

# **British military engineer's photograph album of India**

**Ms. Coll. 1190**

**Finding aid prepared by Clémence Scouten.**

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University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository</b>	University of Pennsylvania: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts
<b>Title</b>	British military engineer's photograph album of India
<b>Call number</b>	Ms. Coll. 1190
<b>Date [inclusive]</b>	1942-1947
<b>Extent</b>	08 linear feet (1 volume)
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Abstract</b>	This volume chronicles the time a British soldier spent in the Royal Bombay Sappers and Miners near the end of World War II and after, working on roads and other projects.

**Cite as:**

British military engineer's photograph album of India, 1942-1947, Ms. Coll. 1190, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania

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## Biography/History

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The Royal Bombay Sappers and Miners, which existed since 1777 under various names, were by 1941 an engineering corps staffed by both Indian and British subjects serving the needs of the British Empire on and around the Indian continent. The Sappers and Miners expanded significantly during the first and

second world wars, and were allocated to India after the partition.

During World War II and until Indian independence in 1947, British, Indian, and Pakistani engineers served together in the same units and formations. The officer who created this scrapbook appears to have been involved in the building of the Palel-Tamu Road which was critical in the retreat of General Harold Alexander's Burma forces in 1942. In February 1943, he attended the Officers Mechanical Equipment Course at No. 6 Engineer Depot in Lahore. He also worked on the Tamu-Kalewa Road and widening the Coom River for flood relief works, as well as less militaristic tasks such as demolishing a house and constructing a sports stadium in Madras City in People's Park. He worked intensively with the 717 Indian Mechanical Equipment Platoon of the Royal Indian Engineers and the 663 Indian Mechanical Equipment COY of the Royal Indian Engineers. He appears to have been stationed in Rangoon and Patiala following the end of World War II and was involved in flood relief works in Patiala State.

Sources:

Verma, S and V.K. Anand. *The Corps of Indian Engineers, 1939-1947*. 1974

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## Scope and Contents

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This collection chronicles the time a young British officers spent in the Royal Bombay Sappers and Miners during World War II from around 1942 and until Indian independence in 1947. The photos (about 200) capture his time in various regions of India and Burma in both military scenes and in leisure activities.

From his beginnings at the Officer Cadet Training Unit in Kirkee, through his departure from Bombay, researchers will find many photographs of various military engineering projects like road construction, building a sports stadium or general military training. Whether during work or leave, the creator paid close attention to the people and place he encountered, and captioned almost every shot. A great number of his co-workers – British and Indian – are photographed, as well as the various trips and places stationed (Poona, Amristar, Kashmir, Khyber Pass, Madras, Madura, Lahore, Burma, South Africa). Of particular note are a few photographs of Japanese soldiers surrendering swords.

Researchers interested in visual documentation of the work of engineers during and following World War II in India will find this collection to be of value; in particular, the photographs of the building of the Palel-Tamu Road and the Tamu-Kalewa Road.

One gets the sense that the creator had a great affection for the people he met which is emphasized in his own words at the end of the album: “With a heavy heart, I left a life and a country which had been my home for five years and where I really knew the meaning of companionship, friendship and a worthwhile duty.”

The photographs in the album do not always seem to be in chronological order and only a very few photographs are dated, although it can be assumed that for the most part the volume is chronological. It is often difficult to tell if the creator is on leave or on active duty and whether the travel is for pleasure or part of his work as an engineer. The photographs are well-captioned and include both factual and personal reflections of his experiences.

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## Administrative Information

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University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts

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### **Access Restrictions**

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## **Controlled Access Headings**

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### **CORPORATE NAME(S)**

- India. Army. Royal Bombay Sappers and Miners.

### **FORM/GENRE(S)**

- Photograph albums
- Photographs

### **GEOGRAPHIC NAME(S)**

- India--History--British occupation, 1765-1947--Photographs
- India--Photographs
- India--Social life and customs

### **SUBJECT(S)**

- **Military engineers--India**
- **World War, 1939-1945--India**

## Collection Inventory

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	Volume
Photograph album, 1942-1947.	1