Title

Domestic archives of empire: photographing Burma and reconstructing British imperialism for the postwar moment

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Abstract

This article examines how photography documenting the military campaign in Burma was mobilized in efforts to reconstruct the image and idea of the British Empire at the end of the Second World War and for the postwar moment. It analyses a selection of popular publications which – although largely overlooked today – provided visual instruction for white Anglophone audiences in the late 1940s on the rectitude and importance of continuing British imperialism after the Allied victory. These encompass the commercial periodicals, *Hutchinson's Pictorial History of the War* and *The War Illustrated*, as well as *Phoenix*, a photo-magazine produced by and for South East Asia Command, and *The Campaign in Burma*, a photo-book issued by the Central Office of Information. These publications were intended to be kept for posterity in the family home, acting as what we term 'domestic archives of empire' for large, dispersed Anglophone audiences across the globe. Such publications represented the empire at war and in peacetime, circulating carefully calibrated images that reconstructed an ideology of imperialism supposedly fit for the postwar moment. At the time of their publication, these 'domestic archives of empire' exhorted white Anglophone readers to view the British Empire as embodying a liberal and tolerant mission

with a central role to play in post-conflict rebuilding. Today, they offer fascinating insights into a vernacular history of empire on the verge of fragmentation, presaging the challenges of reconstruction and decolonisation and the development of imperial nostalgia.

Keywords

Photography, Second World War, Reconstruction, Postwar, British Empire, Burma, Imperialism

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Introduction

From iconic photographs to contemporary films, the dominant imagery in British cultural memories of the Second World War emphasizes the European theatre of conflict. The Normandy Landings act as the defining 'event' encapsulating this Eurocentric view of the war and its end. Within this national frame of commemoration and celebration, the perspectives of white male protagonists as soldier-heroes take centre stage. This selective focus on the European front belies the worldwide coverage of this global conflict in the press and official publications at the time. The privileging of such a worldview, however, was pre-eminent across reporting of the 1940s – whether from the skies above Europe, the Atlantic Ocean, the deserts of North Africa or the jungles of South East Asia. Such visual imaginaries partook of long-established cultural scripts of Britishness intertwined with the British Empire as a military, economic and cultural project. This article analyses the ways in which photography from Burma (now Myanmar) was used to reimagine the British Empire in the wake of war and to instruct white Anglophone readers in the rightness of the continuation of British colonial rule. In the words of F. B. Malim, Chairman of the Imperial Studies Committee of the Royal Empire Society, audiences across the globe were being instructed in

how to be ‘empire-minded’ for the postwar moment (Malim, 1944: 221). This article will examine how an ‘empire-consciousness’ was advocated in photographic representations via a set of visual strategies that promoted the ‘Empire brand itself’ (Motrescu-Mayes, 2021: 75). By analysing popular commercial periodicals, as well as photo-magazines and photo-books produced by the armed forces and the Central Office of Information, this article will focus on what we term ‘domestic archives of empire’. We characterize as such popular publications that represented the empire at war and in peacetime via purposefully calibrated images designed to communicate and maintain an ideology of empire fit for the postwar moment. As we will argue, these publications – collected, reread and shared at home in the 1940s – impressed upon readers a highly self-conscious image of the benevolent rule of Empire just as campaigns for independence were gaining traction.

Visual culture was always central to British colonialism, mobilized to connect those ‘at home’ with imperial subjects overseas (whether colonized peoples or colonial administrators) and to communicate the scale, breadth and purported values of the British Empire. Elizabeth Edwards (2020) highlights the role of photography from the mid-nineteenth century in this endeavour: from private photographs taken abroad and pasted into family albums to the reproduction of half-tone photographs in illustrated journals consulted in public libraries. Indeed photography – travelling across borders, appearing concurrently across territories of the empire – helped underpin a modern conception of ‘Britishness’ at the height of the British Empire. This notion of Britishness (sometimes termed ‘Britannic nationalism’) extended beyond the coastlines of the British Isles to encompass self-governing white Anglophone settler communities in Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand (Gildea, 2019: 30-31). From the early 1900s, these territories were referred to as ‘Dominions’ to distinguish them from the colonies governed directly by Britain. Visual culture contributed to this

imagined community of 'Britishness' connecting white contemporaries around the globe, as well as white predecessors across the generations. These photographically facilitated imperial imaginaries were consumed across the private sphere (where shared family reading amplified their effects) and the public sphere (where ceremony and spectacle imbued them with historical imagination). In the postwar moment, the challenge of 'reconstructing empire' precipitated urgent attempts 'to find new bases to legitimate empire' (Cooper, 2011: 196). Photography, as a consequence of its centrality to British colonialism, was considered a valuable resource to meet the demands of this project of 'political reconstruction and the building of an inclusive empire' (Cooper, 2011: 197). This article will address a set of publishing formats, spanning the private and public domains, produced by collaborations between official institutions and commercial organisations and constituting domestic archives of empire.

This article begins by mapping the visual relationship between empire, nation and war in mid-twentieth century Britain. It then focuses on the strategic importance and publicity value of Burma in the mid-1940s before moving on to analyse the contexts and conditions for producing official and commercial war photography. In so doing, it will historicize the production of popular wartime photo-magazines, as well as government-sponsored propaganda produced for the British Central Office of Information, and explain how domestic archives of empire took shape and were disseminated. The article then turns to examine recurrent themes across four photographically illustrated publications which have not been widely analysed as historical primary sources to date: two commercial publications (*Hutchinson's Pictorial History of the War* and *The War Illustrated*) and two official publications (*Phoenix* and *The Campaign in Burma*). The recurring themes in the photographic coverage of the situation in Burma are: the white soldier-hero; surveillance,

inspection and eye-witnessing; picturing racialized forms of togetherness; and visualizations of peace-building work that sought to restore colonial control. To conclude, the article will discuss why analysing such popular publications today is significant for advancing thinking about the end of empire and the politics of memory in twenty-first century Britain. Too often 'invisible' to scholars today as the ephemera of wartime propaganda and persuasion, such publications reveal how far empire-consciousness reached into the very fabric of British domestic life, shaping imperial ideologies and imaginaries.

Visual instruction and 'togetherness' for a postwar empire

The photographically illustrated publications on which this article focuses are defined by their mobilization of photographic material with deliberate pedagogical intent – a key facet of the culture of empire. The Colonial Office Visual Instruction Committee (1902-45), for instance, used photography for the assumed pedagogical value of picturing empire in classrooms and other educational settings. The Committee produced a series of lantern slide lectures for the children of Britain about the empire and for children of the empire about the 'Mother Country' with photographs used to classify, categorize and concretize British imperial endeavours (Ryan, 1997; Moser, 2017). These vehicles of visual instruction prioritized symbols of progress and technology, such as newly constructed bridges and railways, as well as representations of order, discipline and military valour, to project the image of a harmonious union of peoples and cultures under British rule. Such depictions provided a formative channel for educating the next cadre of British imperial administrators, entrepreneurs and missionaries. Yet, the resultant repertoire of visualizations naturalized the repression and exploitation of the colonial system. Visual instruction efforts were consolidated by the establishment of the Empire Marketing Board in 1926. In the words of Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, Leo Amery, its aim was to 'bring the Empire alive to

the minds of its citizens' via 'a picture of vivid human interest, as well as of practical promise' and thereby 'sell […] the idea of the Empire as a co-operative venture between living persons interested in each other's work, and in each other's welfare' (cited by L'Etaing, 1998: 422). These educational initiatives thus promoted a worldview that envisioned a benign, interconnected empire – 'an imagined global community with a rightful place for each citizen' (Moser, 2017: 218).

By the interwar period, thinking photographically and thinking imperially (see Ryan, 1994) were thus firmly intertwined in the public imagination in the UK and the Dominions. This pedagogical and publicity role of photography was a two-way street, not only bringing the empire home but also projecting Britain abroad. Secretary of the Empire Marketing Board, Stephen Tallents, published *The Projection of England* (1932) – a fitting filmic analogy given the utilization of visual culture to craft the international public image of Britain and its empire. This visual publicity work continued into the Second World War via multiple campaigns overseen by the Ministry of Information. The Colonial Film Unit (1939-55), for instance, sought to circulate imagery that 'advertised the virtues of Britain as a liberal and tolerant nation, and demonstrated common resistance to Nazi Germany by a temperate empire that was neither racist nor oppressive' (Webster, 2005: 29; see also Rice, 2019). This idealized image of the British Empire at war is encapsulated in William Little's 1941 poster, 'Together'.[1] It depicts troops from Canada, Australia, Britain, South Africa, New Zealand, India and Africa united under the Union Jack. Yet, with Indian and African soldiers marching at the rear behind a community of white Britons, the racialized hierarchy of colonial forces in wartime is evident (Sealy 2019: 141).

