

ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



Episode #635
"Mad Mike" Calvert
2nd Oct, 2026

Transcript	3
Key vocabulary	27
Language spotlight	37
Quiz	41
Listening Comprehension Multiple Choice Questions	41
True or False	43
Fill in the Blank	43
Vocabulary Practice	44
Answers	47

Transcript

[00:00:05] Hello, hello, hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English, the show where you can listen to fascinating stories and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:21] I'm Alastair Budge, and today we are going to be talking about a man called Michael Calvert, or as he was better known, "Mad Mike".

[00:00:32] He was one of the most [decorated¹](#) British soldiers of the Second World War, a man whose ideas still shape the most famous [regiment²](#) in the British Army. And his story ends with one of the saddest [falls from grace³](#) in British military history.

[00:00:49] So let's not waste a minute and get right into it.

[00:00:54] In 1997, a set of military medals was put up for sale.

[00:01:00] There was nothing particularly unusual about that. Medals are bought and sold all the time, usually long after the original owner has died.

[00:01:11] But these medals belonged to a living man. He was 84 years old, he was living in south-west London, and he was selling them because he needed the money.

¹ given medals or awards for bravery or good service

² a large group of soldiers in the army

³ sudden losses of respect, success, or a good position

"Mad Mike" Calvert

[00:01:24] Among them were two Distinguished Service Orders, which is one of the most [distinguished](#)⁴ medals you can get.

[00:01:32] The man selling them was called Michael Calvert. And fifty years earlier, he had been one of the most [celebrated](#)⁵ soldiers in the British Army.

[00:01:43] He had led troops behind Japanese lines in the jungles of Burma. He had been recommended for the Victoria Cross, Britain's highest military honour, on three separate occasions. He had commanded the SAS, and later, he had [brought it back from the dead](#)⁶.

[00:02:01] So, you might be thinking, how does a man like that end up poor, and forgotten, selling his own medals to pay his bills?

[00:02:11] The answer involves one of the most [remarkable](#)⁷ military careers of the twentieth century, and a single trial in Germany that destroyed it almost [overnight](#)⁸.

[00:02:23] Let's start at the beginning.

⁴ respected and important because of great achievements

⁵ famous and admired by many people

⁶ made it successful or active again after it had ended

⁷ unusual and very impressive

⁸ very quickly, in a very short time

"Mad Mike" Calvert

[00:02:25] Michael Calvert was born in India in March of 1913. His father was a senior official in the British administration there, and like many [sons of empire](#)⁹, young Michael was sent back to England for his education.

[00:02:43] He went on to the Royal Military Academy and joined the Royal Engineers. The Royal Engineers are the part of the army that builds things: bridges, roads and defences. They are also the part of the army that [blows things up](#)¹⁰, and it was this second skill that Calvert would make his own.

[00:03:03] He was also a natural athlete. He [boxed](#)¹¹ for the Army, becoming its [middleweight](#)¹² champion, and he was also a good swimmer.

[00:03:12] He was clever, too, and was sent by the army to Cambridge, to study Mechanical Engineering.

[00:03:19] In 1934, he was posted to Hong Kong, where he learned Cantonese.

⁹ boys whose fathers worked for the British Empire

¹⁰ destroys things using explosives

¹¹ fought other people using boxing

¹² a person who competed in a middle-weight class in boxing

"Mad Mike" Calvert

[00:03:26] And in 1937, he was present during the Japanese [assault¹³](#) on Shanghai, shortly before the [infamous¹⁴](#) [massacre¹⁵](#) at Nanjing, witnessing one of the most modern and [brutal¹⁶](#) armies in the world at work.

[00:03:41] This was something of an [eye-opener¹⁷](#) for the young officer.

[00:03:45] At the time, the general view in the British military was that Japan was not a serious threat. Its soldiers were thought to be poorly equipped and [no match for¹⁸](#) European troops.

[00:03:59] Calvert had seen them fight. He knew this view was dangerously wrong, and within a few years, he would be proved right.

[00:04:09] Now, when the Second World War [broke out¹⁹](#), Calvert had a brief and frustrating time in the failed Norwegian campaign of 1940. But the army had noticed his

¹³ a strong and violent attack

¹⁴ famous for something bad

¹⁵ the killing of many people, especially in a cruel way

¹⁶ very violent and cruel

¹⁷ an experience that made him understand something he did not know before

¹⁸ not strong or good enough to compete with them

¹⁹ started suddenly

"Mad Mike" Calvert

talent for [demolitions](#)²⁰ and [irregular warfare](#)²¹, and in 1941 he was sent east again, to run something called the Bush Warfare School in Burma, in modern day Myanmar, but then a British colony.

[00:04:38] His job was to train soldiers in [guerrilla warfare](#)²²: how to operate in small groups behind enemy lines, how to [ambush](#)²³, how to [sabotage](#)²⁴, how to survive in the jungle.

[00:04:51] So when the Japanese invaded Burma in early 1942, Michael Calvert was one of the few men in the entire British Army who knew how to fight back.

