

CHAPTER 6

Memory of the War in North East India

6.1. Impact of Kohima and Imphal battles in mainstreaming the region

The battles fought in Kohima and Imphal during WW II played a pivotal role in mainstreaming the region of northeast India for various compelling reasons. Firstly, the strategic importance of these battles cannot be overstated. The successful defense by the British and Allied forces in 1944 against the Japanese invasion not only prevented the enemy from advancing into India but also showcased the region's significance in safeguarding the Indian subcontinent(REVIEW & 2019, n.d.).

Prior to WW II, the Northeast region of India was relatively isolated and often overlooked by colonial authorities. However, the battles in Kohima and Imphal brought international attention to the area's geographical and strategic importance, fundamentally altering its status. The recognition garnered during the conflict contributed to a shift in perception and increased awareness of the region on the global stage(Glancey, 2011).

The military operations necessitated significant investment in infrastructure, including the development of roads and airstrips. These improvements, initiated to support wartime activities, had enduring positive effects on the connectivity and accessibility of the region. Consequently, the improved infrastructure played a crucial role in integrating Northeast India with the rest of the country(Ethnicity & 2020, 2019). Indigenous participation in the battles, particularly by ethnic groups like the Naga and Kuki tribes, marked a turning point. Their bravery and contributions not only earned recognition and respect from the British authorities but also fostered a sense of unity and pride among the local populations. This indigenous involvement played a vital role in shaping the region's identity(Poyer, 2023).

The aftermath of WW II witnessed continued development in the Northeast, building upon the infrastructure improvements initiated during the conflict. Post-independence, the Indian government recognized the region's strategic importance, leading to a sustained focus on its development, security, and integration into the Indian Union. The military presence in the area persisted, underscoring its ongoing significance. The presence of British and Allied forces during the war facilitated cultural and social exchanges between

the local populations and the outside world. This interaction had a profound and lasting impact on the region's cultural dynamics, contributing to a broader understanding of its diverse communities and further mainstreaming the Northeast.

Today, the battlefields of Kohima and Imphal serve as crucial historical sites, attracting tourists and symbolizing the region's enduring significance in Indian history. Commemoration events and memorials not only pay homage to the sacrifices made during the war but also contribute to keeping the memory of these battles alive, thereby ensuring the continued mainstream recognition of Northeast India's vital role in shaping the nation's narrative (Choudhury, 2023).

6.2. WW II Memorials and Cemeteries and Public Memory

Northeast India occupies a significant place in the cultural and historical memory of WW II, serving as the theatre for some of the most pivotal battles in the Pacific theatre. The region witnessed fierce combat, particularly in Manipur and Naga Hills, where the Battle of Kohima and Imphal turned the tide of the war. These battles not only shaped the outcome of WWII but also left a profound impact on the lives of the indigenous people, who endured immense sacrifices amidst the ravages of war. The cemeteries established in this region are at Kohima, Imphal, and Digboi, serving as enduring symbols of valour and resilience. The cemeteries commemorate the soldiers who fought and fell, including many from the local population, and embody the region's collective identity, linking its historical struggles to present-day pride and remembrance. These sites stand as cultural touchstones, preserving the narratives of sacrifice and fostering a deeper connection between the past and the present (Naorem, 2020c). A brief report on each of these cemeteries is as under:

6.2.1. The Kohima War Cemetery.

The Kohima War Cemetery, located in the heart of Nagaland's capital, is a poignant tribute to the soldiers of the 2nd British Division of the Allied Forces who gave their lives in the Battle of Kohima during WW II. This decisive battle, fought in April 1944 on the slopes of Garrison Hill and the tennis court of the Deputy Commissioner's bungalow, marked a turning point in the Burma Campaign. It halted the Japanese advance into India and shifted the trajectory of the war in Southeast Asia. Today, the cemetery stands as a profound

symbol of bravery, sacrifice, and resilience, deeply embedded in the historical and cultural memory of the region.

Maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the cemetery is the resting place for 1,420 Commonwealth soldiers who fell in the battle. Additionally, it commemorates 917 Hindu and Sikh soldiers who were cremated in accordance with their faith, emphasizing the diverse composition of the Allied Forces. Two distinctive memorials grace the site: one honouring the Indian and Sikh soldiers and another massive stone monument dedicated to the 2nd British Division. These memorials underscore the unity of soldiers from varied backgrounds who fought together, symbolizing the universal human cost of war.