In the immediate postwar years, this national self-conceit of a benign British Empire was reconfigured, as the Second World War and postwar challenges destabilized acceptance of European imperial projects. The period from the mid- to late-1940s represented an important shift when ‘a world hospitable to empires became more hostile to them’ (Stockwell, 2017: 65). In its effort to regain and retain imperial power, Britain was drawn into strategies for reconstructing ideologies of imperialism and the brand image of empire. As if by default, this initiative was to draw heavily on the resources of photography. Such a recasting of the imperial imaginary can be seen at work in coverage of Burma, a country whose postwar trajectory is representative of a broader (largely unforeseen) processes of decolonisation in the period of geopolitical uncertainty after 1945.

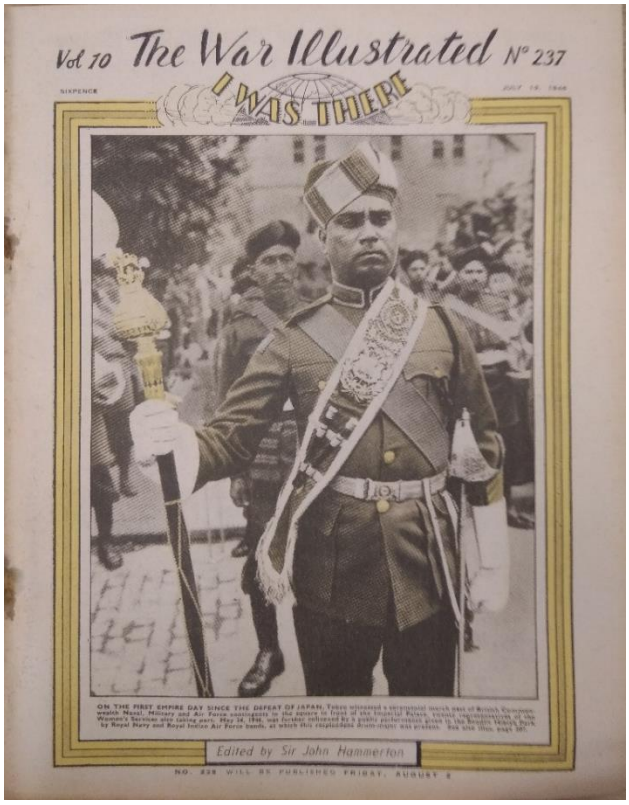


Fig. 1 Cover photograph of drum-major from the Royal India Air Force band in Hibya Park, Tokyo; ‘On the first Empire Day since the defeat of Japan’, *The War Illustrated*, 19 July 1946

Core to this reconstructed empire-consciousness was the choreography and display of togetherness to forge a 'modernised imperial identity of egalitarianism' (Webster, 2005: 56). This is evident in Figure 1 portraying Empire Day on 24 May 1946 in *The War Illustrated*.[2] The cover photograph depicts a 'resplendent' drum-major from the Royal India Air Force band in full ceremonial regalia taking part in a global ceremony by parading in Hibya Park in occupied Tokyo. Aspects of his uniform and mace captured by in the monochrome photograph are highlighted in yellow ink, matching the border framing the photograph. The depiction foregrounds a sense of spectacle and tradition, yet by focusing on one uniformed individual – pictured as part of a wider community and seemingly engrossed in his duties – this photograph also seeks to convey a sense of place for and commitment by colonial subjects in a modern British Empire. Circulated nearly a year after the end of the war, this photographic image performs an assertion of a renewed imperial ideology impelled by growing independence movements. The rhetorical contours of this effort to reconstruct imperial worldviews was articulated by HRH Princess Elizabeth in her Empire Day speech delivered in London that year. Announcing her plans to tour the empire and speaking of the 'noble brotherhood' between 'the mother country' and the nations of the commonwealth, in her speech, Princess Elizabeth expressed the central tenets of a postwar imperial ideology, framed as 'common ideals of freedom, justice and humanity which are to be found in every corner of our empire' and emphasising the existential importance of empire: 'for a year in this last war we of the empire stood together and alone and by doing so saved civilisation. Let us enshrine this truth in our hearts'.[3] This vision of the British Empire as a continuing partnership is encapsulated on the cover of *The War Illustrated* where caption and image together contrast the purportedly free and benevolent union of the British Empire with the hostility and subjugation of the defeated Japanese empire.

Rebuilding ideologies of empire: the case of Burma

At the outbreak of the Second World War, British rule in Burma was already over a century old. Following the growth of nationalist sentiment, Burma had been overseen directly by the British state from 1937. In 1942, military operations by imperial Japan sought to secure natural resources, enlarge markets and ensure security through expansion into Allied colonial territories including French Indochina, Dutch Indonesia, Australian-held territory in Papua New Guinea and the American Philippines, as well as taking Singapore, Malaya and Burma from Britain. The defeat of British rule in Burma received widespread media coverage and continued to be a source of public interest with as many as half of the 26 reporters who covered the retreat subsequently publishing book-length accounts (see Woods, 2017). Japanese occupation of Burma disrupted rice imports west to territories in British India and the movement of supplies eastwards to support nationalist Chinese forces led by Chiang Kai-shek. Thus, expelling Japanese forces from the former British colony was considered strategically important. In August 1943, South East Asia Command (SEAC) was established under Admiral Lord Mountbatten and his deputy US Army General Joseph Stilwell. Conveying the scale of the defeat the year before and the effort invested in this battlefront, the SEAC insignia was a phoenix rising from the flames. Substantial numbers of colonial soldiers were integral to the Allied effort. Around 70,000 Indian and 120,000 African troops participated in the Burma campaign led by General Slim, as well as pro-Allied Burmese forces in the British Burma Army (Gildea, 2019: 60). From early 1945, with Allied forces advancing through Europe, increasing attention was paid to coverage of the strategically important China-Burma-India theatre of war with extensive photographic coverage continuing into the postwar years.

Despite official rhetoric to the contrary, this was not simply a fight to expel Japan. The ultimate objective of the British was to restore imperial rule, with SEAC derisively referred to by American troops as 'Save England's Asian Colonies' (Bayly and Harper 2008: 11). Yet, as ideas of self-determination articulated in the Atlantic Charter (1941) gained traction internationally, it became difficult to envisage a return to the status quo. As a result, in response to 'increasing pressure to present a modern empire' to the world, a concerted wartime effort to articulate a refashioned ideology of empire stressing partnership was increasingly prevalent from 1942 (Webster, 2005: 26). Moreover, Japan's sweep through South East Asia had delivered a blow to the prestige of British and other European empires. With the end of the campaign to retake Burma following the Japanese surrender in August 1945, Allied General Order No. 1 determined governance of this war-torn territory and saw SEAC take control of postwar Burma, Indochina, Malaya, Indonesia and elsewhere. The exigencies of wartime alliances and the challenges of postwar reconstruction were reflected in changing ideas, vocabularies and visualizations of empire. Responding to this new geopolitical and discursive terrain, British officials sought to reconstruct ideas of liberal British imperialism and to promote the British Commonwealth as a vehicle for appropriate postwar values. Before 1945, this term was generally used to refer to the white settler communities in self-governing Dominions, such as Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. For the postwar moment, its meaning was expanded to encompass British colonies.

Britain sought simultaneously to reconfigure the image of empire and to reassert imperial control, fashioning a national self-image exemplifying social democratic values that contrasted with the communist USSR and capitalist USA (Stockwell, 2017: 73). This inflection of the ideology of imperialism tried to accommodate postwar geopolitics; the idea being that liberal imperialism would bring nations up to point where self-governance was

possible within the framework of the British Commonwealth. This moment saw a significant 'postwar expansion of overseas publicity and information services [that] reflected this awareness of diminished power and the need to convince the world that traditional prestige and skills could compensate for economic and military decline' (Adamthwaite, 1985: 231). Efforts to re-establish British power by rebuilding the contours of empire also required sustained deployment of troops. In late 1946, as many as 250,000 Indian troops were still serving overseas including in South East Asian countries as well as the Middle East (Butler, 2001: 72). The aim of military deployments, diplomacy and publicity alike were to make it evident Britain would overcome the setbacks of war – albeit such strategies were based on unrealistic assessments of the challenges faced (Adamthwaite, 1985: 226).

However, Burmese nationalists were not compliant. The Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League, led by Aung San and which grew out of resistance to Japanese occupation from 1944, opposed the reassertion of Western colonialism from 1945. Following Indian independence and the subsequent partition in 1947, it became untenable to deny Burma self-determination and elections held in April 1947 were won by Aung San. Notwithstanding his assassination in July, Britain was forced to grant independence to Burma in a ceremony that took place on 4 January 1948.[4] The independence of India, Pakistan and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) further eroded the public image of imperial Britain, with independent Burma choosing not to become part of the British Commonwealth. In October 1948, to underscore a redoubled commitment to the values of 'modernity, democracy, and freedom as a "people's empire"', the word 'British' was dropped from 'British Commonwealth' (Webster 2005: 62). In retrospect, such initiatives appear largely counter-productive serving only to demonstrate how many in the British establishment misjudged the postwar moment and efforts towards decolonisation. Thus, Burma offers an particularly rich case study for analysing British

attempts to bolster and promote 'empire-mindedness' through visual publicity as a long-standing imperial possession; a site of heroic military engagement with the Axis powers; and a locus for efforts to reassert British imperial power as empire fragmented.

