



### INTRODUCTION FROM GENERAL SIR RICHARD SHIRREFF KCB CBE



Three-quarters of a century has elapsed since the 14th Army fought in Burma with such distinction while the British Empire those soldiers served has long since passed into history. Yet the values of comradeship and courage nurtured in that ferocious campaign live on in the work of the Burma Star Memorial Fund, which exemplifies the deep mutual respect between the different nations of that diverse and multinational army. I grew up in Kenya with my father's stories of fighting as a platoon and company commander in the 5th

Battalion, King's African Rifles (5 KAR), the reconnaissance battalion of 11th (East African) Division in its advance down the mud-sodden, disease-ridden teak forests and unforgiving terrain of the Kabaw Valley in Burma at the height of the monsoon against a tenacious, ruthless and highly capable enemy, who preferred death to surrender.

I shall never forget attending, as a small boy, 5 KAR's Letsagan Day parade at Nanyuki in Kenya, which commemorated their proudest Burma campaign battle honour: fine-looking, proud, immaculately-drilled Askaris



*David Shirreff's Samburu orderly, Serimon, with the three Shirreff children*

in khaki, distinctive in their fezes with their officers wearing slouch hats and brightly-coloured hackles. Prompted by my incessant questions, my father's stories of the Askaris alongside whom he served set me on the path to becoming a soldier – as did the stories of Serimon, my father's Samburu orderly. Badly wounded by the same Japanese grenade that injured my father, he used to come to our home wherever we were living in Kenya, staying for a week or so, before returning to his tribal lands in the Northern Frontier District.

My grandchildren now call me *mzee* ('The Old Man', a Swahili term of respect) – but those stories are still as vivid to me as when I first heard

them: Sergeant Kora, my father's brave and highly professional Somali platoon sergeant, who, as a young teenager had fought against the British in the so-called 'Mad Mullah's' rebellion; his Masai *Bren* gunners rhythmically chanting their tribal war cries as they charged the Japanese firing from the hip; and the pride of his Askaris as they showed him the blood on their pangas afterwards. In lighter moments, after the fighting was over, he talked about playing an African version of rugby with the Askaris, principally an excuse for them to beat up their British officers, but all taken in good heart. There was a darker side too, though, for this was warfare at its most brutal, which left lasting scars, both mental and physical, on those who fought.



*Major AD Shirreff MC*

Although those brave African warriors – together with their British, Burmese, Gurkha, Sikh, Dogra, Baluch, Pashtun and other Indian and Pakistani comrades – have marched to their last resting place, the work of the Burma Star Memorial Fund will remain a lasting testament to all who served with the 14th Army. Furthermore, it is particularly appropriate that so much of the work of the fund is devoted to the education of young people – the leaders of the future – on whose judgement and wisdom the solution to so many of the world's challenges will depend.

Above all, the Burma Star Memorial Fund is a testament to the lasting bonds between Britain and the countries from which the 14th Army was drawn.

### SCHOLARSHIPS AT UCL – JUDY BERTFIELD, SENIOR PHILANTHROPY MANAGER

Staying true to our founding principle of education for all, UCL invests in the world's brightest students. We believe that anyone who has the academic ability should be able to experience a UCL education, regardless of background or personal circumstances, and we are committed to ensuring that philanthropy helps us achieve this. UCL's scholarship and student funding programme is the most powerful tool we have to honour this commitment to students and leave them free to think, challenge and

participate fully in UCL life. There are currently nearly 43,900 students, of whom 19,994 are undergraduates and 23,842 are postgraduates. Slightly more than half come from countries outside the UK.

Historically, a number of schemes were established on the basis of academic merit. Today, however, the key focus of our scholarships programme is financial need. We aim to support those who meet our high academic standards as part of UCL's competitive selection process, but for whom funding their education remains a significant challenge. We identify students who require targeted scholarship support to overcome such financial challenges.

More than 200 students at UCL are currently supported by philanthropic awards across more than 100 different scholarship programmes, supported by a range of trusts and foundations, individuals, companies, and our alumni community. Demand for scholarships is high – in 2019/20 alone, UCL's Student Funding Office received more than 3,400 applications for entrance scholarships and bursaries. In addition to scholarships and bursaries, our Financial Assistance Fund provides support to students who are in unexpected financial need. For the 2019/20 academic year, UCL awarded hardship grants to 1,832 current students – our highest figure ever, due to sudden and unexpected financial need brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This year the Burma Star Memorial Fund will be awarding a scholarship at the UCL Institute for Global Health (IGH). Led by Professor Ibrahim Abubakar, IGH is a world-leading centre of research and educational excellence in global health, which sits within the Faculty of Population Health Sciences. IGH offers three MSc programmes: Global Health and Development, Health Economics and Decision Science, and Applied Infectious Disease Epidemiology. Approximately 180 students graduated from these three MSc courses in 2019/20.