The cemetery's significance goes beyond its role as a war grave. It is a testament to the extraordinary events of the Battle of Kohima, where the Allied Forces, outnumbered and besieged, fought valiantly to repel the Japanese. The tennis court, preserved within the cemetery and marked by white concrete lines, remains a powerful symbol of resilience, as it witnessed some of the fiercest hand-to-hand combat of the war. The Kohima War Cemetery is also a place of quiet reflection. Designed with terraces that hold rows of stone markers and bronze plaques bearing the names of the fallen, it invites visitors to contemplate the sacrifices made during one of history's darkest times. At its heart lies the iconic Kohima Epitaph:

*"When you go home, tell them of us and say,
For your tomorrow, we gave our today."*

Attributed to John Maxwell Edmonds, this verse has transcended time, becoming a universal expression of gratitude for those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

For the people of Nagaland, the cemetery is not merely a historical monument but a part of their collective cultural memory. It has reshaped local narratives, integrating the global significance of WW II with the region's identity (Veipou, 1944). The inclusion of a cherry tree, symbolic of the "Battle Under the Cherry Tree," intertwines history with local lore. A brass plaque at its base reiterates the message of sacrifice, creating a tangible connection between the events of the past and the present.

The cemetery also serves as a space for education and commemoration, fostering awareness of Nagaland's pivotal role in global history. Memorial services held on the 60th and 70th anniversaries of the battle brought together descendants of veterans, local communities, and international dignitaries. Such events reinforce the enduring legacy of Kohima, strengthening the bond between Nagaland and the broader global community that recognizes the importance of this battle. Today, the Kohima War Cemetery remains a vital focal point for remembrance, reflection, and reconciliation. It continues to honour the courage and sacrifices of those who fought while also reshaping the narrative of WW II in the collective memory of Nagaland and beyond. As a bridge between past and present, it ensures that the lessons of history remain alive, inspiring future generations to appreciate the value of peace and the enduring cost of conflict.

6.2.2. The Imphal War Cemetery.

The Imphal War Cemetery, located in Dewlahland, Imphal, commemorates 1,600 Commonwealth soldiers who fell during the pivotal battles of Imphal and Kohima in 1944, marking a turning point in WW II. Maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the cemetery stands as a profound testament to sacrifice, resilience, and the shared struggle against tyranny.

Imphal played a critical role in the Burma Campaign of WW II. Following the Japanese occupation of Burma in 1942, the Allies fortified Imphal, transforming it into a strategic defense hub. The Battle of Imphal (March–June 1944) saw intense combat, resulting in nearly 50,000 Japanese casualties and earning the battle the title 'Normandy of the East'. This victory not only secured India but also paved the way for Burma's liberation, cementing Imphal's role in the war's outcome. The cemetery reflects the diverse composition of the Allied forces, with graves of soldiers from the United Kingdom, India, Canada, Australia, East and West Africa, and Burma. Each grave, marked with a brass plaque, symbolizes their collective sacrifice. The cemetery's inclusiveness underscores the global unity that characterized the Allied effort and serves as a sombre reminder of the human cost of war (H. S. Katoch, 2016b).

For the people of Manipur, the cemetery is a cultural touchstone linking their history to a global narrative. It instils pride and serves as a reminder of their homeland's pivotal role in WW II. The proposed installation of Visitor Information Panels will further enhance its

educational value, providing insights into the battle and personal stories of the fallen. The cemetery is a focal point for remembrance, with events like the 70th Anniversary of the Battle of Imphal in 2014 drawing dignitaries and fostering international connections. These commemorations deepen local understanding of the sacrifices made and strengthen ties with global efforts to preserve WW II's memory.

6.2.3. The Digboi War Cemetery.

The Digboi War Cemetery in Assam stands as a testament to the region's strategic importance and its role in the Burma Campaign during WWII. Located near the Burmese border and along the road to Ledo, Digboi was a critical hub on the lines of communication and home to a military hospital established to treat casualties from the campaign (Hewson, 2007). Initially containing 70 burials from the hospital, the cemetery was expanded after the war when graves were relocated from other burial grounds in Panitola, Jorhat, Margherita, Tinsukia, and Ledo, as well as one grave from the US Military Cemetery at Shingvuoityang in Burma, where permanent maintenance was not feasible.

Originally situated on a small spur, the cemetery's location was compromised by an earthquake in 1950, which caused extensive cracks and subsidence. Subsequent landslides during heavy rains in 1953 further endangered the site, necessitating the relocation of the graves to their current, more stable location. Today, the Digboi War Cemetery houses 197 Commonwealth and three non-Commonwealth burials, representing soldiers of diverse nationalities, including Italian, American, and Belgian servicemen.