Visual publicity, official photography and pictorializing war

The role of visual publicity in promoting ideas of empire was already a highly coordinated effort by the outbreak of the Second World War. The British Ministry of Information (MOI) contributed to developing and disseminating material publicizing the war effort for countries of the British Empire and projecting abroad an image of the empire at war. In so doing, MOI gave particular prominence to photographic representations. Aware that it was competing with commercial media for public attention, MOI drew on advertising codes and press strategies developed during the interwar years (including innovative publication formats like *Picture Post* photo-magazine launched in 1938) to deliver persuasive messaging about the war effort. MOI output thus entailed 'a process of mobilizing commercial and popular culture to […] communicate to as large a part of society as possible' (Eliot & Wiggam, 2020: 3). The photographically illustrated publication was a vital vehicle of visual publicity, since posters, leaflets and booklets facilitated the dissemination of 'detailed information combined with glossy photographs and illustrations that provided a visual punch' (Welch, 2016: 168). Indeed, Head of the MOI Publications Division was Robert Fraser who had worked for Odhams Press when Britain's first modern photo-magazine, *Weekly Illustrated*, was launched in 1934. Fraser oversaw the production of photo-histories of various campaigns of the Second World War, including territories of the British Empire. This popular format foregrounded the photographic image. As Fraser advocated: 'it must so use pictures as to become two books in one – a picture book and a text book – and it must carry the full propaganda message once in the text and for a second time in the pictures' (cited by Holman, 2005: 213). MOI photo-

histories were widely circulated with apparently more than half of the population having seen one and a quarter having seen three or more.[5]

The MOI thus drew on the expertise of the press and publishing industry to maximize the propaganda potential of photography, but it also influenced the tenor and texture of commercial publications circulating in Britain and overseas. As Francis Williams, former Editor of *The Daily Herald* and MOI Controller of Press Censorship and News, observed, 'Photographs were one of the most potent instruments of war-time information. The really superb picture […] could have the same effect upon public opinion abroad as a great victory' (Williams, 1946: 215-6). In recognition of this public information value, the Army Film and Photographic Unit (AFPU) was established in October 1941. AFPU cameramen included soldiers with little prior photographic experience alongside professionals like *Picture Post*'s Bert Hardy. Members were trained in concepts of news gathering and news value, as well as how to construct coverage through sequences of still or moving images. AFPU's ethos is credited to New Zealander Hugh Stewart and 'his conception of the combat cameraman as a trained soldier filming [and photographing] actuality in the front line' (Gladstone, 2002: 329). AFPU was organized into units, tasked with reporting on specific theatres of war. In September 1943, No. 9 Unit was created under SEAC command. Tasked with securing a comprehensive picture of the situation in South East Asia, No. 9 Unit operated until August 1946 documenting postwar trials and executions, as well as efforts towards material and educational reconstruction. With explicit directives to focus on the human aspect of the fighting and the responses of soldiers and civilians, No. 9 Unit photographers were encouraged to focus on positive narratives of a return to old ways of life and symbols of the overcoming of Japanese occupation, such as the removal of Japanese signage and tearing down posters (McGlade, 2002: 168-9). Charged with both creating a historical record and

fulfilling a vital publicity function, the AFPU became an essential source of photographs for official publications issued by MOI and a principal means of disseminating official imagery to the commercial press. Consequently, this dual focus on publicity and posterity permeates many photographic publications of the 1940s and is evident in the four publications that are central to this article.

Still pictures from No. 9 Unit were used extensively in official British wartime publications, as well as SEAC material, like the service newspaper for Allied troops, *SEAC Souvenir*, and a weekly photo-magazine, *Phoenix*. Both titles were produced under the instruction of Mountbatten and directed by Frank Owen, SEAC member and former editor of the London *Evening Standard*.[6] With high production values and printed on durable coated paper for SEAC troops, *Phoenix* ran for a year from 24 February 1945 with half of the issues published after the end of the war on 2 September. These publications followed a widespread model of promoting current affairs and disseminating public information to serving troops through visual material.[7] As recorded in his diary, Mountbatten envisaged *Phoenix* as 'a weekly picture magazine on the *Life – Picture Post* model' and 'a joint Anglo-American publication so as to bring the American and British forces closer together in this theatre' (Zeigler, 1988: 176). As well as acknowledging *Life*'s influence, an editorial by Ian Coster in the final issue of *Phoenix* (16 February 1946) also cited *National Geographic* as a potential influence on the magazine. This is evident in photo-features profiling South East Asian cities including Rangoon via which the editorial team sought to influence Allied soldiers' perspective on their host countries: 'as most of them were fed up with [British] India, we ought to say, gently and persistently, "This is a most interesting place, full of strange customs, beauties, and ugliness and, if you'd been invited to come here on a trip in peace, you'd have jumped at it"'. With a modest print run of 30,000 copies, a third of *Phoenix* issues were ordered by civilian

distributors and many troops ordered copies to be sent home. Looking back, it was clear to the editorial team behind the magazine that they had been 'providing the fighting troops with illustrations to their postwar memories' and thereby creating domestic archives of war and empire.[8]

No. 9 Unit photographs were also distributed and reproduced in commercial publications designed to be collected and preserved, such as *Hutchinson's Pictorial History of the War* and *The War Illustrated*. The illustrated press in wartime Britain and the Dominions mobilized a patriotic template that championed the purported values of the British Empire exemplified by more established titles, like *Illustrated London News* launched in the nineteenth-century.[9] *Hutchinson's Pictorial History of the War* was a weekly illustrated magazine that ran from 1939 to 1945. Edited by Walter Hutchinson, it was published by Hutchinson and Co. with offices in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.[10] Hutchinson's publications were noted for their popular appeal including serialized educational works in which illustrations were a principal feature. Each instalment of *Hutchinson's Pictorial History of the War* followed the same format. A wrap-round paper banner advertized the main features of the issue and promoted the publication as 'a beautiful standard work for every home'. On the back of each paper banner was an advert for binding cases to preserve and display the collection. Inside, the publication reproduced black and white photographs taken in the field. Short captions accompanied all photographs, although individual photographers and photographic sources were not credited. A centre fold drawing depicting a war scene – from the air, on the ground, over water – provided a pull-out cinematographic imagining of war by Montague B. Black.[11] Each issue had three short narrative sections: a personal feature written by a senior political figure or serving commander, a weekly 'commentary on the war', and lastly a 'history of the war in brief'. All

sections reinforced an ethos of visual instruction, supporting official war propaganda messaging around British pluck and valour.

A comparable fortnightly illustrated periodical, *War Illustrated* was reprised from a successful run during the First World War. It was edited by John Hammerton, a publishing innovator renowned for producing serialized encyclopaedias and other educational publications issued in instalments. Published by Amalgamated Press, *War Illustrated* initially achieved circulation figures of a million copies and was distributed in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa (Hammerton, 1944: 290).[12] The centre fold was printed on higher quality paper and suitable for pinning-up, while consecutive issues were designed to be collated and collected. As Hammerton noted in his editorial for the final issue of 11 April 1947, the aim of the publication was 'to record and illustrate the war news after it had been verified and censored'. *War Illustrated* was thus a self-consciously semi-official patriotic publishing project, addressing white audiences across the globe with photographs credited to both official and commercial sources. Like *Hutchinson's*, *War Illustrated* devoted substantial coverage to the military campaign in Burma.

Like the serialized issues of these commercial magazines intended for domestic consumption, a photo-book was published for veterans of the Burma campaign and their families on the model of the popular wartime MOI photo-histories. *The Campaign in Burma* (1946) was a spin-off from the initiative behind *Phoenix* magazine. It was published by the Central Office of Information which, from April 1946, replaced the disbanded MOI. The new government body continued certain MOI publishing initiatives. This included issuing campaign photo-histories like *Among Those Present: The Official Story of the Pacific Islands at War* (1946) for the Colonial Office. As well as British audiences, COI publications targeted

Commonwealth countries through 'a continuation of the type of literature that it [the British government] had disseminated to the Empire during the war' underpinned by 'a paternalistic assumption of the innate superiority of Great Britain as the guardian of civilisation and the belief in the notion of the "white man's burden" that underpinned history textbooks in British schools in the 1950s and 1960s' (Welch, 2019: 100). Edited by Frank Owen, *The Campaign in Burma* made use of official photographs to provide a detailed history of the battle to expel the Japanese from Burma and to visualize and negotiate the postwar challenges of reconstruction.

As publications made to be collected, conserved and consulted at home, these titles pictorialized current affairs to a broad and diverse readership of soldiers and citizens across the empire. They were aimed at 'British' readers broadly conceived – i.e., white Anglophone readers of the UK and the Dominions. They sought to be commemorative artefacts, shaping and fixing a particular image of the British Empire in war and peace. While they drew their photographs largely from official sources, like the AFPU, their modes of representation and the propaganda messaging represented public information initiatives that cut across official and commercial domains. *Hutchinson's* and *War Illustrated* operated in collaboration with military authorities and government sponsors in their construction of patriotic and propagandistic narratives of war. At the same time, official public information campaigns drew on industry expertise and personnel to produce publications like *Phoenix* and *Campaign in Burma*. Whether principally aimed at soldiers or civilians, veterans or their families, these publications reached into homes across the empire where they were compiled and conserved.

