



Gibraltar: Challenge, Change & Continuity

The Friends of Gibraltar Oral History Project (1930 to 1970)

Bootland, Margaret Elizabeth (Ser 227 / IWM 019821R01-06)

Object description

British civilian wife of Alan Bootland, 1st Bn King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, in Burma 1938-1942; evacuation to India 1942; in India 1942-1944

Content description

REEL 1 Background in GB, Gibraltar and India, 1912-1938: family; details of childhood in army married quarters, Pontefract and Wentworth Barracks; story of Zeppelin raid; education; accommodation; story of birth of sister, Evelyn, including coping with her down syndrome; activities following school and civilian work; marriage to Sergeant Alan Bootland, King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry; desire to travel abroad; accommodation on base at Sandhurst; leisure activities and class distinction; birth of son, Ian; news of posting to Burma; problems with cockroaches in Gibraltar; story of German battleship bombed in Gibraltar harbour including subsequent military funeral and awards made; ban on travel into Spain; relationship with Spanish civilian maid; description of journey to India including meeting of Molly and Frank Birch at Port Said; arrival and stay in Bombay including impressions of India; relationship with Indian civilians. REEL 2 Continues: journey to Mingaladon via Rangoon. Aspects of period as civilian in Burma, 1938-1942: details of nearby airfield; events during Rangoon riots; evidence of religious tensions in Burma; posting in Maymyo; description of accommodation; memories of neighbours; organisation of children's education; civilian workers in home; leisure activities; reason for spending period in Mandalay; accommodation; story of night-time walk and scorpions; reactions to outbreak of war; concerns about Japanese; further details of accommodation in Maymyo; cycling; description of first Japanese air raid and story of Mrs Niblett's baby; compilation of priority evacuation list. REEL 3 Continues: return of husband on hospital train and period suffering from malaria; initial preparations for evacuation and its announcement; method of sterilising bottles to divide up and transport brandy; items given to hospital; items packed for journey; method of transporting clothing; rations taken on journey; items given to bearer and left behind. Aspects of journey from Maymyo, Burma, to Calcutta, India, 2/1942-3/1942: departure of husband in Mandalay including wait for departure at Maymyo and arrival at Mandalay; complaints from fellow passenger; train journey to Monywa; voyage up Chindwin River; story of revolver and request received from husband including shooting

lesson and transport of belongings; scenes on Ava Bridge; summary of complete journey; arrival at Sittaung; meeting with Burmese officer; overnight accommodation; morning procedures; organisation of march including events in south of Burma; daily routine; story of friend Lottie's exhaustion. REEL 4 Continues: detour to avoid disease-ridden camp including work of teacher Miss Baker with children; state of feet; story of sugared tea and baths; story of lost meal including sleeping arrangements; reactions of son to storm; events during final day's march; details of bus journey to Imphal; details of paths used; arrival in Imphal; meal and baths; description of journey to Dimapur including contact with Naga civilians, crossing of ravine and travel sickness; arrival and treatment received in Dimapur; journey across Brahmaputra River; anti- British nature of station master; refusal of first train offered. REEL 5 Continues: importance of teacher Mrs Mansfield; memories of Sikh soldiers with group; story of Rose of Burma; train journey to Calcutta. Aspects of period as civilian in India, 1942-1944: concerns about husbands; reception on arrival in Calcutta; interviews at Fort William; reunion with Molly Birch; stay at Fort William; journey to Sabathu; accommodation; civilians from Singapore; attempts to discover news of husband; story of nightmare about husband's death; story of receiving news of husband's being wounding; arrival of husband; details of treatment; knowledge of Indian National Army and Bengal Famine; awareness of Gandhi. Aspects of journey from India to GB, 1944: accommodation; tipping of steward; news of Mrs Niblett; seasickness; visit to doctor; boat drill and story of scare. Aspects of period as civilian in GB from 1944: story of end to blackout at a station; story of attempt to gain refreshments. REEL 6 Continues: transport of excess luggage; continuing treatment of husband; pension; worst moments of evacuation; story of visit to Grand Hotel in Calcutta; telegrams sent to Britain; poverty in India.

Courtesy IWM March 2014
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