

Major WILLIAM JOHN HOPPER SHEPHARD

EC/2241, 9th Bn. 12th, Frontier Force Regiment

who died on 17 January 1944

Remembered with honour at the TAUKKYAN WAR CEMETERY



William John Hopper Shephard was already a Major (though perhaps only paid as a Captain) when he was killed in action fighting the Japanese in Burma, aged only 21. He was the second son of the well-known local Dr. Hopper Shephard and brother of the retired G.P., Dr. Graham Shephard, who was very helpful in compiling this profile. His brother Michael had been a member of the B.E.F. in France and had won the *Military Cross* in 1941.¹

Born in Sheerness, Kent, he was educated at Hayleybury College where he was renowned as a "brilliant young cricketer"; indeed, he scored a memorable century for Tewkesbury C.C., aged only 14. Ironically, he was the only one of the family who intended to go in to medicine. He could have continued as a medical student but felt that he could not spend 5 or 6 years in a reserved occupation during the war, especially with a brother in the army. When he went out to India, he was for some time

in a Regiment commanded by our Uncle, Col. Bryceson who was a regular Indian Army officer.²

In fact, that that was partly why he volunteered to take a Commission in the Indian Army. He joined the 8th Battalion of the *Glosters* in 1940 after which he was commissioned and joined the Indian Army.³ This photograph was taken just before his death and presented by his brother officers.

The circumstances of his death are best left to the words of his commanding officer [see below]. He



seemed to be operating in enemy territory and may have been a *Chindit*.⁴ Why did he not win a medal for this gallantry? It would seem that, from reading the biography of Stan Hollis, our only V.C. on D-Day, winning such honours was something of a lottery.⁵

¹ For information on the later career of Michael Shephard, see **H. Workman Memoirs Vol. I p24**

² Perhaps for that reason he is classed by the CWGC website as an Indian Citizen.

³ *Tewkesbury Register*, 29/1/1944 & 5/2/1944.

⁴ A British and Indian unit commanded by **Orde Wingate** from 1941-March 1944 which fought behind enemy lines, using guerrilla tactics. Taukkyan was a "*Chindit*" War Cemetery.

⁵ My own thinking is that all too often they are regarded as compensation for a military defeat.

Major Shephard was in command of a patrol operating in enemy territory across the RIVER CHINDWON. As is usual in these circumstances, the patrol was beyond supporting distance of any other force and beyond reach of any organised ammunition supply or any system of medical evacuation.

Major Shephard's original plan for attacking an enemy occupied village had to be abandoned as surprise was unfortunately forfeited. He refused to abandon the enterprise skillfully redispensed his forces and advanced to a position from which he prepared to launch the attack. This position was on top of a hill overlooking the enemy occupied village.

On arrival there Major Shephard who was leading was seen by the enemy in the village. Realising fully the stress that had been laid in order given to him of the importance of capturing a live Japanese prisoner and of the value of bold offensive action, he at once charged down a steep slope towards the enemy in face of heavy fire. The slope was a bare pebble strewn stretch devoid of cover.

While charging he threw two grenades and fired his tommy gun at an enemy post. Though hit in the head, he continued to charge until hit in the stomach by another bullet when he fell unconscious into the enemy position, with a third grenade still clutched in his hand.

This officer showed most outstanding bravery in attempting to secure the objective of the operation and his personal example had a great effect in carrying forward, the men forming his immediate escort and thereby enabling them to kill and wound all the enemy in the village. He was a tall and conspicuous figure and must have realised what a target he would make for enemy fire, but carried on.

x Village of SAPHA.

John's orderly JANAB GUL was killed in the same action.