Over the years, the cemetery has shaped the collective memory of the local population, serving as a poignant reminder of the sacrifices made during the war. The presence of the cemetery fosters a sense of historical awareness and connection to global events, bridging the local experiences of wartime hardship with the broader narrative of WWII. For the local communities, the cemetery stands as both a site of solemn remembrance and a symbol of the region's resilience and contribution to the Allied victory. The continued maintenance of the cemetery and its integration into public memory underscores its enduring cultural significance.

6.2.4. INA Memorial at Moirang.

The INA Martyrs' Memorial Complex in Moirang, Manipur, 45 km south of Imphal, pays tribute to the soldiers of the Indian National Army (INA) who fought for India's independence during WW II. This significant site commemorates a critical chapter in India's freedom struggle, blending the local heritage with the broader narrative of WW II and the INA's campaign.

Moirang holds immense historical importance as the location where Colonel S. A. Malik of the INA raised the Azad Hind flag in April 1944, signalling a symbolic assertion of independence. The INA Martyrs' Memorial Complex honours these soldiers and their efforts to align India's freedom movement with the global dynamics of WW II. The complex's centrepiece is a reconstruction of the INA's memorial to fallen soldiers, originally located in Singapore but demolished by British Indian Army sappers in 1945. Construction work of the INA Martyrs' Memorial at Moirang, began in 1968 and was officially inaugurated by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1969.

In 2022, the Government of Manipur initiated a renovation project aimed at preserving and enhancing the historical importance of the INA Headquarters at Moirang. This project involved the acquisition of an additional 1.6193 acres from 31 local residents, with alternative land provided to the affected families. The renovation focused on transforming the site into a comprehensive historical complex preserving the narrative of Manipur's role in the Indian independence movement. A key feature of the upgraded complex is a replica of the granite monument originally erected by the INA in Singapore, which was dismantled by the British Indian Army in 1945. The monument prominently displays the INA's core principles; *ITEFAQ* (Unity), *ITMAD* (Faith), and *KURBANI* (Sacrifice).

Today, the INA Headquarters at Moirang serves as a key historical site and educational destination, providing insight into the INA's legacy and role in the freedom movement.

6.3. Cultural and Historical Significance of Memorials/Cemeteries

The WW II Memorials and cemeteries scattered across Northeastern India are profound symbols of resilience, sacrifice, and unity. These monuments commemorate the pivotal events of WW II and the contributions of local communities to India's freedom movement,

offering a unique connection to both regional and global history. Northeastern India, a critical theatre of conflict, witnessed historic battles, which played decisive roles in halting Japanese advances.

For local communities, these memorials are more than historical markers; they embody shared memories and ancestral connections to a turbulent past. They honour the sacrifices of soldiers, including those from diverse ethnic and regional backgrounds, and underscore the region's significant role in shaping modern Indian history.

6.3.1. Preserving Cultural Identity.

These memorials serve as vital repositories of regional and national identity. They preserve stories of extraordinary courage and collective effort, highlighting the contributions of individuals and communities from Northeastern India. For instance, the flag-raising by the Indian National Army (INA) at Moirang in 1944, marking the establishment of Azad Hind, stands as a defining moment in the region's history. Similarly, the battles of Imphal and Kohima are celebrated not only for their strategic importance but also for the unity displayed by soldiers from varied backgrounds.

To ensure their continued relevance, efforts are being made to modernize these memorials. Digital archives, virtual tours, and interactive educational programs have been introduced to make the history accessible to a wider audience. These initiatives bridge the gap between traditional remembrance and modern technology, allowing people across the globe to engage with the region's historical legacy.

By bridging historical memory with contemporary identity, the war memorials of Northeastern India stand as enduring reminders of resilience, unity, and the human cost of war. They inspire reflection on the sacrifices made for freedom and the values of peace and perseverance. For future generations, these sites are more than places of remembrance, they are platforms for education and inspiration. By preserving the stories of valour and sacrifice, the memorials ensure that the legacies of those who lived through conflict continue to resonate, fostering a collective vision of peace and progress.

6.4. The Legacy and Remembrance of WW II in North-East India

WW II had a significant impact on North-East India, shaping its history and collective memory. The region served as a crucial battleground for the Allied and Axis powers, with Japanese forces advancing through Burma, causing widespread conflict, destruction, and societal changes. This upheaval altered the social and cultural fabric of the diverse communities in the region. Even after the war, the effects of displacement, loss, and changes in traditional lifestyles persisted. The legacy of WW II in North-East India underscores the resilience and sacrifices of its people. Memories of these times are kept alive through oral stories, monuments, and memorials, celebrating acts of bravery and unity. Local people, including soldiers from different ethnic backgrounds who fought for the Allies cause, were recognized for their bravery. Those who collaborated with the Japanese faced consequences. Additionally, the war led to major changes in the region's alliances and affected movements for decolonization(Nag, 1998).

