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Tape 853 Finding Aid

INTERVIEWEE NAMES:
Brigadier Richard Gardiner and Mrs. Catherine Gardiner
   4700.0578  853.1  (Tape 6 of 7)
Sir Alec Ogilvie
   4700.0584  853.2  (Tape 1 of 2)
Colonel and Mrs. C.A.K. Innes-Wilson
   4700.0585  853.3  (Tape 1 of 4)

IDENTIFICATION:  Britons in Pre-Independence India

INTERVIEWERS:  Frank de Caro, Rosan Jordan

SERIES:  British Voices from South Asia

INTERVIEW DATES:
Gardiners: 3/8/1978
Ogilvie: 3/14/1978
Innes-Wilsons: 3/29/78

TOTAL PLAYING TIME:  1 hour, 34 minutes
Gardiners: 17 minutes
Ogilvie: 73 minutes
Innes-Wilsons:  4 minutes:

OTHER MATERIALS:  None

RESTRICTIONS:  Copyright retained by interviewee and/or the interviewee’s heirs

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Tape 853, Side A
Gardiners (Part 8 of 10) (853.1)
001  Inquiry and rumors about submarine in the harbor that had fired a torpedo
008  earthquakes
014  investigating railway accidents, most are straightforward
the mystery of one particular accident at Dimapur (continued from tape 852), he was in charge of re-enacting accident to resolve conflicting claims regarding the deformation of the track
rebuild site for re-enactment, collected a train with the same number of coaches and weighted them with sandbags
arranged it so that the vacuum brake was working, placed an internal combustion engine to activate the brake system
arranged telescope on the front of the train; building a large buffer across the track
arranged derailment by opening a joint
used an eight-speed engine to push the train to gain speed (45 mph)
then watched the crash in broad daylight, the first time anyone was ever prepared to watch a railway accident
re-enactment indicated that the engine was at fault, eventually they had to redesign it
moving picture cameras, he filmed the incident but sold his camera after it began to deteriorate

A bogey is a four-wheeled, two-axle track upon which cars and locomotives sit
railway men got a lot of travel time, as did the ICS men
he was born in India and it was expected that he would serve overseas, probably India
Calcutta was distinct “a little nation of its own”, crowded
Bombay, you found people, entire families, sleeping on the pavements
people often climbed on the roof of trains because of crowds
Richard was involved in theatrical plays, miniature theaters
he also dove and swam a lot in Rangoon
end of Gardiner interview

Tape 853, Side A cont’d
Ogilvie (Part 1 of 3) (853.2)

Interview is in London
tradition of family service
Alec was born in England in 1913, but taken to India when he was three months old
vague childhood memories of living in Delhi and Shimla
earliest recollection of living in tents while New Delhi was being constructed
his father was in the Foreigner Political Department through the Army
thus his service was in the loveliest part of India (not British India), the Indian States
Frank’s interest in India
Alec returned to India after his education and worked in London; he joined a British company in Calcutta when he was 21 (March, 1935), his father was still there and did not retire until October 1937
Alec enjoyed visiting his father who was Agent to the Governor General in now Rajasthan, covering all of the most beautiful states
Bikaner, a city; the Maharaja used to give Christmas Shoot [?]
a 24 hour train ride from Calcutta to Delhi, changing trains and going to Bathinda,changed trains again at the Bikaner State Railway
Christmas party, father Christmas
after Christmas, house party moved out [Gajner?] for three days shooting, where there was
his father returned to England at the age of 55, but had spent 44 years in India.

people say that every year spent in Calcutta after the age of 55 took five years off your life.

Alec’s vague childhood recollections, children saw their parents very little; between the ages of 12-18, he saw his father a total of six weeks one summer vacation.

children were sent back to England rather than educated in India; this was very difficult.

two reasons people sent their children back: 1) the lack of adequate schools after age eight and 2) climate.

after WWII, with the introduction of regular air travel, the gap was closed a bit.

Alec lived in Calcutta for 30 years (March 1935- March 1965), but was away while in the Indian Army during WWII (August 1940 - February 1946).

life in Calcutta between 1935 and 1940: very similar to contemporary Hong Kong (last remaining outposts of Old British Empire), you worked hard and played hard.

Calcutta had simmering political trouble.

he preferred the eighteen years of Independent India.

his father encouraged him to go into business because he realized that British involvement in government was going to decrease with next generations.

living conditions in Calcutta: had 17 servants.

story about the day he arrived in Calcutta: a man greeted him at the railway station who lined up personal servants from which to choose, the one he chose stayed with them until he and his wife left in 1965 (a tearful departure).

Alec was a Japanese prisoner of war, and his personal servant tracked him down after his release.

it was very rare that a personal servant lasted through the transition from his master’s single life to his married one.

Calcutta was not as popular to work in as was Bombay, outbursts usually led to violence.

the least popular government job in India in the 1930's was Safety Governor.

danger was just a part of life.

Calcutta was the capital of India until Delhi became the capital.

Bombay was financial sector, a businessman’s city.

when people ask him if he was upset leaving India, he replies that he was sad at going, but not sorry to leave.

famines and wars.

when Pakistan was divided into two, the refugees from the new Pakistan went to Calcutta but the city was not prepared for the influx of people.

the British always retired in their own country.

on 15 August, 1947--Independence Day--he went out into the streets of Calcutta and people were shouting “Long live India!”; no feeling against the British unlike the Dutch who had a “very rough departure.”

doesn’t remember any rude Indians.