[00:05:05] There was very little he could do, though, because the campaign was a disaster from the start.

²⁰ the act of destroying buildings or other things with explosives

²¹ fighting by small groups using methods different from a normal army

²² fighting by small groups that attack suddenly and then hide

²³ attack suddenly from a hidden place

²⁴ deliberately damage something to stop it from working

"Mad Mike" Calvert

[00:05:12] The Japanese soldiers who crossed into Burma in January 1942 were [hardened veterans](#)²⁵, with years of fighting in China behind them. They were trained for the jungle, they [travelled light](#)²⁶, and they moved fast.

[00:05:29] The British defence, on the other hand, was built around roads. The thinking was that the thick Burmese jungle was [impassable](#)²⁷, so the jungle was left largely unguarded. The Japanese simply walked through it, [slipped around](#)²⁸ the British positions, and set up roadblocks behind them. Again and again, British units discovered that the enemy was already behind them, cutting off their escape.

[00:05:59] And [to make matters worse](#)²⁹, many of the defending troops were [raw recruits](#)³⁰ who had never seen battle. When the capital and main port of Rangoon fell just a couple of months later, there was no longer any way to bring in supplies or [reinforcements](#)³¹.

²⁵ experienced soldiers who had been through a lot of fighting

²⁶ carried only a small amount of equipment

²⁷ impossible to travel through

²⁸ moved quietly and secretly around

²⁹ used to say that a bad situation became even worse

³⁰ new soldiers with little or no experience

³¹ extra soldiers sent to help other soldiers

"Mad Mike" Calvert

[00:06:19] What followed was the longest [retreat](#)³² in British military history. The army [fell back](#)³³ around 1,500 kilometres, through jungle, mountains and [monsoon](#)³⁴ rains, all the way to India, with the Japanese close behind for most of the way.

[00:06:38] And it was during that [chaotic](#)³⁵ [retreat](#) that Calvert met the man who would change his life.

[00:06:45] Orde Wingate was one of the strangest officers the British Army has ever produced, and that is [saying something](#)³⁶.

[00:06:53] He was [intense](#)³⁷, difficult, and completely [indifferent](#)³⁸ to what anyone thought of him. He ate raw onions because he believed they were good for his health. He quoted the Old Testament in military [briefings](#)³⁹. He held meetings while completely naked, brushing his body with a rubber brush.

³² a movement away from the enemy or danger

³³ moved back because of an enemy attack

³⁴ a season of very heavy rain in parts of Asia

³⁵ very confused and badly organised

³⁶ used to show that what was just said is especially true or surprising

³⁷ very strong and difficult to deal with

³⁸ not interested or not caring about it

³⁹ meetings where soldiers were given important information

"Mad Mike" Calvert

[00:07:14] Most officers thought he was mad. Calvert thought he was a genius.

[00:07:20] The two men became [firm friends](#)⁴⁰ almost immediately.

[00:07:24] Wingate's big idea was this. Instead of facing the Japanese army [head-on](#)⁴¹, Britain should send [columns](#)⁴² of specially trained troops deep behind enemy lines, marching through the jungle and supplied entirely by air. They would cut railways, destroy bridges, and attack the Japanese where they least expected it.

[00:07:49] The force became known as the Chindits, named after the chinthe, the [mythical](#)⁴³ lion statues that guard Burmese temples.

[00:07:59] In February 1943, around 3,000 Chindits marched into Japanese-occupied Burma. Calvert commanded one of the [columns](#).

[00:08:10] It was a [brutal](#) experience, and the jungle itself was as dangerous as the Japanese. It was [dense](#)⁴⁴, steaming hot, and [crawling with](#)⁴⁵ [leeches](#)⁴⁶ and

⁴⁰ very close friends

⁴¹ directly and without trying to avoid them

⁴² groups of soldiers moving together

⁴³ existing only in old stories or legends

⁴⁴ very thick and difficult to move through

⁴⁵ full of large numbers of (small animals or insects)

⁴⁶ small animals that attached themselves to people and animals and drank their blood

"Mad Mike" Calvert

mosquitoes. The men marched for weeks [on end](#)⁴⁷, carrying everything on their back and on [mules](#)⁴⁸, relying on [supply drops](#)⁴⁹ from the air that didn't always arrive where they were meant to, or arrive at all.

[00:08:36] [Malaria](#)⁵⁰ and [dysentery](#)⁵¹ spread through the [columns](#). [Rations](#)⁵² [ran short](#)⁵³. And the men who were badly wounded or too sick to walk often had to be left behind, because there was simply no way to carry them out.

[00:08:52] The men were exhausted. Roughly a third of them never came back, and many of those who did were so broken by disease that they never fought again.