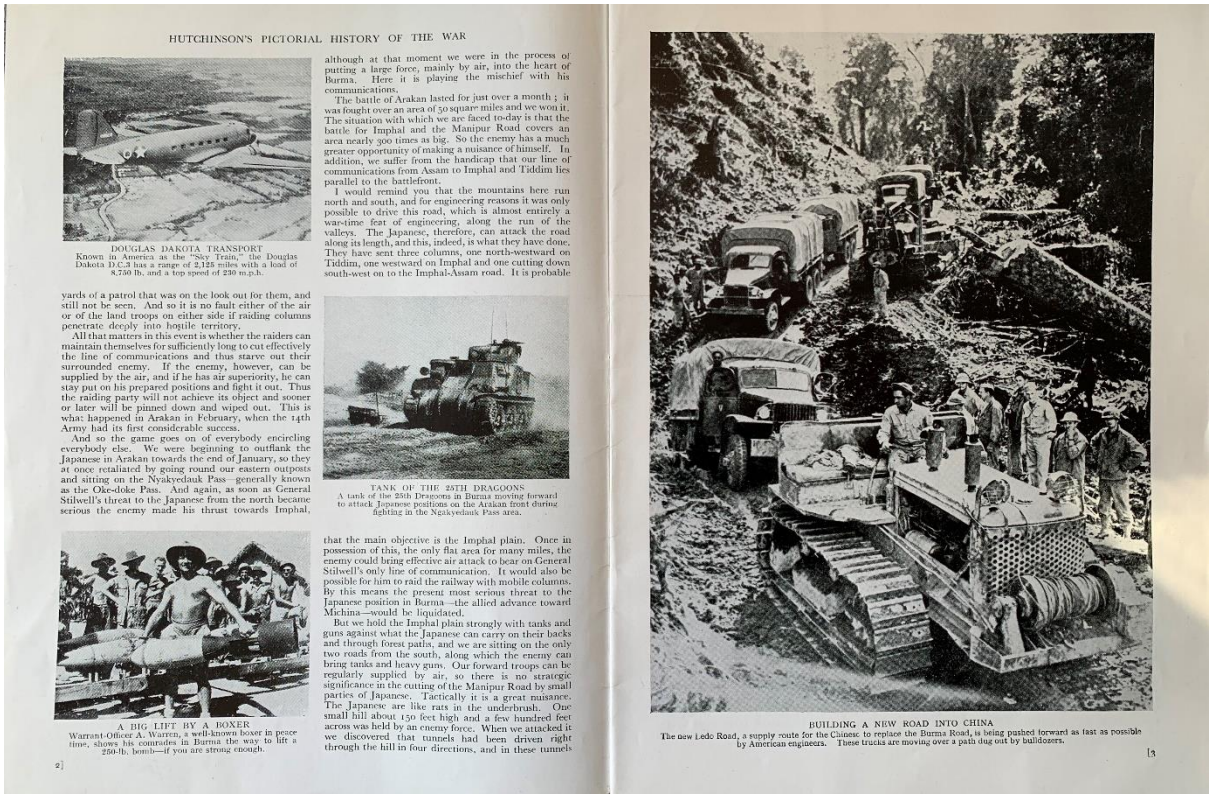
Such titles constitute 'domestic archives of empire', drawing on traditions of visual instruction long associated with British colonialism and aiming to reconstruct the image and

idea of a liberal British civilising mission for the postwar moment. They instantiate a concerted effort through photographic material to domesticate empire as both an adventure story and a picture of togetherness which could be consumed, shared and commemorated in the form of collectable volumes for a home library. They crystallize much of the 'empire-consciousness' of their day and its intersection with constructions of masculinity, race and the rebuilding of empire for the postwar moment. In the following sections, we examine four recurrent themes in their coverage of the situation in Burma: the white soldier-hero; surveillance, inspection and eye-witnessing; picturing racialized forms of togetherness; and visualizations of peace-building work that sought to restore colonial control.

The white soldier-hero

The most prominent image from visual reporting of the situation in Burma was the white male soldier, stripped to the waist, wearing a slouch hat or similar and carrying a gun or other device. For instance, the cover image for *The Campaign in Burma* shows Private J. George of the South Wales Borderers on patrol, a Bren gun on his shoulder and a cigarette held between his lips.[13] Similarly, Figure 2 shows a double-page spread from *Hutchinson's* (12-18 April 1944) with a photograph bottom left of a shirtless white solider lifting a bomb, performing his masculinity in front of an approving crowd. The caption reads, 'A Big Lift by a Boxer. Warrant-Officer A. Warren, a well-known boxer in peace time, shows his comrades in Burma, the way to lift a 250-Ib bomb – if you are strong enough'. Warren beams as he displays his physical prowess, mastering not only his own physicality, but military hardware. This model of heroic masculinity was, as Graham Dawson has argued, 'fused in an especially potent configuration with representations of British imperial identity' (Dawson 1994: 1). An established fantasy figure, the soldier-hero was an archetype that materialized 'the social world' in the age of empire – a cultural form that had real effects (Dawson 1994: 22). As part

of a repertoire of shared cultural narratives centred on empire, the white soldier-hero was a touchstone for social identities for younger readers, drawing them imaginatively and literally into a shared story of empire and Britishness. This pervasive cultural template exhorted white men in particular to identify as ‘British’ and project themselves into what Dawson calls ‘a masculine pleasure-culture of war’ (Dawson 1994: 4).



HUTCHINSON'S PICTORIAL HISTORY OF THE WAR

DOUGLAS DAKOTA TRANSPORT
Known in America as the "Sky Train," the Douglas Dakota D.C.3 has a range of 2,125 miles with a load of 8,750 lb. and a top speed of 230 m.p.h.

yards of a patrol that was on the look out for them, and still not be seen. And so it is no fault either of the air or of the land troops on either side if raiding columns penetrate deeply into hostile territory.

All that matters in this event is whether the raiders can maintain themselves for sufficiently long to cut effectively the line of communications and thus starve out their surrounded enemy. If the enemy, however, can be supplied by the air, and if he has air superiority, he can stay put on his prepared positions and fight it out. Thus the raiding party will not achieve its object and sooner or later will be pinned down and wiped out. This is what happened in Arakan in February, when the 14th Army had its first considerable success.

And so the game goes on of everybody encircling everybody else. We were beginning to outflank the Japanese in Arakan towards the end of January, so they at once retaliated by going round our eastern outposts and sitting on the Nyakyedauk Pass—generally known as the Oke-doke Pass. And again, as soon as General Stilwell's threat to the Japanese from the north became serious the enemy made his thrust towards Imphal,

A BIG LIFT BY A BOXER
Warrant-Officer A. Warren, a well-known boxer in peace time, shows his comrades in Burma the way to lift a 250-lb. bomb—if you are strong enough.

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although at that moment we were in the process of putting a large force, mainly by air, into the heart of Burma. Here it is playing the mischief with his communications.

The battle of Arakan lasted for just over a month; it was fought over an area of 50 square miles and we won it. The situation with which we are faced to-day is that the battle for Imphal and the Manipur Road covers an area nearly 300 times as big. So the enemy has a much greater opportunity of making a nuisance of himself. In addition, we suffer from the handicap that our line of communications from Assam to Imphal and Tiddim lies parallel to the battlefront.

I would remind you that the mountains here run north and south, and for engineering reasons it was only possible to drive this road, which is almost entirely a war-time feat of engineering, along the run of the valleys. The Japanese, therefore, can attack the road along its length, and this, indeed, is what they have done. They have sent three columns, one north-westward on Tiddim, one westward on Imphal and one cutting down south-west on to the Imphal-Assam road. It is probable

TANK OF THE 25TH DRAGOONS
A tank of the 25th Dragoons in Burma moving forward to attack Japanese positions on the Arakan front during fighting in the Nyakyedauk Pass area.

that the main objective is the Imphal plain. Once in possession of this, the only flat area for many miles, the enemy could bring effective air attack to bear on General Stilwell's only line of communication. It would also be possible for him to raid the railway with mobile columns. By this means the present most serious threat to the Japanese position in Burma—the allied advance toward Michna—would be liquidated.

