

What a wondrous thing is the Internet! Google has indexed over 4.2 billion Web pages, and, personally, I'd sooner give up the phone than e-mail. Yes, there's a lot of junk and spam out there, but the Internet is a treasure trove for writers and editors. And sometimes we don't even have to go in hunt of a gem—it finds us. One of this issue's features is a case in point.

We are privileged to be publishing the first excerpts ever made public from the diary of John Grindlay, a Dartmouth-trained doctor who served in Burma during World War II with Gordon Seagrave, the famous "Burma surgeon." Here's how Grindlay's compelling story (which begins on page 28) landed in our laps:

Our Winter 2002 issue included a feature based on letters written to Dr. John Bowler, DMS's dean, by alumni serving abroad during WWII. One of the letters mentioned in that article was from Grindlay, who had detailed for Bowler his harrowing experiences in Burma just a few weeks before Seagrave wrote an article about the unit for the July 20, 1942, issue of *Time* magazine. And that might have been that, but for the Internet.

Coincidentally, however, a few months after our Winter '02 article came out, a member of the University of Minnesota faculty was doing some research about Grindlay on the Web. Alan Lathrop, who is also curator of the manuscripts division at the University of Minnesota Libraries, had learned of Grindlay's diary 35 years ago, just after Grindlay's death. At the time, Lathrop was researching the 1942 Burma campaign, and his father-in-law put him in touch with Grindlay's widow. She mentioned to Lathrop that she had her late husband's unpublished wartime diary and, recalls Lathrop, "kindly copied about 50 pages dealing with Dr. Grindlay's experiences in that campaign."

Then, he says, "about 10 years ago I contacted her again to see if she could provide a photocopy of the entire diary, as it seemed a good bet for publication. I still have never seen the original," he adds. He is currently seeking a publisher for the book.

It was in Lathrop's hunt on the Web for further information about Grindlay that our Winter '02 feature came to his attention. And he and his project came to our attention when he e-mailed us to clarify a term in that article, adding, "I am editing

[Grindlay's] lengthy diary for publication." Thus began a series of exchanges that led to this issue's feature by Lathrop, based on Grindlay's diary.

But if the word "diary" conjures up an image of a compact leather-bound volume neatly secured with a hasp, think again. Grindlay kept his diary on whatever random pieces of paper he could lay his hands on. One sheet may be graph paper, the next a three-hole-punched notebook page, and the next a piece of hotel stationery. Some entries are in pencil, some in fountain pen.

Nevertheless, as Lathrop notes in one of his early e-mails to me, "each entry is remarkably extensive. I quite honestly don't know where he found the time and energy to write these." One also wonders, on reading about the conditions the unit was subjected to, how Grindlay ever managed to keep track of all those single sheets of paper and carry them with him all across Burma.

But historians will be thankful that he did. And thankful, too, that Lathrop has taken the time to transcribe Grindlay's account—no mean feat. I'd say Lathrop is guilty of understatement in calling Grindlay's diary "sometimes difficult to decipher." However, Grindlay's poor handwriting appears due in large part to wartime exigencies. I know that because, amazingly, DHMC's Graduate Medical Education Office still has on file his 1935 residency application—handwritten, on a mimeographed form. His penmanship there isn't Palmer-method perfect, but it's better than in the diary.

And there's yet another coincidence to this tale. Grindlay had three children, and Al Lathrop put me in touch with two of them by e-mail so DARTMOUTH MEDICINE could get the appropriate permissions and borrow a few actual diary pages to reproduce with the article (so I've seen some, even though Lathrop hasn't!). Both Lorna Moore, one of Grindlay's daughters, and his son, Josh, have been very helpful. And, it turns out, Josh Grindlay is a 1966 graduate of Dartmouth College.

But despite that tie, I'm sure that we'd never have stumbled across his father's gripping saga were it not for the Internet. So the next time you're tempted to rail at spam, remember the wonders that the Web also delivers to our doorsteps.

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