⁴⁷ continuously for a long period

⁴⁸ animals that were a mixture of a horse and a donkey, used to carry things

⁴⁹ supplies brought by aircraft and dropped to soldiers

⁵⁰ a serious disease spread by mosquitoes

⁵¹ a serious illness that causes bad diarrhoea

⁵² small amounts of food given to soldiers

⁵³ became almost finished because there were not enough

"Mad Mike" Calvert

[00:09:04] But Calvert's [column](#)⁵⁴ was the star of the operation, blowing up railway bridges and cutting off [supply lines](#)⁵⁵. And somehow, [remarkably](#)⁵⁶, getting back to India largely [intact](#)⁵⁷.

[00:09:17] He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order. And somewhere along the way, his men started calling him "Mad Mike", for his bravery, and sometimes "Dynamite Mike", for what he liked to do to Japanese bridges and railways.

[00:09:33] By early 1944, Wingate had convinced Winston Churchill and the Americans to back a far bigger operation. This time, an entire [division](#)⁵⁸ would be flown into the heart of Burma, landing at night, in [gliders](#)⁵⁹, on jungle clearings hundreds of kilometres behind Japanese lines.

⁵⁴ a group of soldiers moving together

⁵⁵ routes used to bring food, weapons, and other supplies to soldiers

⁵⁶ in a way that was unusual or surprising

⁵⁷ still complete and not badly damaged

⁵⁸ a large military group made up of several smaller groups

⁵⁹ aircraft without engines that could carry people or equipment

"Mad Mike" Calvert

[00:09:56] Calvert, now a [brigadier](#)⁶⁰ at the age of just 30, commanded the leading [brigade](#)⁶¹.

[00:10:03] The landing zones had been given the names of famous streets: Piccadilly and Broadway. And on the evening of the operation, the 5th of March 1944, an aircraft brought back last-minute photographs showing that Piccadilly was blocked. Someone had covered the clearing with tree trunks.

[00:10:26] Was it a trap? Did the Japanese know they were coming? Nobody could say. Senior commanders [hesitated](#)⁶², and the whole operation [hung in the balance](#)⁶³.

[00:10:36] Calvert did not [hesitate](#)⁶⁴. "I am prepared to take the whole of my [brigade](#) into Broadway," he said, "and we can do without Piccadilly."

[00:10:46] So they went. That night, Calvert and his men [crash-landed](#)⁶⁵ in [gliders](#) onto a rough jungle clearing deep inside enemy territory. The [gliders](#) carried men, weapons,

⁶⁰ a high-ranking army officer who commanded a brigade

⁶¹ a large group of soldiers made up of several smaller groups

⁶² paused because they were unsure what to do

⁶³ was uncertain because it could have several possible results

⁶⁴ pause because he was unsure what to do

⁶⁵ landed the aircraft badly

"Mad Mike" Calvert

a few unlucky [mules](#), and several small [bulldozers](#)⁶⁶, which the engineers used to [carve](#)⁶⁷ a proper [airstrip](#)⁶⁸ out of the clearing.

[00:11:08] The [airstrip](#) was ready within twenty-four hours, and from then on, transport planes landed night after night. Within a week, some 9,000 men and over 1,300 [mules](#) had been flown in behind Japanese lines.

[00:11:27] As it turned out, the tree trunks on Piccadilly had been left there by Burmese woodcutters. The Japanese had no idea the British were coming.

[00:11:37] What followed showed both sides of Calvert.

[00:11:41] There was the planner, who built a [fortified](#)⁶⁹ base called White City, surrounded with [barbed wire](#)⁷⁰, mines and [artillery](#)⁷¹. It got its name from the hundreds of white supply parachutes hanging in the trees around it. For weeks, the

⁶⁶ large machines used for moving earth and clearing land

⁶⁷ cut or shape

⁶⁸ a long, flat area where aircraft could take off and land

⁶⁹ made stronger and safer against attack

⁷⁰ wire with sharp points used to stop people from entering the area

⁷¹ large guns used by the army

"Mad Mike" Calvert

Japanese threw themselves at it in [furious](#)⁷² night attacks, and the defences Calvert had designed held every time.

[00:12:06] And then, there was the fighter. Early in the campaign, at a place called Pagoda Hill, Calvert found his men [pinned down](#)⁷³ by Japanese troops on higher ground. His response was to get up and personally lead a [bayonet charge](#)⁷⁴ up the [slope](#)⁷⁵, with officers and soldiers [scrambling](#)⁷⁶ up beside him.

[00:12:28] The fighting at the top was [hand-to-hand](#)⁷⁷. Calvert later described it as an extraordinary scene, "everyone shooting, [bayoneting](#)⁷⁸, kicking at everyone else, rather like an officers' [guest night](#)⁷⁹."

⁷² extremely violent

⁷³ forced to stay there because of enemy fire

⁷⁴ an attack in which soldiers ran towards the enemy with bayonets (long knives) on their guns

⁷⁵ a surface that went up at an angle

⁷⁶ moving quickly and with difficulty, often using their hands

⁷⁷ involving direct fighting between them very close to each other

⁷⁸ attacking someone with a bayonet (long knife on a gun)

⁷⁹ a special evening when army officers meet socially

"Mad Mike" Calvert

[00:12:44] This, you understand, was a [brigadier](#), a senior officer. [Brigadiers](#)⁸⁰ are supposed to be several kilometres behind the fighting, [sipping](#)⁸¹ tea, looking at maps and radioing in instructions. That was never Calvert's style, and as you might imagine, his men loved him for it.