But we hold the Imphal plain strongly with tanks and guns against what the Japanese can carry on their backs and through forest paths, and we are sitting on the only two roads from the south, along which the enemy can bring tanks and heavy guns. Our forward troops can be regularly supplied by air, so there is no strategic significance in the cutting of the Manipur Road by small parties of Japanese. Tactically it is a great nuisance. The Japanese are like rats in the underbrush. One small hill about 150 feet high and a few hundred feet across was held by an enemy force. When we attacked it we discovered that tunnels had been driven right through the hill in four directions, and in these tunnels

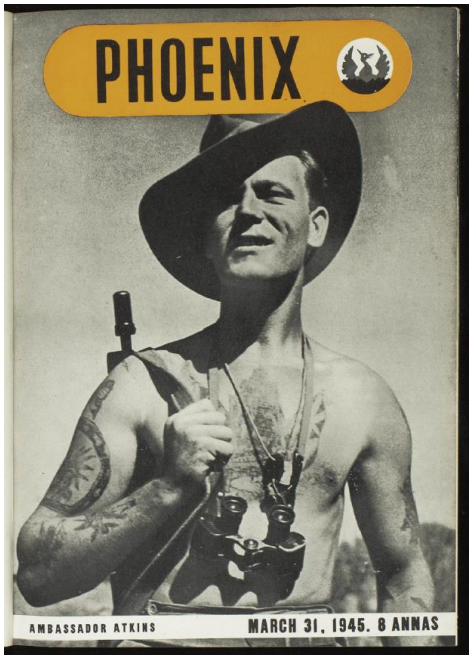
BUILDING A NEW ROAD INTO CHINA
The new Ledo Road, a supply route for the Chinese to replace the Burma Road, is being pushed forward as fast as possible by American engineers. These trucks are moving over a path dug out by bulldozers.

13

Fig.2 Double-page spread including 4 photographs including a transport aircraft, tank, a soldier lifting ordnance, and the construction of a new road; ‘Battlefront in Burma’, *Hutchinson’s Pictorial History of the War*, 12-18 April 1944

This common visual trope was repeated in the winning shot of a photo-competition launched by *Phoenix* immediately following the defeat of Japan. Open to Allied servicemen and women and inviting ‘snapshots or posed pictures of news or general interest suitable for reproduction’ (*Phoenix*, 1 September 1945), it was won by RAF Corporal H. F. Meaden with a posed portrait taken from a slightly raised position of a soldier (shirtless but wearing a hat) who conveys an air of both resolution and conviviality. The photograph was titled ‘Burma

Star' after the military campaign medal awarded from May 1945.[14] The caption also carries associations with cinema-influenced visual depictions of male military heroes. Indeed, Meaden's photograph could be a production still from a movie set and was praised by competition judges for being the 'slickest, professional job' of all entries (*Phoenix*, 17 November 1945). This places the heroic portrait of an average, unnamed veteran in conversation with the glamorous pin-ups of female Hollywood stars that appeared weekly in *Phoenix*.[15] That this was the winning photo selected reveals how pervasive this cultural imaginary of the shirtless white soldier-hero was. Similarly, one of the last images in *The Campaign in Burma* depicts two bare-chested servicemen, with slouch hats and cigarettes, laying telephone wires through a forest, with captions emphasizing their emblematic status 'the Fourteenth was any army that worked stripped to the belt'. Thus, notwithstanding the diversity of Allied forces serving in South East Asia, such images acted as the face of the Burma campaign through photographic reportage that meshed historic representations of white imperial soldiery with contemporary visual culture.



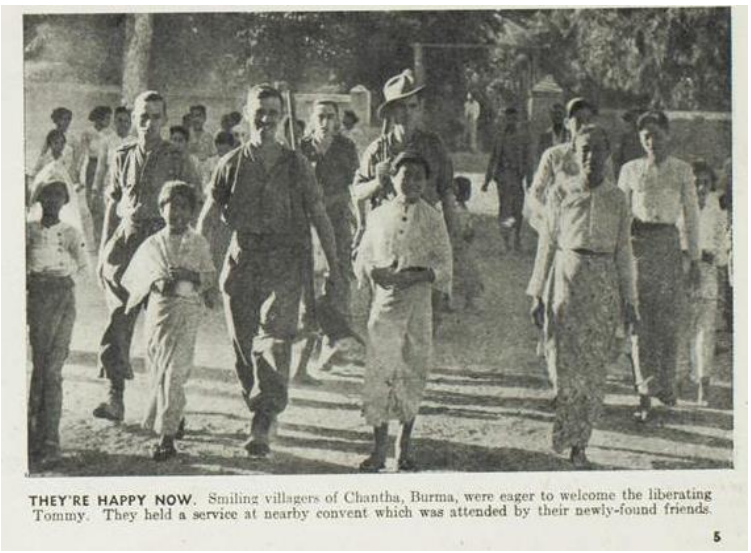


Fig 3a Cover photograph of Royal Scots Fusilier; 'Ambassador Atkins', *Phoenix*, 31 March 1945

Fig. 3b Photograph of British soldiers with civilian women and children in Chantha, Burma; 'They're happy now', *Phoenix*, 31 March 1945

This image of the 'British' (i.e., white Anglophone) soldier-hero, however, was not simply concerned with asserting a particular hyper-masculinity. It was also connected with defining ideas of empire for the postwar moment. A cover image and three-page article in *Phoenix* (31 March 1945) articulated this objective. Titled 'Ambassador Atkins', it projected an image of the diplomatic role that the archetypal British soldier (so-called 'Tommy Atkins') could play among citizens in postwar nations. The article looks at the relationship between British troops and civilians, stressing Tommy Atkins's contribution in assisting and befriending people in the wake of war. Through a host of photographs from liberated Europe alongside a selection from South East Asia, the British soldier is characterized as a 'natural diplomat'. The cover photograph of Glaswegian D. Miller of Royal Scots Fusiliers (Figure 3a) shot slightly from below his eyeline, shows him stripped to the waist and tattooed, hat on to shield him from the sun's glare, and a gun over one shoulder to show his preparedness. Moreover, with binoculars around his neck and a gaze that travels up and out of the photographic frame, his vision and foresight is implied, as well as his vigilance. Regarding his ambassadorial role in South East Asia, readers are informed: 'Ambassador Atkins is doing pretty well out in this part of the world, too […] and he doesn't behave as the old pre-1914 regular is alleged to have behaved.' It includes a photo of a Tommy feeding Chinese soldiers in the CBI Theatre, as well as 'smiling villagers of Chantha, Burma, […] eager to welcome the liberating Tommy' (Figure 3b) in a photograph titled, 'They're happy now'. Such coverage represents a conscious effort both to influence the conduct of the British soldier (with his 'big heart and useful hands'),

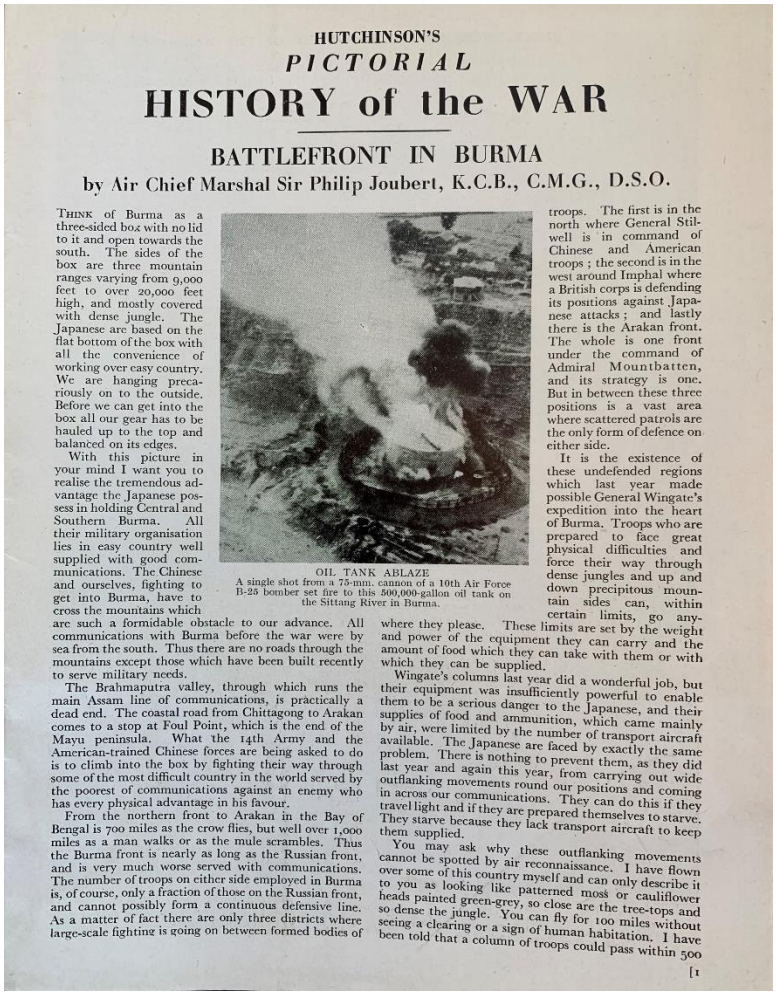
and to reconstruct the image of British imperialism abroad as the geopolitics of colonialism shifted on the international stage.