Moreover, the cultural landscape experienced a metamorphosis as the war brought about a confluence of different cultures, ideologies, and influences. This period witnessed the convergence of various ethnicities, languages, and traditions, fostering a mosaic of cultural exchanges that continue to shape the rich tapestry of North-East India. The remnants of military installations, abandoned bunkers, and relics scattered across the landscape serve as tangible symbols of the war's impact, inviting contemplation and reflection on the region's historical journey.

6.5. Religion and War

The northeastern states of Manipur and Naga Hills have a complex history shaped by their unique blend of diverse religious practices and the impact of war. The years leading up to and during WW II marked a pivotal period in the history of these regions, where religion and war intersected to bring about significant changes. This comprehensive write-up explores the religious landscape in Manipur and Naga Hills, their experiences during the war, and the transformative consequences that left both these areas at a critical crossroads(Chakravarti, 2022c).

6.6. Manipur.

WW II undoubtedly left a profound mark on Manipur's religious landscape, but the story goes deeper. Prior to the conflict, Christian missionaries had arrived in the region, introducing a new faith alongside the existing tapestry of Hinduism, Sanamahi religion, and animistic traditions. Their presence, though limited, added another layer of complexity to the spiritual lives of the Manipuri people. The war's impact on these religious dynamics was multifaceted. The arrival of Allied forces, many of whom were Christians, further exposed the region to a new religious influence. This, along with the disruptions caused by the Battle of Imphal, undoubtedly challenged the established dominance of Hinduism. However, it is important to note that the influence of Christian missionaries on the course of WW II, on either a global or regional scale, was minimal. Manipur, while caught in the crossfire, remained a relatively small player in the grand scheme of the conflict(*Borderland City in New India*, n.d.).

The true significance lies in how the war interacted with existing religious pluralism. The hardships endured by the Manipuri people during the conflict likely led to a renewed sense of introspection and a search for meaning. This, in some cases, might have drawn individuals towards Christianity or a re-evaluation of their existing faith. More importantly, the war highlighted the resilience of indigenous beliefs. The presence of the Sanamahi faith alongside Hinduism throughout the conflict demonstrates the enduring strength of local traditions. While some may have converted to Christianity, the vast majority clung to their established practices, offering a sense of continuity and solace amidst the chaos.

In the aftermath, Manipur's religious landscape emerged transformed. Hinduism remained a dominant force, but the war had served as a catalyst for revaluation. The presence of Christianity, though limited, added another facet to the region's religious identity. Most importantly, the war underscored the enduring strength of the Sanamahi faith and the importance of cultural preservation. Today, Manipur's religious landscape continues to be a vibrant tapestry woven from diverse spiritual traditions, a witness to the region's rich cultural heritage and its ability to adapt and evolve in the face of external pressures.

6.7. Naga Hills.

Naga Hills, home to indigenous Naga tribes with deep-rooted animistic beliefs, became a battleground, profoundly impacting the psyche of the local population and catalysing significant religious transformations. The war intersected with the religious landscape of the Naga Hills, amplifying existing tensions and triggering a clash of ideologies that reshaped the spiritual and cultural fabric of the region. For centuries, the Naga tribes had maintained a spiritual connection with the natural world, revering ancestral spirits and attributing sacred significance to elements of their environment such as forests, rivers, and mountains. This traditional Naga religion formed the cornerstone of their cultural identity and communal cohesion, providing a sense of belonging and guidance in their daily lives. However, the arrival of Western missionaries during the colonial period initiated a gradual shift in religious dynamics. Christian missionaries, establishing churches, schools, and medical facilities, presented Christianity as an alternative spiritual path. This marked a pivotal moment in Naga religious history, introducing a monotheistic worldview that challenged traditional animistic beliefs (Text et al., n.d.).

The onset of WW II intensified these religious tensions. As the conflict unfolded in the Naga Hills, the Naga tribes found themselves caught in the crossfire of global ideologies. The experiences of war exposed them to new influences and perspectives, further destabilizing their traditional religious practices. The entry of Christian missionaries during this tumultuous period exacerbated the transformation of Naga religious identity. The missionaries offered not only spiritual salvation but also practical assistance, such as education and healthcare, which appealed to many in the face of wartime hardships. This combination of spiritual and material support contributed to the gradual shift of some Naga communities towards Christianity. The war served as a catalyst for change, accelerating the pace of religious transformation among the Naga tribes.