[00:13:05] Then, at the end of March 1944, disaster. Wingate, Calvert's hero, was killed when his plane crashed into a hillside. The Chindits had lost their leader and their protector.

[00:13:20] In May 1944, the Chindits were placed under the command of an American general, Joseph Stilwell, a man known as "Vinegar Joe".

[00:13:32] Stilwell [had little time for](#)⁸² the British and even less for the Chindits. Calvert's [brigade](#) was already [worn down](#)⁸³ by months in the jungle. Then, it was ordered to capture the key Japanese [stronghold](#)⁸⁴ of Mogaung.

⁸⁰ high-ranking army officers who command brigades

⁸¹ drinking slowly in small amounts

⁸² did not like or respect them very much

⁸³ very tired or weak over a long period

⁸⁴ a place that was strongly defended

"Mad Mike" Calvert

[00:13:48] The [monsoon](#) had broken. The land was flooded. The men were [exhausted](#)⁸⁵, wet through, and [riddled with](#)⁸⁶ [malaria](#), [dysentery](#) and jungle sores. And Mogaung was defended by thousands of fresh Japanese troops with orders to hold it [at all costs](#)⁸⁷.

[00:14:09] Calvert's [brigade](#) took Mogaung in June 1944, after almost a month of some of the most [savage](#)⁸⁸ [close-quarters fighting](#)⁸⁹ of the entire war.

[00:14:20] The cost was [appalling](#)⁹⁰. He had started the campaign with around 3,500 men. By the time Mogaung fell, battle, disease and [sheer](#)⁹¹ exhaustion had reduced that number to around 300.

[00:14:38] And then, a few days later, Calvert's radio operators picked up a BBC news report. General Stilwell's headquarters had announced that Mogaung had been captured by Chinese troops.

⁸⁵ extremely tired

⁸⁶ affected by a large number of cases

⁸⁷ whatever problems or dangers were involved

⁸⁸ very violent and cruel

⁸⁹ fighting between people who were very close to each other

⁹⁰ extremely bad or shocking

⁹¹ complete or very great in degree

[00:14:52] There was no mention of the Chindits at all.

[00:14:56] Calvert's reply has [gone down in](#)⁹² British military legend. He sent a signal to Stilwell's headquarters that read: "Chinese reported taking Mogaung. My Brigade now taking umbrage."

[00:15:11] To take umbrage, by the way, means to be offended, to take insult at something. Even then it was an old-fashioned and very British expression. The story goes, and this part may be more legend than fact, that Stilwell's American staff searched their maps for a town called Umbrage, trying to work out where it was.

[00:15:35] Shortly afterwards, when Stilwell's headquarters ordered his [shattered](#)⁹³ [brigade](#) on to yet another battle, Calvert shut down his radios, refused, and went to see Stilwell in person, to [give him a piece of his mind](#)⁹⁴.

[00:15:52] When the pair finally met face to face, Stilwell understood what the brigade had been through. The American general [relented](#)⁹⁵, and the survivors were flown out to India.

⁹² become remembered as part of history

⁹³ completely broken, damaged, or exhausted

⁹⁴ tell him angrily that he was unhappy with them

⁹⁵ finally agreed to it after refusing before

"Mad Mike" Calvert

[00:16:04] Calvert was awarded the Distinguished Service Order for a second time, as well as the American Silver Star. Three separate commanding officers recommended him for the Victoria Cross, although he never received it.

[00:16:21] By 1945, Calvert's reputation was such that he was given command of the SAS Brigade, the special forces units fighting in Europe.

[00:16:31] The war ended soon afterwards, and Britain began [dismantling](#)⁹⁶ its special forces. The SAS, in the eyes of the military establishment, was an expensive wartime experiment with no place in peacetime, and in October 1945, it was formally [disbanded](#)⁹⁷.

[00:16:52] Calvert thought it was a mistake. He pushed hard for an official study into what the SAS had achieved and what it could do in future wars. That study helped keep the idea alive, and a part-time [territorial](#)⁹⁸ SAS unit was formed in 1947.

[00:17:12] But the real second birth came in Malaya, the then-British colony now known as Malaysia.

⁹⁶ taking them apart or gradually ending them

⁹⁷ officially ended

⁹⁸ connected with a part-time military force made up of soldiers who also had other jobs

"Mad Mike" Calvert

[00:17:21] In 1948, a communist [uprising](#)⁹⁹ had [broken out](#)¹⁰⁰. Communist fighters were operating out of the deep jungle, [ambushing](#)¹⁰¹, killing and disappearing, and the British were losing.