### **UPDATE FROM OUR 2020 BURMA STAR SCHOLAR, AKARASETH PURANASAMRIDDHI**

Despite the pandemic, my overall experience at UCL was incredible. The Engineering for International Development programme presents an excellent balance of theoretical knowledge and fieldwork that fully prepared me to engage with global engineering issues effectively. The modules from the programme strengthened my technical knowledge in energy, water and sanitation, sustainable infrastructure, and post-disaster recovery. Luckily, my cohort went on a site visit to the Centre for Alternative Technologies in Wales in Fall 2019 to experience hands-on teaching of various sustainable energy technologies. Outside the classroom, I was elected as an MSc academic representative to ensure that my cohort's interests were appropriately represented at faculty meetings and also represented UCL in varsity swimming.

During lockdowns, it was challenging at times, especially as an international student. In terms of teaching, UCL moved its classes online, which significantly limited my engagement with my supervisors and colleagues. Instead of writing my assignments and dissertation in the library, I had my classes and meetings virtually while trying to navigate the whole situation alone in my flat. However, I was fortunate that I have a good support system from my family, friends, cohort and teachers at UCL, and staff from the Burma Star Memorial Fund. With their constant support, I graduated from the programme with a distinction.

After completing my MSc, I have been working as a Research Assistant for both UCL and the University of Cambridge. At UCL's Engineering for International Development Centre, I lead a research report examining the relationship between off-grid electricity access and local economic

development in sub-Saharan Africa. The evidence from this report aims to highlight benefits of off-grid energy and present it as a solution for a more sustainable economic recovery post COVID-19. At Cambridge's Centre for the Study of Existential Risk, I support the research on the mitigation of climate change and inequality through the investment policies and practices of institutional investors. My next stage is to continue in academia and hopefully pursue a PhD programme in sustainable energy or a closely related field in order to develop strategies to address environmental risks.

Without the support from the patrons, trustees, staff, and members of the Burma Star Memorial Fund, none of these opportunities would be possible. Therefore, I would like to use this opportunity to thank everyone involved. During my time at UCL, the Burma Star Scholarship provided me with a strong foundation to successfully pursue the programme, especially with the uncertainties as a result of the pandemic. More importantly, through various events, the Scholarship enabled me to personally get to know many Burma Star veterans and their family members. Learning about their background and experiences has been both insightful and rewarding; I feel extremely privileged to be in this position. It also connected me with fellow Burma Star Scholar, Kushma Thapa, and I am excited to meet the future Scholars and together create this community of leaders who are passionate about solving global issues. Thank you very much again for your continued support for the Burma Star Scholarship Programme.

### **VETERAN'S CORNER: WISDOM KUDOWOR**



Wisdom Kudowor was born on 6 January 1928 at Atiteti in the Volta Region of Ghana. In 1942, having completed his formal education at the EP Senior High School, he decided to fulfil his ambition and enlisted in the Army. After training as an artisan at the Army Training School in Kibi, Wisdom was posted to the 26th West African Artisan Works Company, based at Teshie, Accra. He was posted to 82nd (West African) Division, which sailed for Ceylon (Sri Lanka) on 20 May 1944.

After acclimatisation and jungle-warfare training, the Division took part in the third Arakan Campaign, which began in December 1944. During the next six months, before the monsoon broke, they recaptured – in conjunction with 81st (West Africa) Division – mountainous terrain that had been hotly disputed for more than three years.

Following his return to Ghana in August 1946 – after two-and-a-half years in Asia – Lance Corporal Kudowor was demobilised. At that point, he was selected to attend two Government-sponsored training schemes – one in Ghana and the other in the United Kingdom – before qualifying as a production engineer. In a recent interview, he made the point that this only happened, “because of the opportunities given to me by the British Government”. A combination of Wisdom's war-time experiences, work ethic, training and natural aptitude put him on the path to becoming Principal of the Accra Polytechnic and Director of the National Official Training Institute, before his retirement in 1984,

On 15 August 2020, Wisdom made a short video in which he said: “As we celebrate the 75th Anniversary of VJ-Day at a time when we can't visit them, show you still remember those who fought for peace during the two World Wars: share a tribute, share a photograph, share a memory, share your family's history, use the *#ShareYourTribute*'. Together we will keep their memory alive.”