While the traditional Naga religion emphasized a deep connection with nature and ancestral spirits, the upheaval of war and the influence of missionary activities led to a notable shift towards monotheistic Christianity. Despite this transformation, elements of the indigenous Naga traditional religion persist among certain tribes, highlighting the complex coexistence of traditional practices alongside Christianity. This syncretic nature of religious beliefs reflects the dynamic interplay between indigenous traditions and the impact of global events on the cultural evolution of the Naga people. In conclusion, the

intersection of religion and war in the Naga Hills during WW II deeply affected the psyche of the local population, catalysing significant religious transformations and reshaping the spiritual landscape of the region. The experiences of conflict, coupled with the influence of missionary activities, led to a gradual shift towards Christianity while also preserving elements of traditional Naga spirituality (Bendangjungshi, 2011). This dynamic religious landscape continues to shape the cultural identity of the Naga tribes, embodying both continuity and change in the wake of wartime upheaval.

6.8. Unearthing Forgotten Stories: Personal Narratives

‘Unearthing Forgotten Stories of WW II fought in Kohima and the Naga Hills in 1944’ encapsulates a profound journey of collecting and preserving individual accounts through interviews and oral histories, rekindling lost perspectives and narratives often overshadowed in conventional historical retellings. The endeavour involves engaging with individuals who lived through the harrowing events of the war, granting a platform for their voices to be heard. These interviews unravel deeply personal experiences, emotions, and viewpoints, crucial components overlooked in conventional historical narratives. Documenting these stories enriches our understanding of historical events, offering a multifaceted portrayal of the past that captures the human side of war.

Rediscovering lost perspectives through personal narratives resurrects a mosaic of experiences that might otherwise have slipped into oblivion. These stories bring to light the intricacies and realities of daily life during wartime, unveiling human resilience, struggles, and triumphs amid adversity. They offer a nuanced lens into the lesser-known facets of the war, challenging dominant historical narratives and providing alternative viewpoints crucial for a more comprehensive understanding of history.

The process of unearthing forgotten stories through interviews and oral histories allows for the reclamation of diverse narratives, ensuring that a broader spectrum of experiences is acknowledged and preserved. It empowers individuals to share their accounts, contributing invaluable layers to the broader historical narrative. These personal narratives not only enrich our comprehension of the past but also serve as poignant reminders of the importance of honouring diverse perspectives, fostering empathy, and valuing the multifaceted human experiences embedded within the annals of history.

The importance of rediscovering forgotten experiences and personal narratives of soldiers and people who lived through the battles of Kohima and Imphal during WW II in 1944. It emphasizes the importance of oral histories, emphasizing how these tales expand our understanding of historical events by offering a diverse representation of human lives in the midst of battle. The narratives bring to light highly intimate experiences, feelings, and points of view that traditional historical records frequently neglect. Through these anecdotes, a full representation of the human side of conflict emerges.

For instance, oral narratives collected from veterans and civilians who were present during the battles offer poignant glimpses into the realities of life during wartime. Personal narratives of soldiers reveal the camaraderie among comrades, the struggles endured on the battlefield, and the emotional toll of war. Stories of civilians depict the challenges they faced, including displacement, hardships, and the resilience displayed in adapting to the adversities of conflict. One example might be the recollection of a soldier who vividly describes the intensity of combat in the hills around Kohima, illustrating the bravery and sacrifices of those who fought there. Similarly, the oral history of a civilian might recount the hardships of being displaced from their homes and the resilience demonstrated in rebuilding their lives amidst the turmoil of war.

These personal narratives serve as invaluable testimonies, offering diverse perspectives that supplement and enrich traditional historical accounts. By capturing the human experiences of soldiers and civilians, these stories contribute significantly to a more comprehensive understanding of the battles of Kohima and Imphal, shedding light on the untold aspects and emotional realities of war beyond mere military strategies and outcomes.