[00:17:37] In 1950, Field Marshal Slim, the most respected British soldier of his generation, described Calvert as perhaps the greatest expert on [guerrilla warfare](#) then serving in the British Army. Calvert was asked to study the problem and propose a solution.

[00:17:56] He spent months touring Malaya, often going out on patrols himself, and he produced a report whose central message was [blunt](#)¹⁰²: there must be one man, with one plan, and the power to carry it out.

[00:18:13] One of his recommendations was for a special force that could live and fight in the deep jungle for weeks at a time, beating the communist fighters [at their own game](#)¹⁰³.

[00:18:25] And naturally, Calvert was told to go and create it.

⁹⁹ an organised attempt by a group to fight against those in power

¹⁰⁰ started suddenly

¹⁰¹ attacking by surprise from a hidden place

¹⁰² very direct and not careful about being polite

¹⁰³ by using the same methods or skills that they used

"Mad Mike" Calvert

[00:18:29] The unit he formed in 1950 was called the Malayan Scouts. He was given very little support and, in many cases, the men no other commander wanted. He trained them his own way, with an emphasis on [initiative](#)¹⁰⁴ and independence rather than [parade-ground discipline](#)¹⁰⁵, and he sent them into the jungle in small patrols.

[00:18:54] His training methods were unusual, [to put it mildly](#)¹⁰⁶. At one point, his men practised jungle combat by [stalking](#)¹⁰⁷ each other through the undergrowth armed with [air rifles](#)¹⁰⁸, wearing [fencing masks](#)¹⁰⁹ to protect their faces. If you got shot, you had been careless, and the [sting](#)¹¹⁰ of the [pellet](#)¹¹¹ was a pretty strong [incentive](#)¹¹² not to be.

¹⁰⁴ the ability to act and make decisions without being told what to do

¹⁰⁵ strict military behaviour and rules taught during army training

¹⁰⁶ used when something is actually much stronger or more serious than the words suggest

¹⁰⁷ following each other secretly and carefully

¹⁰⁸ guns that used air to fire small pellets

¹⁰⁹ protective masks worn over the face when practising fencing (sword fighting)

¹¹⁰ a sharp, painful feeling

¹¹¹ a small, round piece of material fired from a gun

¹¹² something that encouraged them

"Mad Mike" Calvert

[00:19:18] The unit was [rough around the edges](#)¹¹³, and it picked up a reputation for bad behaviour. But the core idea worked. In 1952, the Malayan Scouts were renamed.

[00:19:32] They became 22 SAS, the special forces [regiment](#) that still exists to this day.

[00:19:40] Calvert, though, was increasingly ill. By the middle of 1951, his body had finally given up. [Malaria](#), [dysentery](#), [miscellaneous](#)¹¹⁴ jungle diseases and twelve years of hard soldiering had [wrecked](#)¹¹⁵ his health, and he was sent home to recover.

[00:20:01] He was 38 years old. He had every reason to expect that this was a temporary [blip](#)¹¹⁶, and that the best part of his career was still ahead of him. Unfortunately, it was not.

[00:20:14] In 1951, Calvert was posted to Germany, to the British forces [stationed](#)¹¹⁷ near Hanover.

[00:20:22] And it was there, within months, that his world collapsed.

¹¹³ not very polished, controlled, or well behaved

¹¹⁴ made up of different things that do not belong to one group

¹¹⁵ badly damaged or seriously harmed

¹¹⁶ a small or temporary problem

¹¹⁷ sent to live or work there as part of the job

"Mad Mike" Calvert

[00:20:27] He was accused of gross indecency with young German men. In other words, homosexual acts, which at the time were a criminal offence under both British and military law.

[00:20:41] He was court-martialled, tried in a military court. The evidence against him was thin¹¹⁸ and contradictory¹¹⁹, and part of it was later withdrawn by the very witnesses who had given it.

[00:20:55] He was found guilty anyway. The sentence was dismissal¹²⁰ from the army.

[00:21:02] For a man like Calvert, this was a form of death. The army had been his entire life since the age of 19. In a single day, he lost his career, his reputation, his income and his place in the world. The hero of Mogaung was now, in the eyes of society, a criminal and a disgrace¹²¹.

[00:21:27] He denied the charge until the day he died. His biographer, who spent years studying the case, came to believe he had been framed¹²², that is, deliberately set up with false evidence.

¹¹⁸ weak or not very convincing

¹¹⁹ including things that did not agree with each other

¹²⁰ the act of officially making him leave this job, removal

¹²¹ a person that caused shame or loss of respect

¹²² intentionally made to look guilty of something he had not done

"Mad Mike" Calvert

[00:21:41] Calvert had made enemies in his career, so perhaps this was their revenge. Or perhaps it was something closer to a robbery gone wrong. The young men in question later admitted that they had gone to his flat to steal from it.

[00:21:57] The [court martial](#)¹²³ records were [sealed](#)¹²⁴ and remain closed to the public until 2028, so even today, no one can read the full evidence against him.