Indians wrote in English.

the language question: English, Hindi, Tamil.
Tape 853, Side B
Ogilvie (Part 3 of 3) (853.2)

000 training grounds in the Northwest frontier
006 [Rusnuk?] ascended 8000 feet
008 RP duty (road protection); going up into the hills with convoys
019 they went from the frontier to train for the Middle East; they went for days without
drinking in order to train
020 transferred to Burma
023 they arrived in Malta two months before the Japanese arrived and were held prisoner
for three and a half years in Singapore
026 changes since Independence, gradual
036 inflation
038 Americans (GIs) did not “behave too terribly well” during the Indian War in Calcutta, so
that when the British returned, they were more loved by Indians
041 British did not like the money that Americans had
046 story about Americans over paying servants, affecting the market
056 American soldiers in captivity; the USS Houston was sunk nearby
057 he picked up languages such as Hindi
060 the inexperience of some British officers regarding the many Indian languages and
dialects; languages were confusing; serious problems arose when they couldn’t understand
the language of the Indian Army
066 it was easier for him because he had been in India
069 the gap during the war between the Indian Army officers (with previous experience) and
those who just came out from England; stories he would hear about the old Indian Army
regulars
074 in his regiment (unlike others you would hear about), there was no stratification between
ECO (emergency commissioned officers) and the Regular army men
077 his sister, Vera, was married to a Birdwood whose father had been Commander in
Chief in India
084 before the war, people from businesses and different services did not mix company; they
were separate communities
085 as a young man, he remembers that as a head of a large company one would know the
senior ICS people in the government as well as one would know the officers in the fort
memories of singing in a cabaret at the Saturday Club in a production about the Army
094 British India had their own vocabulary; there a lot of Indian words that describe situations
better than the English language, but they never use them in front of relations, etc.
105 story about getting currencies confused when discussing a man’s raise (1000 rupees vs.
1000 pounds)
122 “prabandhabus” means “arrangement”
137 there were two things he was told to buy in India at Simon Arzt Emporium; a topi and an
edition of Lady Chatterley’s Lover
145 the end of the topees came with the war; he returned from captivity to find the air force
mechanics servicing the planes without any head protections
148 he remembers that as a child, if he went out without a topi the nurse would probably get
fired
railway officials still wear topees as part of the uniform

Simon Arzt Emporium was probably run by Egyptians

most British reaction to India was positive

British Tea Garden managers[?]; the nearest neighbor was 20 miles away

unionization after the war; isolation

Calcutta was a close-knit society

tea gardens were clubs that you would drive you to see you friends, sometimes 25 miles

Calcutta was large

the changing of the phrase “Eurasian community” to “Anglo-Indians” in about the 1940s

seeing people he knew in India in England, friendships based on shared experiences

he belongs to the Oriental Club, which originally stemmed from people who worked in the East, but now half of the members are associated with the medical fraternity

in the next 10-12 years, he expects that members who actually lived in the East will die out; he’s 65 years old and most people he’s talking about are older

he realized he was “becoming archaic” when his son’s university class referred to WWII as “Mod Hist”

his contact with Eurasians was limited

he was most likely to have social relations with Indians than Anglo-Indians/Eurasians

they brought back carpets and rugs from India

as a young child, he went along on hunts but did not hunt as an adult

a paper chase is like a treasure hunt with horses and paper; they did it in Calcutta on horses

he met his wife in England when he was 16 on a chaperoned Swiss party; she was 11; they married in November 1945 and she joined him in India in 1946; she lived there 20 years and looks on her experience more sentimentally than he does

he was in India 36 years and came back to England at age 51

returning to Calcutta; his wife had not gotten it out of her system

his opinion on “The Plain Tales of the Raj” radio program; his friend, Evan Charlton, narrated it; it came on too late for him to listen to the whole thing (his sister’s voice was in it)

Michael Mason of the BBC is a good contact regarding the interviews for the radio program; the concept of the interviews is similar to de Caro’s; preservation and recording a period of history

he particularly liked the background noises of the radio show, the Indian train stations

de Caro was there in 1966-67, just after Alec left

living in Calcutta was a unique experience, but not too popular; they had a large English population, much bigger than Bombay

looking out the London window at the playboy bunny girls who walk down the stairs to the Playboy Club--“a great American export”

reels of videos made in India

gsmall talk about upcoming vacation plans

story about American tourists in India in June when it was 108 degrees--they told him that it was no worse than Texas

end of interview with Sir Alec Ogilvie
Tape 853, Side B cont’d
Innes-Wilsons (Part 1 of 5) (853.3)


515 he spent most of his time in the north, but was also in the Central Provinces for several years

520 he went to India because his family had traditionally served there; his father and grandfather were there

532 getting away from the restrictive feeling of serving in the Army in England

535 in the Survey of India, they had to work very hard

544 he joined the Survey of India in the spring of 1929;

550 for the first few years, they spent time out in the field surveying themselves, then later they supervised others

556 aerial survey came later; they had an aerial survey organization on the frontier since the 1920s