very well with our local fire brigade.

I was called up into the Army on 3 September 1942. I expressed a preference for the Royal Armoured Corps, but first of all I had to go through some very primary training down at Bodmin which was an infantry unit, but after six or seven weeks I was transferred up to Barnard Castle in Durham to join a RAC training unit and I did three or four months there before I was posted to 42nd Armoured Division.

I went through another course of radio training, which was quite important and I got a trade rating which helped me earn a few coppers a week extra in pay and then I went into the scout car troop. I wasn't very happy there and I wanted to get away but one has to go and do as the Army tells you, but eventually I had the opportunity to leave and join the Special Forces. That's something I never, never regretted. The troop



officer got hold of us radio operators in a very confidential way and we were told they wanted some radio operators for special operations which would include parachuting into enemy occupied territory to do whatever was necessary and then get out. We were bound to secrecy and I jumped at the opportunity.

I retained the Royal Armoured Corps badge but my divisional signs came off, and I started some pretty intense radio training. When we had reached a certain standard, we were transferred to another unit at Mildenhall near Peterborough where we went through our field training, but also carried on with our radio training. We had to do that to keep up to date with it.

One of the things that they were very hot on was physical fitness. We did our ground para training and then we went up to Manchester and did our three parachute drops. That's all we did, we didn't do seven drops as the Airborne had to do, we weren't Airborne troops we'd kept our black berets. We were a completely separate unit.

At Henley-on-Thames, we had to get our radio operating speed up and be very accurate with sending and receiving and from twelve words a minute in the RAC, we had to get up to eighteen words a minute and with hundred per cent accuracy. That was very necessary. We also did a lot of code and cipher work, which we would need for when we were in the field. It was hard work, but our esprit de corps started there and it never, ever went away.

Once we had successfully completed our Special Forces training we got our 'Wings', Special Forces and a Parachute Badge.

There were three men in each Jedburgh team. We were teamed up at Peterborough. I didn't know the officers at all until then. There was always a French officer in the team, the team leader would usually be British or American, and the radio operator could be of any of the three nationalities.

My team consisted of Captain Oswin Craster. The Frenchman was known as Carriere - not his proper name, it was an alias and myself and our team was called Stanley. Each team was briefed individually as to what was wanted. My own team was to gather as much information as we could and to prevent destructive demolitions, because the advancing armies were coming so quickly, they wanted to make certain that they



Jack Grinham, reading.



Jack cleaning his Bren Gun.



could progress as fast as possible, so that's what we were to do. Get the information out and provide targets for the RAF which we did very successfully.

I went in August 1944. We were hyped up, of course. The one thing I knew I could never do was let the side down and as I went out of the plane I said to myself, "Right, you're in it, you can't go back. Make a man of yourself and get on with the job", and that's what I did. I did my best to anyway. We were dropped in uniform, but we took civilian clothes with us and had civilian identity cards - if we had been caught with those we would have been in trouble. We headed for a place near Bussières with Belmont in Haute Marne south of Chaumont and north of Dijon. The family there was very, very good. They looked after us with what they had, even though they hadn't got a lot. They were virtually forced to have us but they were very hospitable.

Oswin, our team leader, didn't like radio operating and I had to stay at the farm so that I could receive messages and deal with the radio operating while he was out. We had to stick to a strict schedule of operating times. We had certain precautions to take, particularly with the times we were operating, it varied every day over a monthly period and our call signs used to vary too. If Oswin wasn't there, then I had to carry on with a French farmer there who would help me with the radio. At first the *Maquis* had distrusted this family because they spoke with a German accent.



On patrol in the Far East.

We always worked with what they called the 'letter one time pad', which is virtually unbroken. It was still in use fairly recently. We would sit and encode and decode – the three of us. You needed one man to read, one to transcribe and one to write, and I was the one that wrote when we were going to send a message and I always used to read my letters when it went the other way and they had got to decode the messages. It worked out very, very well.