[00:22:09] What is certain is what happened next.

[00:22:13] Calvert [drifted](#)¹²⁵. He drank, heavily, and became an alcoholic. He tried to build a new life as an engineer in Australia, and it fell apart. At his lowest point, this man who had commanded thousands in battle was doing casual manual labour, [sleeping rough](#)¹²⁶, an anonymous [drifter](#)¹²⁷ on the other side of the world.

[00:22:38] Slowly, he managed to [claw some of it back](#)¹²⁸. He wrote [well-regarded](#)¹²⁹ books about the Burma campaign. He lectured on [guerrilla warfare](#), and in the 1970s

¹²³ a military court that judges soldiers accused of breaking the law

¹²⁴ officially closed so that people cannot read or use the information

¹²⁵ slowly moved into a different situation without a clear plan

¹²⁶ sleeping outside because he had no home

¹²⁷ a person who moved from place to place without a home or clear plan

¹²⁸ slowly recover some of what he had lost

¹²⁹ respected and liked by many people

"Mad Mike" Calvert

he appeared as an expert in the [celebrated](#) television documentary series The World at War. Old comrades, especially SAS men, [stood by him](#)¹³⁰ and campaigned to restore his reputation.

[00:23:05] But the [stain](#)¹³¹ of his 1952 [court martial](#) never left him. In his lifetime, there was no [pardon](#)¹³², no review, no apology. He never married, he struggled with money all his life, and in 1997 he was forced to sell his medals.

[00:23:26] He died the following year, in November 1998, at the age of 85.

[00:23:32] Today, the [regiment](#) he rebuilt is one of if not the most famous special forces unit in the world. The tactics he worked out in the jungles of Burma and Malaya became standard practice, taught to generations of soldiers who have never heard his name.

[00:23:50] And in 2028, the [sealed](#) files from that [court martial](#) in Germany are due to be opened at last.

[00:23:58] Thirty years after his death, "Mad Mike" Calvert may finally get his answer.

[00:24:06] OK, then, that is it for today's episode on "Mad Mike" Calvert.

¹³⁰ continued to support him during difficult times

¹³¹ something that damaged his reputation

¹³² an official decision to forgive someone for a crime

[00:24:10] I hope it's been an interesting one and that you've learnt something new.

[00:24:14] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

[00:24:19] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF EPISODE]

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Decorated	given medals or awards for bravery or good service
Regiment	a large group of soldiers in the army
Falls from grace	sudden losses of respect, success, or a good position
Distinguished	respected and important because of great achievements
Celebrated	famous and admired by many people
Brought it back from the dead	made it successful or active again after it had ended
Remarkable	unusual and very impressive
Overnight	very quickly, in a very short time
Sons of empire	boys whose fathers worked for the British Empire
Blows things up	destroys things using explosives
Boxed	fought other people using boxing
Middleweight	a person who competed in a middle-weight class in boxing
Assault	a strong and violent attack

"Mad Mike" Calvert

Infamous	famous for something bad
Massacre	the killing of many people, especially in a cruel way
Brutal	very violent and cruel
Eye-opener	an experience that made him understand something he did not know before
No match for	not strong or good enough to compete with them
Broke out	started suddenly
Demolitions	the act of destroying buildings or other things with explosives
Irregular warfare	fighting by small groups using methods different from a normal army
Guerrilla warfare	fighting by small groups that attack suddenly and then hide
Ambush	attack suddenly from a hidden place
Sabotage	deliberately damage something to stop it from working
Hardened veterans	experienced soldiers who had been through a lot of fighting
Travelled light	carried only a small amount of equipment
Impassable	impossible to travel through
Slipped around	moved quietly and secretly around

"Mad Mike" Calvert

To make matters worse	used to say that a bad situation became even worse
Raw recruits	new soldiers with little or no experience
Reinforcements	extra soldiers sent to help other soldiers
Retreat	a movement away from the enemy or danger
Fell back	moved back because of an enemy attack
Monsoon	a season of very heavy rain in parts of Asia
Chaotic	very confused and badly organised
Saying something	used to show that what was just said is especially true or surprising
Intense	very strong and difficult to deal with
Indifferent	not interested or not caring about it
Briefings	meetings where soldiers were given important information
Firm friends	very close friends
Head-on	directly and without trying to avoid them
Columns	groups of soldiers moving together
Mythical	existing only in old stories or legends

"Mad Mike" Calvert

Dense	very thick and difficult to move through
Crawling with	full of large numbers of (small animals or insects)
Leeches	small animals that attached themselves to people and animals and drank their blood
On end	continuously for a long period
Mules	animals that were a mixture of a horse and a donkey, used to carry things
Supply drops	supplies brought by aircraft and dropped to soldiers
Malaria	a serious disease spread by mosquitoes
Dysentery	a serious illness that causes bad diarrhoea
Rations	small amounts of food given to soldiers
Ran short	became almost finished because there were not enough
Column	a group of soldiers moving together
Supply lines	routes used to bring food, weapons, and other supplies to soldiers
Remarkably	in a way that was unusual or surprising
Intact	still complete and not badly damaged

