

under heavy fire in Burma

ROGER BROWNING, who has died aged 96, was a sapper in the Burma campaign before taking up farming, and subsequently became mayor of Colchester.

In December 1944, after rigorous training in India, Browning, in command of a section of 751 Indian Mechanical Equipment Platoon (751 IMEP), moved to Myitche, Burma, where 7th Indian Infantry Division and 17th Indian Infantry Division had established a bridgehead on the banks of the Irrawaddy.

All the equipment for the two divisions had been ferried across the river on large rafts powered by massive outboard motors. There were no lines of communication. The troops had to rely on airdrops for their supplies.

In February 1945, they were ready to break out and push for the strategically important town of Meiktila, held in strength by the Japanese. The task of Browning's platoon was to advance with the leading brigade and help tanks to cross rivers and creeks, remove obstacles and craters and establish short airstrips to enable small aircraft to land and evacuate casualties.

He took part in a 10-day approach march to Meiktila and arrived on the outskirts on March 1. The Japanese were firmly entrenched. Snipers, machine gun nests, anti-tank gun emplacements and strafing from enemy aircraft were among the many hazards. His section started work at once repairing the airstrips so that Dakotas could land. This work became increasingly dangerous when the defenders began attacking the airfields in order to deprive the Allied forces of supplies.

When a replacement part was urgently required for one of the machines, Browning scrounged a lift to Chittagong aboard a Dakota supply aeroplane, and having secured the part, hitched a lift back on another Dakota. This one, however, had no seat for him and no parachute and he was obliged to travel in the cargo hold alongside barrels of high octane fuel.

By March 3 Meiktila had been captured but, for the rest of the month, the Japanese made determined but unavailing attempts to retake it. At the end of the campaign, Browning and his unit had reached Rangoon and he had been promoted



Became a farmer in Essex

to captain. His steadiness under fire and his determination to keep his unit operational, whatever the dangers and difficulties, resulted in his twice being mentioned in despatches.

Roger William Richard Browning was born at Tey Brook Farmhouse, near Colchester, on July 27 1921. His father had served with the RNVR in the First World War. Roger was educated at the Friends' School, Saffron Walden, before being articled to an estate agent.

In 1941, he enlisted in the Corps of Royal Engineers. After being commissioned, he was posted to India and, having arrived at Lahore (now in Pakistan), he took command of a section of 751 IMEP. He learnt to speak Urdu and was trained in heavy earth-moving equipment before leaving for the war zone in Burma.

In 1946 he was demobilised and, after returning to England, he worked for W & C French, civil engineers, until 1950 when he began farming at Tey Brook Farm in partnership with his father.

He took a keen interest in local affairs and served on both the Great Tey parish council and the managers of Great Tey Primary School for 30 years. In 1974, he was elected as a Conservative to Colchester Borough Council, and in 1981, he became mayor of Colchester.

Browning enjoyed the garrison town's close association with the Army. He was an accomplished sailor and sailed a 30ft sloop. He and his wife shared a great love of Burma, a country which they visited on several occasions. For more than 60 years he was a Freemason.

He published *Great Tey to Rangoon - a farmer's story* in 2004.

Roger Browning married, in 1950, Rosemary Moore, who survives him with their son and daughter.

Roger Browning, born July 27 1921, died May 7 2018