Surveillance, inspection and eye-witnessing

In Figure 3a, Royal Scots Fusilier Miller looks meaningfully beyond the edge of the photographic frame, as if apprehending something about to happen or yet to come. In this and other examples, it is not only the *image* of the white soldier-hero that performs important cultural work, but also the *perspective* of the soldier-hero. Central to colonialist photographic material from Burma is the inscription of the point of view of the white British soldier – a repeated depiction and naturalization of an ideologically freighted way of looking at the world in general and this territory in particular. Gun sights, binoculars and other visual devices captured in these photographs emphasize the soldier's vision and direct audiences' ways of seeing the postwar world and its challenges, sanitizing the colonial violence upon which it was built. Indeed, even the ubiquitous imagery of Mountbatten and Stillwell conducting parade inspections are visual performances which promote an officially sanctioned perspective. This reveals another ideological layer to the directive given to No. 9 Unit AFPU photographers to capture 'a picture of the human side of the fighting' and prioritize reaction pictures over action shots (cited by McGlade, 2002: 168-9).

This promotion of an imperialist point of view entailed an alignment of masculinity, the surveillance of territory, and technological progress or mastery. Figure 2 exemplifies the visual depiction of the mastery of landscape with the full-page photograph on the righthand side ('Building a New Road to China') showing white martial bodies and machines working in unison to tame the jungle and reshape the landscape. The caption explains: 'The new Ledo Road, a supply route for the Chinese, to replace the Burma Road, is being pushed forward as

fast as possible by American engineers.' Readers are not only shown Allied forces mastering the terrain; they are interpellated into a soldier's visual experience via repeated instances of acts of surveying, observing and seeing. Technology, ingenuity and Allied cooperation support a vision of the white military team as not only triumphant over the elements but always in possession of the masterful perspective.



HUTCHINSON'S
PICTORIAL
HISTORY of the WAR

BATTLEFRONT IN BURMA
by Air Chief Marshal Sir Philip Joubert, K.C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.

THINK of Burma as a three-sided box with no lid to it and open towards the south. The sides of the box are three mountain ranges varying from 9,000 feet to over 20,000 feet high, and mostly covered with dense jungle. The Japanese are based on the flat bottom of the box with all the convenience of working over easy country. We are hanging precariously on to the outside. Before we can get into the box all our gear has to be hauled up to the top and balanced on its edges.

With this picture in your mind I want you to realise the tremendous advantage the Japanese possess in holding Central and Southern Burma. All their military organisation lies in easy country well supplied with good communications. The Chinese and ourselves, fighting to get into Burma, have to cross the mountains which are such a formidable obstacle to our advance. All communications with Burma before the war were by sea from the south. Thus there are no roads through the mountains except those which have been built recently to serve military needs.

OIL TANK ABLAZE
A single shot from a 75-mm. cannon of a 10th Air Force B-25 bomber set fire to this 500,000-gallon oil tank on the Sittang River in Burma.

The Brahmaputra valley, through which runs the main Assam line of communications, is practically a dead end. The coastal road from Chittagong to Arakan comes to a stop at Foul Point, which is the end of the Mayu peninsula. What the 14th Army and the American-trained Chinese forces are being asked to do is to climb into the box by fighting their way through some of the most difficult country in the world served by the poorest of communications against an enemy who has every physical advantage in his favour.

From the northern front to Arakan in the Bay of Bengal is 700 miles as the crow flies, but well over 1,000 miles as a man walks or as the mule scrambles. Thus the Burma front is nearly as long as the Russian front, and is very much worse served with communications. The number of troops on either side employed in Burma is, of course, only a fraction of those on the Russian front, and cannot possibly form a continuous defensive line. As a matter of fact there are only three districts where large-scale fighting is going on between formed bodies of troops. The first is in the north where General Stilwell is in command of Chinese and American troops; the second is in the west around Imphal where a British corps is defending its positions against Japanese attacks; and lastly there is the Arakan front. The whole is one front under the command of Admiral Mountbatten, and its strategy is one. But in between these three positions is a vast area where scattered patrols are the only form of defence on either side.

It is the existence of these undefended regions which last year made possible General Wingate's expedition into the heart of Burma. Troops who are prepared to face great physical difficulties and force their way through dense jungles and up and down precipitous mountain sides can, within certain limits, go anywhere they please. These limits are set by the weight and power of the equipment they can carry and the amount of food which they can take with them or with which they can be supplied.

Wingate's columns last year did a wonderful job, but their equipment was insufficiently powerful to enable them to be a serious danger to the Japanese, and their supplies of food and ammunition, which came mainly by air, were limited by the number of transport aircraft available. The Japanese are faced by exactly the same problem. There is nothing to prevent them, as they did last year and again this year, from carrying out wide outflanking movements round our positions and coming in across our communications. They can do this if they travel light and if they are prepared themselves to starve. They starve because they lack transport aircraft to keep them supplied.

You may ask why these outflanking movements cannot be spotted by air reconnaissance. I have flown over some of this country myself and can only describe it to you as looking like patterned moss or cauliflower heads painted green-grey, so close are the tree-tops and so dense the jungle. You can fly for 100 miles without seeing a clearing or a sign of human habitation. I have been told that a column of troops could pass within 500

[1

Fig. 4 Article illustrated by aerial photograph of burning oil tank; 'Battlefront in Burma', *Hutchinson's Pictorial History of the War*, 12-18 April 1944

This was a consistent way of framing Burma from the final phases of the war. In April 1944, as part of its recurring 'History of the War' feature, *Hutchinson's* printed 'Battlefront in Burma' purportedly written by Air Chief Marshal Sir Philip Joubert with accompanying

photographic illustrations (12-18 April 1944; Figure 4). The article is a detailed account of the campaign, cataloguing the logistical challenges and engineering feats of Allied forces. Accompanying Joubert's dispassionate focus on terrain, troop manoeuvres and jungle warfare conditions are aerial photographs exemplifying the military fire power and might of the Allies. These are described with precision (e.g., 'Oil tanker ablaze: a single shot from a 75mm cannon of a 10th Air Force B-25 bomber set fire to this 500,000-gallon oil tank on the Sittang River in Burma') with the detailed caption acting as a cypher for the accuracy and efficacy of Allied action. Moreover, these aerial images instantiate the all-seeing eye of Allied forces. Text and image work in close symbiosis as Joubert (or his ghost writer) reduce Burma to a geometric shape: 'think of Burma as a three-sided box with no lid on it and open towards the south'. This simplifying verbal image renders the territory depicted in the accompanying pictures as devoid of indigenous peoples, absent of proprietorial claims, and utilisable by whoever 'discovers' it. Furthermore, bringing the conflict into the orbit of domestic British readers, Joubert interposes the reader in the scene via descriptions of Burmese territory in the vernacular of the country garden or allotment: 'I have flown over some of this country myself and can only describe it to you like patterned moss or *cauliflower heads painted green-grey*, so close are the tree-tops and so dense the jungle' (*emphasis added*). Here Joubert performs the imperial visual trope of the white man as the all-seeing eye of power, translating the Burmese landscape into metaphors of British domestic life that distance the Anglophone reader from the realities of military actions on the ground.

In similar vein, considerable emphasis in these publications was placed on eye-witnessing by white Allied soldiers. Following the surrender of Japan, *War Illustrated* included a regular feature titled 'I was there'.[16] These articles are defined by prominent use of eye-witness accounts alongside photographs, including a standard military portrait of the author and

photographs from the specific campaign being narrated. Numerous examples address Burma including ‘I Crash-landed on Burma’s Broadway’ (30 August 1946), which uses the first-person to recount the experiences of Squadron Leader Leonard Hart, and ‘On the Road from Assam to Rangoon’ (31 January 1947), which narrates the experience of Major L. L. Bearman with the 19th Indian Division (Figure 5). The latter includes a military portrait, photographs of Burmese women purportedly grateful for the assistance provided by Indian soldiers, depictions of an Allied convoy, and a photograph of Corporal Carpenter (bare-chested, repairing a jeep engine, and instructing a soldier from the Indian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers in how to ‘“Keep the wheels turning”’). Thus, these pages deliver visual instruction about the British Empire via eye-witness accounts from white male soldiers’ experiences, combined with imagery of acts of surveillance, observation, inspection and signalling. This use of the human-interest story paradigm reduces complex geopolitical processes to individual experiences and obscures abstract social, political and cultural factors key to understanding the China-Burma-India theatre of conflict.

I WAS THERE!

THE HUMAN STORY OF 1939-1946

On the Road From Assam to Rangoon

Awful Yellow Dust Three Feet Deep

I Was There!

Our Overflowing Cup of Woe!