"Mad Mike" Calvert

Division	a large military group made up of several smaller groups
Gliders	aircraft without engines that could carry people or equipment
Brigadier	a high-ranking army officer who commanded a brigade
Brigade	a large group of soldiers made up of several smaller groups
Hesitated	paused because they were unsure what to do
Hung in the balance	was uncertain because it could have several possible results
Hesitate	pause because he was unsure what to do
Crash-landed	landed the aircraft badly
Bulldozers	large machines used for moving earth and clearing land
Carve	cut or shape
Airstrip	a long, flat area where aircraft could take off and land
Fortified	made stronger and safer against attack
Barbed wire	wire with sharp points used to stop people from entering the area
Artillery	large guns used by the army
Furious	extremely violent

"Mad Mike" Calvert

Pinned down	forced to stay there because of enemy fire
Bayonet charge	an attack in which soldiers ran towards the enemy with bayonets (long knives) on their guns
Slope	a surface that went up at an angle
Scrambling	moving quickly and with difficulty, often using their hands
Hand-to-hand	involving direct fighting between them very close to each other
Bayoneting	attacking someone with a bayonet (long knife on a gun)
Guest night	a special evening when army officers meet socially
Brigadiers	high-ranking army officers who command brigades
Sipping	drinking slowly in small amounts
Had little time for	did not like or respect them very much
Worn down	very tired or weak over a long period
Stronghold	a place that was strongly defended
Exhausted	extremely tired
Riddled with	affected by a large number of cases
At all costs	whatever problems or dangers were involved

"Mad Mike" Calvert

Savage	very violent and cruel
Close-quarters fighting	fighting between people who were very close to each other
Appalling	extremely bad or shocking
Sheer	complete or very great in degree
Gone down in	become remembered as part of history
Shattered	completely broken, damaged, or exhausted
Give him a piece of his mind	tell him angrily that he was unhappy with them
Relented	finally agreed to it after refusing before
Dismantling	taking them apart or gradually ending them
Disbanded	officially ended
Territorial	connected with a part-time military force made up of soldiers who also had other jobs
Uprising	an organised attempt by a group to fight against those in power
Broken out	started suddenly

"Mad Mike" Calvert

Ambushing	attacking by surprise from a hidden place
Blunt	very direct and not careful about being polite
At their own game	by using the same methods or skills that they used
Initiative	the ability to act and make decisions without being told what to do
Parade-ground discipline	strict military behaviour and rules taught during army training
To put it mildly	used when something is actually much stronger or more serious than the words suggest
Stalking	following each other secretly and carefully
Air rifles	guns that used air to fire small pellets
Fencing masks	protective masks worn over the face when practising fencing (sword fighting)
Sting	a sharp, painful feeling
Pellet	a small, round piece of material fired from a gun
Incentive	something that encouraged them
Rough around the edges	not very polished, controlled, or well behaved

"Mad Mike" Calvert

Miscellaneous	made up of different things that do not belong to one group
Wrecked	badly damaged or seriously harmed
Blip	a small or temporary problem
Stationed	sent to live or work there as part of the job
Thin	weak or not very convincing
Contradictory	including things that did not agree with each other
Dismissal	the act of officially making him leave this job, removal
Disgrace	a person that caused shame or loss of respect
Framed	intentionally made to look guilty of something he had not done
Court martial	a military court that judges soldiers accused of breaking the law
Sealed	officially closed so that people cannot read or use the information
Drifted	slowly moved into a different situation without a clear plan
Sleeping rough	sleeping outside because he had no home
Drifter	a person who moved from place to place without a home or clear plan
Claw some of it back	slowly recover some of what he had lost

"Mad Mike" Calvert

Well-regarded	respected and liked by many people
Stood by him	continued to support him during difficult times
Stain	something that damaged his reputation
Pardon	an official decision to forgive someone for a crime

Language spotlight

1. Fall from grace

- **Meaning:** to lose respect, success, or a good position after doing something wrong or experiencing a serious problem
- **Synonyms:** loss of respect, downfall, decline, loss of status
- **Antonyms:** rise to success, gain respect, rise in status, triumph
- **Examples:**
 - The politician's **fall from grace** began when the newspapers discovered that he had lied to the public.
 - The actor experienced a dramatic **fall from grace** after several scandals damaged his reputation.

2. Bring something back from the dead

- **Meaning:** to make something successful or active again after it has ended or almost disappeared
- **Synonyms:** revive, restore, restart, resurrect

"Mad Mike" Calvert

- **Antonyms:** end, destroy, abandon, eliminate
- **Examples:**
 - The new manager managed to **bring the failing company back from the dead**.
 - After years without much interest, the band's new album **brought their career back from the dead**.