Oral narratives stand as a central pillar in the reconstruction of the early history of the people of Naga Hills and Manipur, playing a crucial role in reshaping the narrative of the Battle of Kohima and Imphal in Northeast India during WW II. In regions where written records are sparse, oral history becomes indispensable for documenting the unique history of a state or community. Despite the inherent challenges in verifying the legitimacy of oral accounts, particularly the risk of alterations from their original state, they offer valuable insights not found in conventional print sources. The primary source for understanding the Battle of Kohima and Imphal from the local perspective is derived from the oral testimonies of war survivors, although the accuracy of these stories may vary. This

challenging issue was carefully addressed by cross-referencing various descriptions of events from various sources in order to create a more nuanced and thorough historical narrative. (Figure 6.1-6.7)

6.9. War Veterans' Accounts of the Battle of Kohima and Imphal

The number of surviving war veterans and eyewitnesses in Northeast India is indeed declining, leading to the gradual fading of memories regarding the pivotal events they lived through. Their recollections encompass a wide array of emotional moments of laughter, fascination, pain, grief, and, notably, the profound recognition of their survival against the odds. The prevailing sentiment among many veterans revolves around a palpable sense of relief stemming from their victorious emergence, a sentiment deeply rooted in their war-torn experiences. However, intriguingly, while some veterans and eyewitnesses echo this sentiment, there is a notable contrast in perspectives. For instance, among those from the Manipur general area, like Moirang, there's a divergence in sentiment. They express a different outlook, highlighting a paradox in their encounters with the Japanese. In addition to physical resemblances between themselves and the Japanese, certain individuals also felt a sense of affinity rather than hostility towards the Japanese, presenting a complex narrative of human connections amid conflict.

Nonetheless, the prevailing sentiment suggests that the Japanese were largely perceived as adversaries, necessitating their elimination. The British, possessing superior resources and strategic advantages, emerged victorious against the Japanese, who faced overwhelming challenges due to resource depletion. Following the war, the triumphant British forces departed, marking the end of their colonial rule, coinciding with the historic declaration of India's independence in 1947. These intricate and multifaceted perspectives underscore the complexity of wartime experiences and the varying sentiments held by individuals, shaping a nuanced understanding of the aftermath of WW II in the region (Murayama, 2021).

Account-1

Sovehu Nienu, an ex-soldier of the 1st Assam Regiment, vividly described the Battle of Kohima as a chaotic scene with loud artillery, cries of the wounded, and constant enemy fire. Despite the intense turmoil, their courage shone through, becoming a shield against

overwhelming odds. They used tactics born out of necessity, even resorting to psychological warfare with shouts and screams to gain any advantage. Yet, beyond tactics, their deep faith in God almighty sustained them. This belief in something greater gave them strength amidst despair, pushing them to endure despite the seemingly impossible situation. The battle was not just about weapons but a display of unity and resilience. They fought not as individuals but as a united force, bound by a silent vow to protect their homeland. For Nienu, the memories of horror and heroism from Kohima stayed forever, as a reminder of the sacrifices made by all who fought alongside him. The battle became a symbol of unwavering courage and unshakeable faith in the face of adversity.

Account -2

Zhavilie Huozha, at 96 years old, vividly recalls the tumult that ensued on April 4th, 1944. The serenity of Meriema village, adjacent to Kohima, was abruptly disrupted by the Japanese onslaught. Fleeing to the safety of the jungle, clutching whatever they could salvage, became the only recourse. In a fortuitous turn in May 1944, British troops arrived, extending a helping hand by erecting tents for the distressed villagers. Despite the unfamiliarity with weaponry, the British supplied arms to the locals, urging vigilance against the encroaching Japanese threat. Zhavilie and a few others, armed with rifles, ventured to Kohima, only to be struck by tragedy; a protective grenade explosion cost Zhavilie his fingers. Prompt intervention by the Assam Rifles led to treatment and the acknowledgment of his bravery with the title of captain.

Initially, the Japanese fostered strong ties with the locals, relying heavily on indigenous resources. However, their actions took a turn for the worse when they resorted to forcibly confiscating livestock and possessions from the populace. This overbearing moves fractured loyalties, prompting a re-evaluation of allegiances among the villagers. Feeling betrayed and facing the jeopardy of their livelihoods, the locals pivoted their allegiance towards the British forces. Recounting the brutality inflicted by the Japanese, Zhavilie recounts instances of raiding food supplies and inflicting harm upon animals and women. Eventually, the Nagas rallied alongside the British in opposition to the Japanese incursion

Account-3

During WWII in Viswema, 12-year-old Niza saw Japanese soldiers' disciplined conduct, contrasting with Indian sepoys' misconduct towards women. He admired the Japanese tactic of shooting from trees. Red Cross nurses, including Italians and Germans, were untouched by conflict.

