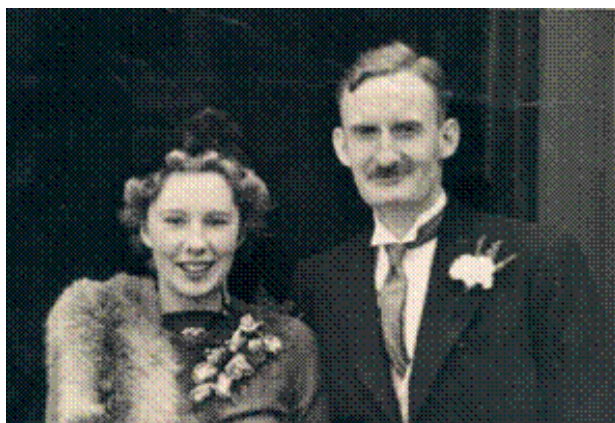


MRS DAPHNE MACDONALD

A tribute in BODY and MIND by Dr Thomas Stuttaford.

The Times Nov 7 1996



Mrs Daphne Macdonald was a most unusual woman who died recently, aged 80... Mrs Macdonald's early married life was spent in the Indian sun.

During the Second World War in the Far East the Japanese advanced through Burma to the borders of Assam, India. In 1943 Mrs Macdonald's husband, Ranald Macdonald, was appointed Superintendent of the Lushai hills and became the proconsul controlling 9,000 square miles of Assam with a 100-mile front facing the Japanese. The Macdonalds' story is told in the book *The Men Who Ruled India*, by Philip Mason.

British defences had been set up in such places as Kohima and Imphal, but it was decided that the surrounding distant hills could not be defended.

The people of every village in the Lushai hills arranged secret hiding places in the jungle where they could go when the Japanese approached, and where food and ammunition could be stored.

Each village contributed volunteers to the irregular bands of young men, commanded by Mr Macdonald, who kept up guerrilla activities in their own hills, harrying the Japanese, laying booby traps, destroying bridges and denying the enemy food and water. The Lushai tribesmen, also provided the British forces with constant intelligence, and raiding parties led by Mr Macdonald ventured into the neighbouring Chin Hills, where they destroyed Japanese installations far behind the front line.

Daphne Macdonald, together with their small boy, stayed with her husband and was the only European woman in the thousands of miles defended by the hill tribesmen. She worked a wireless set, decoded the messages, and organised the headquarters. The only leave she had was when she became pregnant with her second child. She walked 100 miles over the hills to the doctor and 100 miles back again, after her antenatal examination.

Throughout the war, such was the tribesmen's loyalty, that no Lushai tribesman ever defected to the Japanese and there is no record of them ever giving away information of British troop movements. Following independence, and after the Macdonalds had returned to Britain, the Lushai Hills were incorporated into the state of Mizoram, but the tribesmen did not forget their wartime leader and his wife, and the usual process of altering the old colonial names was reversed. A hill in the centre of the state's capital, Aizawl, lost its local name of Thunghui Huan, was renamed, and is still known as, Macdonald Hill.