3. To make matters worse

- **Meaning:** to make a bad situation even more difficult or serious
- **Synonyms:** make things worse, worsen the situation, add to the problem
- **Antonyms:** improve the situation, solve the problem, make things better
- **Examples:**
 - I was already late for work, and **to make matters worse**, my car wouldn't start.
 - The team was losing the match, and **to make matters worse**, their best player was injured.

4. Give someone a piece of your mind

- **Meaning:** to speak angrily to someone because you are very unhappy about something they have done
- **Synonyms:** tell someone off, confront someone, express your anger
- **Antonyms:** praise someone, forgive someone, remain silent
- **Examples:**
 - When I discovered that my colleague had taken credit for my work, I **gave him a piece of my mind.**
 - She was extremely angry about the cancelled flight, so she **gave the manager a piece of her mind.**

5. Claw something back

- **Meaning:** to slowly recover something that you have lost, especially money, success, or respect
- **Synonyms:** recover, regain, get back, rebuild
- **Antonyms:** lose, give up, surrender, forfeit
- **Examples:**

- After losing several important customers, the company worked hard to **claw back some of its lost business**.
- The football team was three goals behind but managed to **claw back** two goals before the end of the match.

Quiz

Listening Comprehension Multiple Choice Questions

1. Why did Michael Calvert sell his military medals in 1997?

- a) He wanted to give the money to charity
- b) He needed money to pay his bills
- c) He wanted to buy a car
- d) He no longer wanted the medals

2. What did Calvert learn while he was stationed in Hong Kong?

- a) Japanese
- b) Mandarin
- c) Cantonese
- d) Korean

3. What was the main purpose of the Chindits' missions in Burma?

- a) To build roads through the jungle

"Mad Mike" Calvert

- b) To train new British soldiers
- c) To protect British cities from Japanese attacks
- d) To attack Japanese forces behind their lines

4. What did Calvert do when his men were pinned down at Pagoda Hill?

- a) He ordered his men to retreat
- b) He called for an air attack
- c) He personally led a bayonet charge
- d) He waited for reinforcements to arrive

5. What happened to Calvert after his court martial in Germany?

- a) He was dismissed from the army
- b) He was transferred to Australia
- c) He was promoted to brigadier
- d) He was given another military medal

True or False

6. Calvert was recommended for the Victoria Cross on three separate occasions.

(True/False)

7. The British military already considered Japan a serious threat when Calvert

witnessed the fighting in Shanghai. (True/False)

8. The Chindits depended partly on supplies dropped from aircraft. (True/False)

9. Calvert's brigade started the campaign with around 3,500 men and was down to

around 300 by the time Mogaung fell. (True/False)

10. The Malayan Scouts eventually became the SAS regiment known as 22 SAS.

(True/False)

Fill in the Blank

11. Its soldiers were thought to be poorly equipped and no _____ for European troops.

12. His job was to train soldiers in _____ warfare: how to operate in small groups behind enemy lines, how to ambush, how to sabotage, how to survive in the jungle.

13. They were trained for the jungle, they travelled _____, and they moved fast.

"Mad Mike" Calvert

14. Orde Wingate was one of the strangest officers the British Army has ever produced, and that is saying _____.

15. Was it a trap? Did the Japanese know they were coming? Nobody could say. Senior commanders hesitated, and the whole operation hung in the _____.

Vocabulary Practice

Choose the definition that best matches the meaning of the **bold** word or expression in the podcast.

16. Calvert had a **remarkable** military career.

- a) Very ordinary
- b) Unusual and impressive
- c) Short and unsuccessful
- d) Difficult to understand

17. The Japanese soldiers were described as **hardened veterans**.

- a) Inexperienced young soldiers

"Mad Mike" Calvert

- b) Soldiers who had been injured
- c) Soldiers who had recently joined the army
- d) Experienced soldiers who had fought in wars

18. Calvert's men were **pinned down** by Japanese troops.

- a) Forced to stay in one place because of enemy fire
- b) Ordered to move quickly towards the enemy
- c) Protected by soldiers from another unit
- d) Trapped inside a building by their own officers

19. Calvert trained his soldiers to use their **initiative**.

- a) The ability to act without being told what to do
- b) The ability to follow orders without question
- c) The ability to work only as part of a large group
- d) The ability to avoid making difficult decisions

"Mad Mike" Calvert

20. The evidence against Calvert was **contradictory**.

- a) Clear and easy to understand
- b) Incomplete but mostly correct
- c) Containing statements that do not agree with each other
- d) Completely false and invented

Answers

1. b) He needed money to pay his bills
2. c) Cantonese
3. d) To attack Japanese forces behind their lines
4. c) He personally led a bayonet charge
5. a) He was dismissed from the army
6. True
7. False
8. True
9. True
10. True
11. match
12. guerrilla
13. light
14. something
15. balance
16. b) Unusual and impressive
17. d) Experienced soldiers who had fought in wars
18. a) Forced to stay in one place because of enemy fire
19. a) The ability to act without being told what to do
20. c) Containing statements that do not agree with each other