Fig. 5. Double page spread with four photographs including a portrait of Major L. L. Bearman, Burmese women in Toungoo, an Allied convoy, and a photograph of a bare-chested corporal instructing a soldier from the Indian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers; ‘On the Road from Assam to Rangoon’, *The War Illustrated*, 31 January 1947

Picturing the empire together

The first-person ‘I was there’ articles contrast with another regular feature in *War Illustrated*, ‘Our Empire’s Proud Share in Victory: War Stories of the British Colonies’ written in the third-person by Harley V. Usill.[17] These articles produced a measured or qualified imperial togetherness through image and text. In ‘East and West Africans in Burma’ (14 February 1947), Usill recounts the contribution of African divisions without giving these soldiers a voice. Notably, the photographic illustration is of an unnamed young black soldier from Accra, lying down and smiling as he receives medical attention from an older white doctor

standing over him. Any suggestion of autonomy or sovereignty implied by a military contribution to the Allied war effort is undercut by the choreography of these two military bodies. In similar derogatory vein, Usill's commentary applauded 'the British officers and N.C.O.s who turned these unsophisticated men into fine fighting units of a mechanized army'. Usill's 'Our Empire's Proud Share in Victory' series thus tells the story of the empire in wartime from the perspective of the colonial authority, as opposed to frontline soldiers of colour. In striking contrast, the togetherness of Allied white soldiers is visualized very differently in *War Illustrated*. A regular feature in each issue was 'Records of the Regiments: 1939-1945', commemorating the wartime experience of a given unit. White Anglophone soldiers in this series are personalized and have a voice as part of stories that focus on humour, courage ingenuity and camaraderie. Conversely, black non-Anglophone soldiers are invariably presented either as individuals requiring assistance or instruction, or as a mass or crowd. In Figure 6, we see a photo-feature recounting the experiences of the Worcestershire Regiment (*War Illustrated*, 14 February 1947). In one photograph, bare-chested soldiers are assembled round a radio projecting the idea of a united white male Anglophone community – the epitome of Britannic nationalism, brought together by the consumption of modern media. This article appeared in the same issue as Usill's coverage of African regiments in Burma. Soldiers of colour were, therefore, an ever-present foil in the construction of the masculinity and the 'Britishness' of white troops. The lives and the experiences of those colonial subjects conscripted to defend the empire are inextricably enmeshed with the construction and exercise of white power.


The Worcestershire Regiment

Through Burma with The 2nd and 7th Worcesters

Fig. 6. Double page spread documenting the wartime experiences of the Worcestershire Regiment including three photographs (righthand side) of members of 2nd and 7th Battalion in Burma, e.g., eight shirtless soldiers on Mount Popa west of Meiktila assembled around a radio listening to news from the European theatre of war in April 1945; 'Records of the Regiments, 1939-1945: The Worcestershire Regiment', The War Illustrated, 14 February 1947

As Richard Smith comments in his analysis of colonial soldiers, race and military masculinities in the twentieth century, the bodies of soldiers of colour did not own or constitute space in the same way as their white counterparts (Smith, 2020). This stark division is inscribed in the significance of dress and uniform in these publications. Unlike white British troops, colonial Allied troops from British India or African nations were presented clothed, with uniforms, medals and insignia acting as a legible script displaying place of origin, company, rank and status. Displaying the unclothed body for such troops is associated with capture and death as in *Hutchinson*'s report on Gurkha action in Arakan

where a partially clothed Japanese body denotes the ignominy of defeat: caption 'Gurkhas in Action in Arakan. Gurkha troops of the 14th Army, who took part in the relief of the 7th Division which was isolated for about two weeks in the Ngakyedauk area. A dead Japanese is seen in the foreground'. In full uniform, the Gurkhas are photographed from behind, faces obscured but with rifles at the ready. Their perceived loyalty to the British Empire is rewarded with special status as 'honorary' white men but this does not extend to – nor is intended to compete with – the hyper-virility of bare-chested white soldiers.

Such a colonial 'ordering' of race, dress and masculinity in *War Illustrated* is naturalized in its visual layout and editorial choices. A regular feature was the reproduction of standardized head-and-shoulder military portraits of soldiers receiving medals and commendations, such as Figure 7a. Reminiscent of Little's 'Together' poster, the *mise-en-page* brings uniformed imperial subjects (Scots and Gurkhas, Christians and Sikhs, white and black soldiers) together in a visually balanced and ordered presentation of imperial fighting forces. This regular 'Roll of Honour' feature projects ideas of partnership, order and place within the empire. These are photographically constructed 'frameworks for encountering difference' through classification and containment (Ryan 1997: 198). The paternalistic picture of the British Empire in *War Illustrated* thus helped represent empire to white audiences across the globe as educative, peacebuilding and modernizing, while denying colonial subjects fully realized agency or equality.

Fig. 7a Military portraits of Victoria Cross recipients; 'Still Mounts the Wall-Roll of incomparable V.C.s', *The War Illustrated*, 23 November 1945

Fig. 7b Photograph of three soldiers from British India; 'Veterans of Burma war are three VCs, currently in London for Buckingham Place for investiture', *Phoenix*, 1 December 1945

The granting of awards postwar also received wide media coverage. For instance, in *Phoenix*, Figure 7b shows three Burma veterans on the day they were awarded the Victoria Cross at Buckingham Palace. From left to right is Naik Gian Singh of the 15th Punjab Regiment, Naik Bhanbhagta Gurung of the Gurkha Rifles and Sgt. Havildar Umrao Singh from the Royal Indian Artillery. Another photograph by Reg Speller shows all three again, this time face on to the camera and in front of a crowd of smiling white onlookers.[18] Gian Singh and Bhanbhagta Gurung also feature in Figure 7a. As Santanu Das examines in relation to the First World War, 'The Gurkhas and the Sikhs were well-recognised "martial types" in the

British imperial imagination' and depictions of these two 'types' were prominent in the press across conflicts of the early twentieth century (Das 2018: 143). The event of investiture was a public spectacle instrumentalized – both on site and through photo-opportunities – to construct a particular picture of empire for the postwar moment.

That same ethos of empire is projected via imagery of the Victory Parade in London which took place on 8 June 1946 and was covered by *War Illustrated* (21 June 1946). Troops from the Burma Campaign adorn both the front and back cover. Six months after their investiture at Buckingham Palace, Bhanbhagta Gurung and Umrao Singh appear on the cover representing the troops of British India alongside an unidentified Sikh soldier. Framed by a train window within which their smiling faces are arranged, the *mise-en-page* of soldiers from multiple nations who fought for the Allied cause is repeated to project the spectacle and performance of ordered imperial togetherness.[19] While troops from British India feature on the front cover of *The War Illustrated* and its Victory parade issue, a photograph of 'warriors' from Nigeria, Gold Coast, Sierra Leone and Gambia is relegated to the back cover. This visual priority given to images of troops from British India over other (African) colonial territories exemplifies again the graduated and racialized hierarchies of togetherness.

Building peace, rebuilding empire

A final prominent theme in these photographically illustrated publications is the depiction of reconstruction efforts and a return to the order (and racialized hierarchies) of empire. For instance, an article in *Phoenix* (8 September 1945) titled 'Burma Under Army Rule (British, temporary)' comprizes a short text and nine photographs that emphasize children and education to convey a sense of British rule as benign and magnanimous. It recounts the efforts of the different departments of the Civil Affairs Service (Burma) which is 'attempting

to straighten out the mess left behind by the Japs and prepared to carry on until, with the ebbing of the tide of war, Burma will provide its own government'. The photographic coverage shows the rebuilding of civil society with pictures of lessons taking place outside at a school in Meiktila and a photograph of Civil Affairs Officer Lt. Col. Steele-Perkins providing 'advice and help' to a homeless refugee mother and her family in his office in Maymyo. Not only is the provision of food and temporary accommodation visualized, but so too is the role of Allied media operations and public information campaigns in postwar Burma. One photograph depicts a news broadcast attended by nuns at a Mandalay convent who listen to the radio perched on the bonnet of a military jeep. London serviceman, Sgt. Schuman, is shown in another photograph handing out newspapers in Burmese, Urdu and Chinese from the back of an army lorry. Distribution of a new photo-magazine produced for the liberated populace, *Burma Today*, is also depicted: 'It seems the youthful inhabitants have a preference for "Burma To-day," another CAS(B) publication. It has photos'. The image of youthful enthusiasm constructed here infantilizes the indigenous Burmese population, while the emphasis on education and sharing information endorses the reimposition of British rule.

Burma's Civilians Retread the Peacetime Paths

IN RANGOON, freed in early May 1945, life was slowly returning to normal by midsummer after the long Japanese occupation: a start was made in demolishing blast walls outside this dignified civic building (1). On June 30, in a British warship moored in the harbour, there opened an important conference between Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith (2, left), Governor of Burma, and Burmese leaders, to discuss plans for the country's future as outlined in the White Paper published in May; on Sir Reginald's left sat Lt.-Gen. F. A. M. Browning, C.B., D.S.O., hero of Arnhem and Chief of Staff to Lord Louis Mountbatten at S.E.A.C. Hdqrs.

Urgent problem is the schooling of young Burmese whose education, totally neglected by the Japanese, has had to begin again. Intent pupils attended this class (3) in the open air. Lt.-Col. Steele Perkins, Chief Administrative Officer at Maymyo (4), interviewed a native mother and her children at a refugee camp. Labourers (5) carried baskets of rice from paddy fields of the Shwebo plain for the relief, via the country's many waterways, of the starving population.

