

Chasing the Germans across Europe



Bharati Gurung is part of the Gurkha units with the British Army advancing across Italy into Austria and Greece. Like all soldiers from Nepal, Gurung understates the hardships and suffering. For his bravery on the siege of Monte Cassino in Italy, he was awarded the Military Cross. Bharati Gurung's story is part of the testimony of Gurkha soldiers serialised every fortnight in this space.



Gurkha soldiers in Italy, 1944

You must have noticed the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea in the map. When we were there, it was exceedingly cold as the ground was fully covered with snow. The goggles are a must day and night. You went blind if you didn't wear them. Rice, millet and corn do not grow there but there is wheat in the lower lands and barley in the highlands. Some buckwheat too.

We had finished fighting in Africa and had to cross a vast sea from there. The British forces had taken their position on this side of the sea and the Germans on the other. The loss of a large number of soldiers was certain. Going by plane had the hazard of being shot down. On the other hand going by sea had the peril of being sunk. As the debate on the possible course of action was going on, the British and Americans filled every corner of the sea with ships. Not all forces from the same regiment was put on one single ship for the fear that the whole lot might be wiped out. British, Negro and Gurkha soldiers were mixed and put on the ships. Thus they landed at Trento (Italy). The sky appeared covered with planes which dropped bombs the size of houses on the sea.

Each group had a strength of 18. The duties of those

assigned to carry the bombs ended there. They did not fire them. There were others to do that. They were covered by yet another machine, which revolved like an eagle. It had the capacity to strike up and down right or left. Marching onward we arrived at a place called Monte Cassino in Italy. On the right side of the road leading to this place there is steep cliff with the sea to the left. In between there is road leading to a small gate. The German and British were facing each other. A single bomb blast caused thousands of stones to work very much like bombs. That caused all the stones to roll down. In that battle a Punjabi won the Victoria Cross. After some time, we took Monte Cassino.

Our victory march reached Rome. There was strict instruction not to resort to bombardment in the capital city, so we bypassed Rome. Our march led us to a place called Gothic land which was well fortified. We encountered an enormous number of German forces equipped with powerful weapons. All eyes were set on us. The problem arose whether or not we could match their firepower. We marched ahead to assess the number of enemies. Nine of our soldiers were killed in the endeavour. I, too, was seriously wounded. I won a gallantry award in that encounter. The award I won was an MC or a Military

Cross. This award is second highest after Victoria Cross. I was hit twice during the skirmish.

The army action started at eight in the evening. There was fullscale bombardment by artillery. Messages were sent about the enemy troops and artillery required. That full scale army attack resulted in victory for us. Thereafter San Marino, a small town of Italy, was seized by us after a brief encounter.

Then we arrived in Austria. It is flanked by Switzerland on the left and Greece on the right. Information reached us that all German strength was concentrated in Greece. Our army went aboard the ships and arrived in Greece. There is a big harbor called Salonica in Greece which is as big as Bombay. The Germans laid mines in the sea. There are different kinds of mines for eliminating human beings and those for the destruction of ship.

We conquered Greece by reaching there in submarines and ships. A big hill, Crimea, stands on the right. The capital Athens lies on the left. The place is quite warm yet there is snowfall during the winter. The wind there is strong enough to sweep away even human beings. The moment we reached Athens, the Germans surrendered.

Hitler was defeated and the war was over.



MARK TURIN



Clockwise from top: A collection of manuscripts from a monastery near Jomsom, Mustang district, is prepared for filming. Diwakar Acharya and Ramhari Timalsina in the Nepal Research Centre, members of the NGMCP team, providing detailed catalogue information on the microfilmed manuscripts.

The *Research Scheme Nepal Himalaya* was born in 1959, exactly 100 years after the death of the brilliant German explorer, Alexander von Humboldt. Growing out of earlier German expeditions to the Himalayan region, the scheme proposed to undertake a comprehensive scientific study of all aspects of Nepal. It was funded by ministries in Bonn with the privately-managed Fritz Thyssen Stiftung.

After a series of highly successful scientific expeditions, the Research Scheme ended in 1965 and was reincarnated as Thyssen House: a home for international scholars from all fields, disciplines and countries, united by an interest in Nepal. Two years later, in 1967, Thyssen House transformed itself into the *Nepal*

The centre of things

After 35 years, it is time to look back at the extraordinary accomplishments of the Kathmandu-based Nepal Research Centre.

Research Centre (NRC).

Today, the NRC offers assistance to visiting scholars from abroad who require institutional affiliation in Nepal. Language training, both in Nepali and in a range of local languages, are arranged. It also encourages visiting scholars to present or publish the results of their research findings while in Nepal. The centre has an active and high profile publishing series comprising of occasional monographs as well as the *Journal of the Nepal Research Centre (JNRC)*, of which there have been twelve volumes to date.

Finally, the centre assists scholars by providing them working facilities, including access to a well-stocked reference library, technical equipment, facilities for viewing microfilms, a working space as well as meals and accommodation. To foster lively academic exchange, the NRC also hosts an informal daily lunch to which both local and foreign scholars are invited and encouraged to share



ideas over dal-bhat.

Over the last 30 years, the NRC has been handling the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project (NGMPP) that microfilms every important manuscript and historical document located in Nepal. The materials photographed include various branches of Hindu and Buddhist literature in languages such as Sanskrit, Tibetan, Nepali and Newari—texts which are of significance far beyond the boundaries of Nepal. Many of these manuscripts are the oldest or last remaining copies of

important religious or historical works, and a significant number are so degraded that they are close to disintegration. Since 2002, the Nepal-German Manuscript Cataloguing Project (NGMCP) is setting up a detailed online catalogue of the manuscripts microfilmed by the earlier project. ●

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