Niza's dad, Vipon, involved in war efforts, donated money for a project. Villagers used horse carriers and fled to Jakhama when danger loomed. Nearby villages suffered damage; some lives were lost. Japanese soldiers helped with food and liked local veggies. Jakhama, though under gunfire, escaped bombardment. The Japanese set up a school there. Niza's account showcased how people coped and adapted to wartime struggles.

Account-4

Chingchungba, hailing from Changki village, bravely enlisted in the Allied forces at the age of 17. His journey began just three months before the fateful battle of Kohima erupted, where he served as a vital runner and interpreter. His duty involved delivering crucial messages between Kohima, Mokokchung, and Wokha, earning a modest salary of twelve rupees per month. Chingchungba recalls the fairness of Allied officials and he claimed that he never witnessed any kind of mistreatment or bias during his service.

While intricate details about the battle eluded him, the thunderous bombardment and the sight of planes hovering above never failed to captivate and astonish him. Memories linger of encounters with INA troops alongside the Japanese, with some ultimately surrendering to the British Army. Amidst numerous British officers, Lt. Col. Brown stands out in his recollections. He fondly remembers the British as 'honourable men' and acknowledges the Japanese for their 'respectful conduct' towards the Nagas. Chingchungba's valour and dedication were duly recognized through the accolade of bravery, alongside prestigious honours for his services.

Account-5

Viketono Semo's memories vividly encapsulate the arrival of the Japanese when she was around 11 years old in Jotsoma village. The tranquillity of the village was abruptly interrupted by the sight of Japanese soldiers ascending from the south, with a notable,

affable officer among them. His demeanour set a surprisingly cordial tone, contrasting the expected tension in such encounters. This officer, seemingly leading the group, engaged warmly with the locals, leaving a lasting impression on the village.

Unexpectedly, the officer and two comrades ventured into various houses in search of sustenance, indicating the soldiers' hunger and desperate need for food. Witnessing their visibly famished state, the villagers, displaying incredible generosity, willingly shared their own provisions with the Japanese soldiers. This act of selflessness underlined the challenging circumstances faced by both the occupying forces and the local community amidst the scarcity of wartime provisions.

In response to the Japanese presence, the closely-knit community of Jotsoma rallied together. Viketono's family and fellow villagers undertook the responsibility of providing sustenance by pounding paddy grain for the soldiers. This demonstration of goodwill underscored the resilience and compassion within the village, navigating the complexities of wartime occupation with a spirit of hospitality and communal support.

The arrival of the Japanese instilled a sense of impending conflict in the villagers' minds. They anticipated skirmishes between the occupying Allied forces and the Japanese. As night fell, the distant sound of mortar shelling echoed, signalling the start of potential clashes on the horizon. This ominous sound underscored the villagers' realization that their once serene existence was about to be engulfed by the tumultuous chaos of war. Viketono's account poignantly captures the transition from peaceful village life to the looming specter of conflict, offering a personal perspective on the unfolding complexities during the Japanese occupation.

Account-6

Zakiebito, a '*Gaon Budha*' in Jotsoma village, has transformed his home into a museum, preserving artifacts from WW II. His collection isn't just about amassing items; it is about keeping the narratives alive. When Zakiebito was just a young child, around 4 or 5, the ravages of war reached his village. He vividly recalls the fear instilled by Japanese soldiers arriving and requesting food in a manner that unsettled not only his family but the entire community.

However, as Zakiebito matured, he delved deeper into these memories. Through the stories passed down by his family, he gained a nuanced understanding. These soldiers weren't merely aggressors—they were individuals grappling with hunger and desperation. They resorted to actions they likely didn't want to take due to their dire lack of resources. Zakiebito now echoes these narratives within his museum. The artifacts displayed—tools, utensils, and more—offer a glimpse into the daily struggles of life during wartime. They serve as poignant reminders of the immense challenges people faced just to survive.

Through his storytelling, Zakiebito reshapes perceptions. Those soldiers are not solely viewed as adversaries anymore; they become relatable individuals caught in the tumult of an immensely trying period. Their actions, once seen as threatening, are reframed in the context of necessity and survival. Zakiebito's mission extends beyond mere preservation. He imparts lessons about the repercussions of difficult times, acknowledging how adversity can drive individuals to commit acts they wouldn't otherwise consider. Simultaneously, his museum underscores the capacity for kindness and compassion, even amidst the chaos of war.

He acts as a bridge between the past and the present, illuminating the human facets of history. His museum serves as a conduit for understanding, forgiveness, and empathy, reminding us of the profound significance of acknowledging the complexities inherent in historical narratives.