PAGE 276 *Photos, British Official*

Fig. 8. Five photographs of postwar Burma including demolition of blast walls outside public building, school lesson taking place outside, British officials, and transport of rice supplies; 'Burma's Civilians Retread the Peacetime Paths', *The War Illustrated,* 31 August 1945

These portrayals highlight the importance placed on the role of media and public information, including photography, for shaping civil society and public understanding at a time of challenge and contestation of British imperial power. Such strategies of representation ricochet through these commercial publications. For instance, the same photograph from Maymyo and another shot of the outdoor classroom in Meiktila appeared in *War Illustrated* (31 August 1945) in an article entitled, 'Burma's Civilians Retread the Peacetime Paths' (Figure 8). As depicted by this collage of scenes, an orderly return to peacetime life is a gift bestowed by the British. In the caption highlighting an 'important conference' in a British warship 'to discuss plans for the country's future', the Burmese delegation is mentioned

briefly, but neither pictured nor named unlike their British counterparts. Reconstruction is constructed as the domain and purview of the returning colonial power.

Conclusion

Writing in 1944, Malim was concerned that the alleged peaceful and positive attributes of the British Empire were not being taught sufficiently in schools. He voiced anxieties about the 'decay of the "empire" idea' and the potential for ignorance to hinder the maintenance of Britain's colonial possessions' (Malim, 1944: 221). In June 1948, a report by the Colonial Office on public opinions and understanding of colonial affairs diagnosed similar ignorance and expressed like-minded concerns. Public knowledge of current affairs in the colonies was 'sketchy and inadequate in the extreme' and it was recommended that 'even the most highly-educated sections of the population could learn a lot from an information campaign of a quite elementary nature' (Evens, 1948: 16). Yet, as this article has argued, efforts to promote empire-consciousness were prominent features of popular visual culture at the end of the Second World War and through the decline of the British Empire between 1944 and 1948. They reached into the domestic sphere in the form of propagandistic illustrated periodicals like *Hutchinson's Pictorial History of the War* and *the War Illustrated*, and circulated amongst soldiers, civilians and their families with the SEAC-sponsored *Phoenix* and *The Campaign in Burma*. They naturalized images of a benevolent empire and reasserted the superiority of the Anglophone community. These photographic publications, so little studied to date, formed part of a larger project of 'commonwealth idealism' that Kenny and Pearce describe as 'a carrier for the enduring, often unarticulated, assumptions about the natural intimacy of English-speaking countries' (Kenny and Pearce, 2019: 26). This is evident in the representation of the camaraderie of white Anglophone soldiers and the colonial ordering of other nations and peoples within discriminatory visual paradigms. Postwar reconstruction and

rebuilding in such photo-narratives is not represented as a new beginning as much as a memorialization of imperial order and the expectation of its reassertion for a new era.[20]

The publications examined here are deeply imbued with an imperial imaginary which drew on well-established narratives of white superiority and colonial rule. They brought these cultural tropes into alignment with propaganda on the need to work together to win both the war and the peace, but within a racial hierarchy of imperial order. The domestic archives of empire that these publications exemplify are now the stuff of eBay sales and vintage war memorabilia, as postwar generations empty the attics of grandparents and great-grandparents who retained these volumes for posterity. They are visual scripts that document the identities, beliefs, hierarchies and values of white Anglophone communities across wartime experience and the era of postwar reconstruction. They are also evidence of resistance to the collapse of empire (both official and commercial) and of how imperial ideologies and nostalgia continued to live on long beyond the end of the British empire itself – a phenomenon traceable in the popularity and historical imaginary of the Netflix's series *The Crown*. Collecting, sharing and holding onto such publications for decades following the war's end reveals how a wartime generation held onto such an imperial worldviews and what that might have meant for them in confronting the stakes and significance of seismic postwar geo-political changes. In the contemporary moment – when the history of colonialism remains largely absent from the English school curriculum – it would be a mistake to assume such ways of viewing Britain and Britishness are safely 'historical'. The dominant Eurocentric view of the Second World War in British cultural memory masks the sedimented layers of such a deeply ingrained worldview. As Stuart Hall has cautioned, we need to be attentive to historical photographs marked by interdiscursive racism – by intersecting discourses of race, colour, gender, sexuality and Britishness. They require 'a delicate excavation, an

archaeology, a tracing of the contradictory imprints which previous discourses have stamped, through those old images, on the iconography of popular memory' (Hall, 1984: 9). In working towards this objective, this article has excavated a neglected corpus of historical material in which vernacular histories can be traced. They demonstrate the imbrication of war, empire, race, discrimination and the violence of colonialism. What we see in these publications is a worldview of past generations that is perhaps not so past, even today.

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Disclosure statement

The authors report that there are no competing interests to report.

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[1] A digital reproduction of Little's poster can be viewed on the National Archives website: https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/theartofwar/prop/allied_unity/INF3_0318.htm.

[2] 'Empire Day' was celebrated from the early 1900s across the British Empire until it was renamed 'Commonwealth Day' in 1958.

[3] Princess Elizabeth's address is available on the BBC Archive website: https://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/empire-day-1946--speech-by-hrh-princess-elizabeth/z62hwty.

[4] Callahan (2005: 87-113) charts the relationship between British forces and Burmese nationalists. The factions and clashes of the period stand in stark contrast to the image projected by the publications addressed here. As Ashton (2001) notes, concerns about perceptions of Burma's status after independence were paramount to UK officials in the latter part of the period, 1944-48, considered in our article.

[5] Louis Moss and Kathleen Box, 'Ministry of Information Publications: A Study of Public Attitudes towards Six Ministry of Information Books, June – July 1943,' National Archives, RG 24/32.

[6] Mountbatten was notoriously image-conscious and, through his involvement in Indian independence and the subsequent partition in 1947, had 'a seminal role in mediating the public image of decolonisation' (Kaul, 2008: 689).

[7] This model is exemplified by initiatives like the Army Bureau of Current Affairs (1941-45). It sought 'to promote "pictorializing" current affairs' through dynamic visual publicity to help produce so-called 'citizen-soldiers' – informed individuals who understood what they are fighting for (Thompson, 2020: 57).

[8] Coster mentions a number of AFPU photographers, and equivalents from the US Signal Corps, who contributed regularly to the magazine including Fred Wackett, Joe Waddell, Lewis D. Klein, Ernie Miller, Ernie Goodwin, Bill Walker and Dave Titmuss.

[9] Smits (2017) shows that around 10% of the total print run of *Illustrated London News* was distributed in Australia in the nineteenth century, constituting an important trans-imperial precedent for the less renowned twentieth-century titles discussed here.

[10] Having worked on interwar public information initiatives for the UK government, Hutchinson (1887-1950) built up his father's publishing company into a global network and a major publishing venture.

[11] Montague Black is best known as a publicity designer following his acclaimed posters for the White Star Line and London North Eastern Railway.

[12] Hammerton (1871-1949) joined Amalgamated Press in 1905, at that point the largest periodical publisher in the world. It was run by Alfred Harmsworth (Lord Northcliffe), but later owned by William Berry (Lord Camrose).

[13] See details in the IWM photographic collection for the original photograph (ref. IWM SE 564) by AFPU photographer, Lieutenant W. Austin: https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205205095.

[14] Burma Star also became the name of the veterans' association founded in 1951.

[15] The selection of Meaden's photograph may also represent an effort to pushback against the Americanization of the public image of the Burma campaign. See Ian Jarvie (1988) regarding the controversy around the film *Objective Burma*, released in January 1945 and starring Errol Flynn.

[16] The human-interest paradigm became established in the early twentieth-century press. Hammerton contributed to this model of reporting with *The Great War – I Was There: Undying Memories of 1914-1918* comprising extracts from published first-person accounts supplemented with photographs by J. A. Insall. Launched in September 1938, it ceased publication after 51 issues with the outbreak of the Second World War.

[17] Usill was author of *The Story of the British People in Pictures* (1937), as well as assistant to Humphrey Jennings on the Festival of Britain film, *Family Portrait* (1951).

[18] See detail in Getty Images collection: https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/news-photo/recipients-of-the-victoria-cross-after-an-investiture-at-news-photo/72103394?adppopup=true.

[19] Subsequently, Umrao Singh was sent on a tour of the Ruhr and was photographed with other Indian soldiers from the Burma campaign, demonstrating the importance placed on the international projection of the British Empire. The IWM photographic collection includes ten pictures of this visit by Gunner Heudebourck of No. 5 Unit, AFPU: https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/search?filters%5BmakerString%5D%5BGunner%20Heudebourck.%2C%20V.A.%5D=on.

[20] Webster (2001) highlights how, in films addressing colonial wars and immigration after 1948, the focus shifted from the pioneering hero abroad to civilians and domestic spaces under threat, whether that be white settlers in fortified plantations during the 'Malayan Emergency' (1948-60), or suburban homesteads menaced by immigration from the colonies inaugurated when the Empire Windrush landed at Tilbury in June 1948. Rather than domestic archives of empire seeking to project a vision of white superiority, imperial togetherness and racialized order, popular culture from the late 1940s was marked by 'the complexity and ambivalence of the theme of a domestic sanctuary, threatened with violation, and its interplay of ideas of racial and gender difference' (Webster, 2001: 560-561).