I can give you an example of the sort of messages we were transmitting. We had to send in information about German positions and so on so that the RAF could go and deal with them. One afternoon some locals come dashing over to us and said, "There's a German convoy in Bussières. There's a lot of vehicles there, can you do something"? So it was reconnoitered and I got on the emergency channel, and sent a very brief but very quick message and within a few hours a squadron of American Thunderbolts came over and they attacked the convoy, killed about 120 Germans and made a mess of the village too. But it wiped the lot out. I remember watching the planes going down low to fire, disappearing behind the trees and then we could see the smoke and the explosions from this convoy. I felt that I had done something useful.



I never went out to find targets or organize ambushes. No, I was a bit disappointed in that, but Oswin didn't like radio operating and he made me stay. He told me how far I could go away from the farm, because I used to like to help and do little jobs around the place rather than just sit on my backside at the farmhouse.

Germans once attacked us, but with the fire from the *Maquis* at the farm, they soon left. They had two French Citroens with machine-guns on the top and they shot at us and one of the *Maquis* was hurt, in fact he died later. The first thing I did was grab my wireless set and get round the corner because without the radio set we were lost.

The *Maquis* had to rough it. They were living in the farm buildings, in the hay and so on. At least we did have a reasonable billet inside the farmhouse itself. The farmers shared what they had with us and made certain that we were looked after.

We were only there for a few weeks because the 1<sup>st</sup> French Army came up from the south and overran our position. We gave a lot of information to their forward scouts and then when they arrived they fought with the Germans. They brought a load of prisoners, some were Russians, and I was talked to these Russians and they told me they had only gone back into the Army because they were starving in the concentration camps. We were redundant and we had to make our way back to England, which we did. We scrounged a lift, scrounged some petrol and we got back to Paris. We found the liaison officer and we got on a Dakota back to Heathrow and back to camp at Peterborough.

When we got back to London we were debriefed and they asked us if we would like to do the same kind of thing in South East Asia and we all said that we would. We went back to camp and had some leave before being drafted out to Bombay. After seven days travelling, we finished up at our base in Ceylon and there I was teamed up with two more officers. (Oswin Craster did not come with us immediately, he came out in a later draft and the Frenchmen went back to the French Army and I didn't see him again until a long time after the war).



Hidden camp in the Far East



Jack Grinham, Yehong, Aung Zo, Basaw, "Jeep" Kemball, Chris Bathwaite, Atet Kodu in the Chin Hills, Burma, early 1945.



Our new team was called Mouse. There was Major Kemball and Chris Bathwaite, (later made Major), and then in Calcutta we met three Elikanese Chin agents, Basaw, Yehong and Aung Zo and that was the team – Mouse – the six of us.

We were briefed in Calcutta for our trip into the Chin Hills. The Japs had constructed a dirt road across western Burma and our intelligence wanted to know what traffic was using it, if there were any possible targets on it and any other information about it whatsoever. And, of course, the usual thing, to find out where the Japs were. We did this with some success although we could not get on to the road itself, it was too well guarded.

It was the middle of January 1945. We were supposed to have three months jungle training but I'm afraid I had to learn the hard way. A rookie Canadian crew dropping us and we were supposed to have a party meeting us at a particular place. They could not make it so we went to a different landing zone in case the first one had been compromised and we landed at eleven o'clock at night in a paddy field.

When we landed on that night, Major Kemball made friends with the local headman, a Thuji his title was, who owned the paddy field we had landed in. He didn't like the Japanese because they were always pinching his rice, so he was very friendly and passed us on to his friends and family so we could enter the village quite safely. They knew where the Japanese were from the tracks they used, so we could move in safely to find somewhere from where we could operate. And that's how we went on. It was hard work to say the least. It had been a bit of a dodgy dropping but we managed to get ourselves sorted out and eventually we got the proper radio and the charging equipment which we had lost on the first drop and then we became quite well established.



Hidden camp

The countryside we were operating in was nearly all bamboo. We could only use tracks, there were no roads. We went everywhere on foot. We were heavily laden but the locals carried some of our kit. Our radio set was different from the one we used in Europe, it was a B2 set and it was in two pieces each weighing seventeen pounds in waterproof and watertight cases. There was a sixty amp twelve volt battery and then the charging equipment, not fuelled by petrol but by a portable steam generator weighing ninety pounds and we had to arrange for that to be carried. We couldn't carry the lot, but we had to go along there with at least forty or fifty pounds on our backs. We didn't carry anything we didn't need, we just ditched it. The first thing I ditched was my spare pair of boots. I've got big feet and I ditched those as soon as I got there because I wasn't going to carry them when I didn't need them.



