WHAT SHOULD WE REMEMBER ABOUT THE 'FORGOTTEN ARMY'?

Equipment issued to British forces serving in Burma

Catalogue ref: AIR 23/4297

What is this source?

This source comes from a training manual used to prepare RAF pilots and service personnel ready for combat in jungle conditions. The source shows equipment issued to help pilots who were forced to parachute out of their aircraft to survive.

The Training and Intelligence services wanted to ensure that all aircrews carried such equipment on operations.

What's the background to this source?

WW2 broke out in Europe in 1939. In the Far East war broke out on December 7th 1941 when Japanese forces destroyed the US fleet at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. The Japanese quickly followed up this victory with attacks on British held possessions in Malaya, Singapore and Burma. There were real fears that the Japanese would reach India. However, troops from Britain and many parts of the Empire fought a hard campaign to stop the Japanese advance by May 1942. It was not until late 1943 and early 1944 that the Allied forces began to drive the Japanese back. Rangoon, capital of Burma, was finally taken in May 1945.

Burma was a key territory for the Japanese because the Allies used road networks through Burma to supply the Chinese forces fighting Japan. The fighting conditions in this campaign were some of the toughest in any campaign of the war.

It's worth knowing that...

Many of the casualties in the Burma campaign were from diseases like malaria rather than enemy action.

The nature of the campaign meant that African and Indian troops were especially valued as many of them were more accustomed to the climate. Even so, many non-European troops also fell ill.

How will you use this source?

1. Study the 25 items. Can you tell what each one was used for?
2. What does this list of equipment tell us about conditions in the Burma campaign?
3. Would you say this is a valuable and reliable source for the historian?
4. What points from this source will you use in your presentation?

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