



Maj Colin Pringle, who has died aged 77, was an R Sigs officer with the Chindits in Burma when in 1944 he had the extraordinary experience of discovering that a line which his party had just laid was connected to a Japanese exchange. While testing the line, his Cpl Hargreaves had been surprised to hear a voice answer in Japanese. With considerable presence he did not answer but informed Pringle. He promptly reported to Special Forces HQ, who then informed Gen Stilwell. The General flew two American-born Japanese into the area to listen in. For the next ten days they acquired important information about Japanese plans. The freak connection had apparently been made by induction between fallen lines.

The telephone incident took place shortly after a more dangerous and challenging operation for Pringle. He was a member of an advance party which had set off in March 1944 by glider to land in an area 150 miles behind Japanese lines in Burma. Their mission was to prepare two airfields to receive 77 Bde on the next night. His immediate senior was Lt Col Peter Fleming, brother of Ian Fleming, later the author of James Bond novels *Towed by a Dakota*; they crossed the Chindwin River at 10,000 feet by the light of a full moon. But over the Chin Hills there was so much turbulence that the glider began soaring upwards, and had to be cast off into an area swarming with Japanese, 50 miles short of its target. They landed in a dry river bed, where the crew burned their papers, and had no choice but to go back to base.

They marched through jungle for five days, narrowly avoiding Japanese patrols. When they arrived at the Chindwin, which, unknown to them, was about to be crossed by a Japanese division, they made a boat out of bamboo and groundsheet. The river at that point was 650 yards wide, but the boat proved so unstable it could only be used as a raft. Pringle, who had been Captain of Swimming at Woolwich, swam over with it taking four non-swimmers. He then swam back to find the remainder had swum over, but left their weapons behind. He took some of their kit with him on the return journey. For swimming the Chindwin five times with essential arms & equipment he was subsequently Mentioned in Despatches.

After a difficult journey including a 12-mile trek over the Naga Hills, they reached Imphal. Two days later they were flown to their original objective, where there was now an airfield. The Chindit operation was later found to have delayed and diverted two Japanese divisions.

Robert Colin Pringle was born on Aug 1919, and educated at Dean Close School and Woolwich, before being commissioned into R Signals. After the war, he was appointed 2i/c of 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Div Signals Regt in Palestine, and again Mentioned in Despatches. He later became OC 16<sup>th</sup> Indep Para Bde Sig Sqn in Germany, and went on to serve in Cyprus, the Gold Coast, and Singapore.

Pringle was a good polo player, won colours in hockey for Gloucestershire, and took part in the Tall Ships Race. He is survived by his wife, Anne, and their two daughters.

(From the Daily Telegraph, 1993)