The Japanese knew we were there, but they didn't know where and our locals were very, very good. They knew where the Japs were and the tracks they used so we managed to move quite happily and successfully from one place to another.

On one occasion when the lads had gone out, I can't remember the name of the place, they came back and said, "There's a hollowed out tree, like a banyan tree, with a lot of big boxes inside and in the water there are some big barrels". These turned out to contain petrol. So we arranged for some Beaufighters to come over and they blew this lot up and it certainly set the petrol in the drums in the water on fire. That was the sort of thing we were successful at doing. Another time there was a convoy on the road. We hadn't seen it but the locals told us where it was. It was parked against a bit of a hill that had been hollowed out. We got onto the emergency schedule and the next morning some more Beaufighters came over and plastered this thing and the hill dropped onto the convoy. We heard them come over just as it was breaking daylight.



On patrol

Communication with the Chin members of our team was no bother. Basaw was a very good interpreter. Yehong had a good command of English and was a very happy sort of person. The other one was a little bit quieter, but nevertheless we were all a team and we all worked together. We never had any difficulty communicating with each other, none at all.

After the original drop, (which they had made such a mess of), we were very short of rations. But with the emergency drop of the charging equipment for the radio, they dropped us some American 'K' rations and we lived on those for a month. We used to get a supply drop once a month and we also had some local food, mostly rice. It was very, very good rice too. Occasionally we had chicken or something like that. Our drops were always at night.



"Jeep" Kemball reading mail.

The rice ration was dropped without a parachute. You had to get out of the way when a half-hundredweight bag of rice was coming your way!

We used to have quite a bit of fun sitting round the fire at night talking. 'Jeep' Kemball was a really well educated Irishman and a Roman Catholic. Chris Bathwaite was Roman Catholic and we used to take the Mickey out of each other. They took the Mickey out of me for being a 'copper', which I didn't mind it was good fun, and we



would have a bit of banter both ways. There was never any falling out, never. We just got on so well together. I can't put it any better than that. We worked as a team and stayed as a team.

We had been dropped about 120 miles behind Jap lines. When the West Africans, and I think it was the 81<sup>st</sup> and 82<sup>nd</sup> West African Brigades, were coming down we made our way towards them. They were firing at the Japanese and when they saw us, they started to fire at us but we just went through the lines and got through safely without being hurt, but I didn't like the bullets whizzing past my ear! We got to the brigade headquarters and the brigadier welcomed us in his very posh voice and 'regimentality' started again, "Officers' quarters over there, Sergeants' quarters over there". We didn't do any operations with them, we just stayed until we could get a lift down the river



Travelling up river to attack the Japanese.

We made our way to the Liaison Officer and he arranged transport for us to get back to what I call civilisation, in this particular case Calcutta. He was very good, he got us on to a Dutch coaster to Cox's Bazaar or somewhere up there, I don't know exactly where, and then we got a lift on a Liberator back to Calcutta. After debriefing, getting cleaned up and some decent clothes because we were absolutely in tatters, filthy and unshaven, we were kitted out again and we went on leave. We went to Poona to a Special Forces rest camp and spent quite a few weeks there. We used to go into Poona and enjoy ourselves and get a little bit drunk, because we had three months ration of booze. From there we went back to Ceylon, and then the war ended and we went back to the normal Army, which hurt a bit. We went back to the RAC depot at Poona, we were an unruly lot because of the life we had been living for the last couple of years and I finished up in Agra. I was there for a while and then I went up in the hills because of illness, and from there I got my passage home, my demob.



Lecturing locals after our attack.

I was as green as grass when I went into the police force and I was even greener than grass when I went into the Army, and particularly when I went into the Special Forces. You had to learn as you went along, it might have been the hard way, but the comradeship made an enormous difference and it gave me an experience of life that I never thought I would have.



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Looking back, it certainly improved my character. Although it didn't do my health any good, I was not in very good health when I got back. It made me more of a man, which is the best way I can put it. I saw so much of other parts of the world and I did things that I didn't think I was ever capable of, and all of that just made me feel more complete. I can't put it any better than that. It was a wonderful experience.