



# Fire in the Night: Wingate of Burma, Ethiopia, and Zion

*John Bierman, Colin Smith*

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Winston Churchill thought he was a military genius; others considered him greatly overrated; a few even thought him mad. Almost sixty years after his death at age forty-four in an airplane crash, Orde Wingate remains perhaps the most controversial of all World War II commanders.

Born into a fundamentalist Christian sect and raised in the Cromwellian tradition of Sword and Bible, Wingate was an odd mixture of religious mystic and idealist, combining an unshakable belief in an Old Testament God with an insatiable interest in music, literature, history, philosophy, and the politics of his day.

But his overriding and enduring passion was for Zionism, a cause that--although he had no Jewish blood--he embraced when posted to British-ruled Palestine in 1936. There he raised the Special Night Squads, an irregular force that decimated Arab rebel bands and taught a future generation of Israeli generals how to fight.

In 1941, Wingate led another guerrilla-style force, this time into Italian-occupied Ethiopia, where he was instrumental in restoring Emperor Haile Selassie to his throne. But the campaign that was to bring him world fame was conducted behind enemy lines in Burma, where his Chindits shattered the myth of Japanese invincibility in jungle fighting, giving Allied morale a much-needed boost at a crucial point in World War II.

Throughout his career, Wingate's unconventionality and disdain for the superiors he dismissed as "military apes" marked him as a difficult if not impossible subordinate. He was that, but also, as this vigorous new study reveals, an inspiring leader.

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