

Film Review
 Bitopan Borborah
Memories of a Forgotten War



Director and Producer- Utpal Borpujari & Subimal Bhattacharjee

Two epochal events of the history, Battle of Waterloo and Battle of Normandy are not, but the Battles of Imphal and Kohima were voted as Britain's greatest by the National Army Museum of London in 2013. The contest's criteria included a battle's political and historical impact, the challenges the troops faced, and the strategy and tactics employed. Waterloo had topped the online poll which produced a list of 20 land battles fought since the English Civil War. The military experts debated extensively about the top five before going to an audience vote after which Battles of Imphal and Kohima came out as the winner. Obviously, the winner was something of a surprise given the longstanding prominence of Waterloo and D-Day or Battle of Normandy in Britain. Army men who fought at the Battles of Imphal and Kohima lamented for long for this historical disregard for the most tortuous and decisive battle preceding the Second World War and in exasperation, called themselves 'The Forgotten Army'. On the other hand, except in fringe areas of theatre of war spread across the states of Manipur and Nagaland, we Indians too have almost forgotten or faintly remember about this very important event

of the Nineteenth century, which gradually culminated in the Second World War. Despite Subhash Chandra Bose-led *Azad Hind Fauj* or the Indian National Army guided the Japanese to break the British defenses in Imphal with an intention to rout the British rulers from India, and Japanese also planned to capture Imphal to advance further up to the Brahmaputra valley to disrupt Allied line of communication to the front in Northern Burma, their expectations, unfortunately, had met with inexplicable catastrophe. Instead, the British troops of 120,000, aided proficiently by the US Air force, cut a swath through the Japanese artillery to finally ensure victory after 133 days of a fierce battle. Historically, the Battles of Imphal and Kohima were remarkably important in the Burma campaign because they stopped the hitherto unvanquished Japanese army's march into Asia for the first time.

Having served as a journalist for a long time, film critic-turned-filmmaker Utpal Borpujari's desire to make a documentary on this war or precisely it's after-effects on common people living on the affected territories, therefore, is

understandable. Because at this juncture, from the humanist point of view, it is not important as who won or got defeated in the war, but important are the scars of the time the war has left on the lives of all the affected, either directly or remotely. As Borpujari claims, “despite the war itself having a great historical



Memories of a Forgotten War Working Still from Viswema Village (Nagaland)

significance, several war historians, as well as documentarists, have touched on its military aspects. What remained untouched were the stories of immense sufferings of common people caught in the war unwittingly, which I wanted to portray besides first-person accounts of people who were actually the actors in the theatre of war in one of the most difficult terrains. Because when the long and terrible war was played out in their backyard in both Manipur and Nagaland, the homes of the natives were bombed and burnt, many women, men and children brutally killed. So, in the course of making the film, I came across many stories of great courage, humanity and comradeship in all the places we had been to that it was difficult to decide what to keep and what to keep out from the final work.” Subimal Bhattacharjee, the producer of the film who was born and brought up in Haflong and is a renowned cyber security expert based in Delhi, says the motivation to make the film came from the sense of responsibility of telling stories from the northeast India that have not been told yet. “Our documentary also en-

deavours to tell a very important story of an event which had some much local involvement for a global war of significance. It was essential to pick up the first-hand experiences



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and show them to the world and also to the people of northeast region so that they know of the strong legacy of the past” he says. Many perhaps do not know that despite the Imphal-Kohima war ended on 18th July 1944, even after 76 years, the local people still continue to suffer from the accidental explosions, caused by the residual ammunition of the war, strewn on the war-ravaged areas. As nightmarish days of the war still haunts the elders, tragedy often occurs even today when accidental explosions take lives and limbs of people. Borpujari’s documentary *Memories of a Forgotten War* (now streaming on pay-per-view platform www.moviesaints.com at this link: <https://www.moviesaints.com/movie/memories-of-a-forgotten-war>) records the accounts of the war veterans, all in their twilight years, and living in India, UK and Japan. Moreover, it also documents the unabated and untold sufferings of the people mostly living in areas of Nagaland and Manipur, and as a result, it comes off as a very heartwarming but equally very poignant and reflective documentary. However, one must not forget that the *Memories of a Forgotten War* is indeed very enlightening as it takes one on an unfamiliar trip through the corridors of a history of extreme brutality, unspeakable sufferings and terrible loss of about 40,000 human lives.

Mr. Bitopan Borborah is a Member of Fipresci-India based in Guwahati.