Account-7

Interviewing K.N. Pusha, a resident of Viswema village who was 18 is around 95 years old narrates that; when the conflict broke out, he was studying at the Mission Compound in Kohima, attending his 3rd standard. The unrest in Burma led to an influx of Burmese refugees seeking refuge in Kohima. Fleeing their war-torn land, they struggled to find welcoming hosts, eventually moving southward to Dimapur and Assam. The settlement that emerged in Dimapur for these refugees came to be known as the 'Burma Camp,' a name that has stuck over the years.

Pusha had heard murmurs of Japanese forces advancing toward Imphal without passing through the main town. Typically, the Japanese traversed the Eastern regions of the Naga Hills, including Zunhebphoto and Kiphire. On April 3, 1944, the Japanese reached Viswema

village. He recalled them as short, fair individuals donning ‘pristine uniforms. Surprisingly, there were even Japanese women present, though not easily recognizable.

Before April 2, 1944, British forces retreated from Burma and passed through Viswema en route to Kohima. The war officially erupted on April 4, 1944, at 4:00 pm. The INA (INA) allied with the Japanese and engaged in the battle for Kohima. During the conflict, the Japanese faced shortages of rations and reinforcements, and it was the Viswema villagers who provided them with food. The village served as a crucial ration station, with the Japanese establishing their ration headquarters at Mr. Vinol’s house. Nearby villagers contributed paddy and other essential food items to support the Japanese, delivered to Mr. Vinol's residence.

Interestingly, local reports highlighted the use of paper currency during this period. Denominations included 50 notes, as well as 1, 2, 5, and 10 notes. Records indicate that the Japanese printed these wartime currencies in Viswema and Jakhama villages.



Figure 6.1: Scholar on a research visit to the field area.

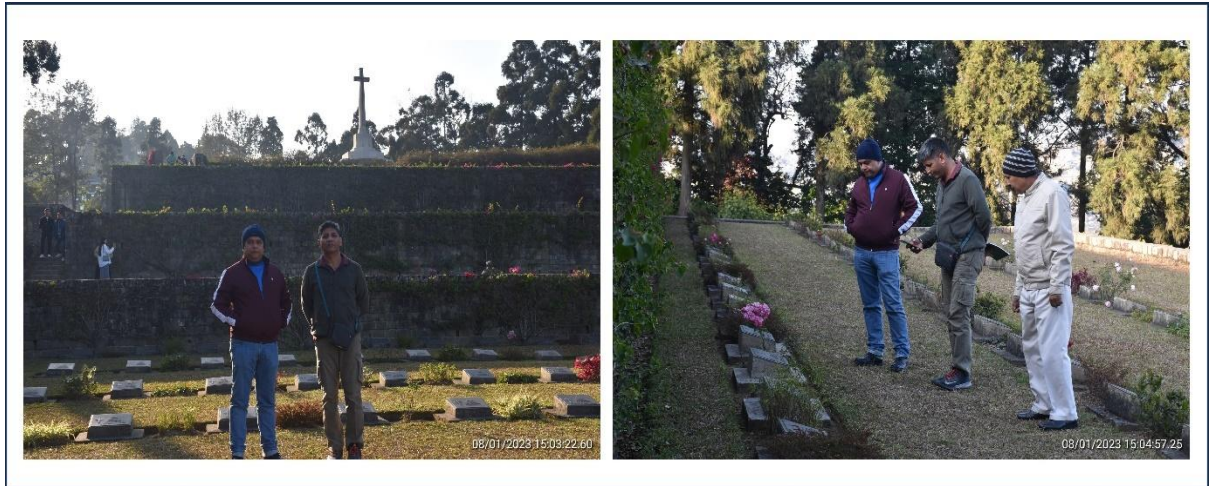


Figure 6.2: The supervisor and the scholar receiving an insightful briefing on the historic Kohima War Cemetery, Jan 2023.



Figure 6.3: Scholar endeavouring to analyze the strategic and tactical dimensions of the Battle of the Tennis Court, February 2022



Figure 6.4: The supervisor and the scholar with 96-year-old Viketono Semo of Jotsoma village after their interaction.



Figure 6.5: The scholar interacting with the pastor of Kohima Cathedral Church



Figure 6.6: A visit to 'India Peace Memorial' Maibam Lokpaching, Manipur)



Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan, has presented his writing of "PEACE (HEIWA)" to the Imphal Peace Museum, as it embodies the friendship between Japan and India & the resolute pursuit of universal peace.

Figure 6.7: The Japanese Efforts Toward Building Universal Peace (Photo Courtesy: 'India Peace Memorial' Maibam Lokpaching, Manipur)