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OPERATIONS IN EASTERN THEATRE, BASED ON INDIA, FROM MARCH 1942 TO DECEMBER 31, 1942

The following Despatch was submitted to the Secretary of State for War on September 27th 1943, by FIELD-MARSHAL The VISCOUNT WAVELL, G.C.B., C.M.G., M.C., A.D.C., Commander-in-Chief, India.

1. This despatch deals with the arrangements for the defence of India against Japanese invasion, which became a serious threat after the fall of Rangoon early in March 1942, and with the preparations later in 1942 to undertake an offensive to recapture Burma. There was little fighting during the period, but the story of the events and of the measures taken is not without interest.

SITUATION IN MARCH 1942.

2. When Rangoon fell, in March 1942, it was obvious that the whole of Burma might be occupied by the Japanese and that India itself and Ceylon lay under imminent threat of invasion.

The forces available for defence at this time were dangerously weak. The Eastern Fleet had only one modernised battleship immediately available and the fleet as a whole was in no position to dispute with the Japanese fleet command of the Bay of Bengal or of the waters round Ceylon. There were only one British and six Indian divisions available for the defence of the whole of India and Ceylon, apart from forces for defence of the N.W. Frontier and for internal security, both of which were well below the strength estimated as necessary for these commitments. No single one of these divisions was complete in ancillary troops or fully equipped or adequately trained. Three of them had two brigades only.

The number of A.A. guns (heavy or light) to defend Calcutta (India's largest city), her most important war industries and other vital points, which were or were soon likely to be within effective bombing range, was less than 150, against an estimated total requirement of some 1,500.

The Air Force available for the commitments of defending India and Ceylon and of supporting the army in Burma was similarly inadequate, as was the number of airfields. For the defence of Calcutta one fighter squadron was available with eight serviceable Mohawks. Fifty Hurricanes were delivered to Ceylon in March, and the three fighter squadrons allotted to the defence of the island were equipped during March, just in time to meet the enemy air raids in April.

The remaining air force available (two fighter squadrons and one light bomber squadron) was allotted to Upper Burma, where the greater part of it was destroyed by enemy attack at Magwe on the 21st and 22nd March. The remnants were withdrawn to India to re-form for its defence.

The airfields in Eastern India were quite inadequate and the warning system was only in a rudimentary stage.

3. On the 7th March, just before the fall of Rangoon, I cabled to the Chiefs of Staff a short appreciation. I expressed grave doubts of my ability to hold Burma, and anticipated a subsequent attack by the Japanese on N.E. India. I considered at this time that an undue proportion of our very inadequate land and air resources in the East was being allocated to the defence of Ceylon. In particular the diversion to Ceylon of a brigade of the 70 British Division, the only British division available in India, caused me concern. Ceylon already had two Indian Brigades and two brigades of local troops; two Australian brigades were being lent to its defence and an East African brigade was on its way there. My view was that if we lost command of the sea and air around Ceylon an additional brigade would be of no avail to secure the naval bases at Trincomalee or Colombo, which the Japanese could destroy without landing, in the same manner as at Pearl Harbour or

Manila; whereas a complete British division in North-East India would have been a most valuable reserve and would have done something to restore shaken public morale.

The War Cabinet ruled, however, that the defence of the naval bases in Ceylon must have priority, and confirmed the diversion thither of the 16th Brigade of the 70th division.

4. The War Cabinet took immediate steps to reinforce India, ordering the 5th and 2nd British Divisions there. The 5th Division arrived in May and the 2nd Division in June. They also arranged to send such aircraft as could be spared; but the position in the Middle East was tense at the time and it was not easy to meet our requirements. In a telegram sent on the 27th March I estimated our air requirements as—

- 9 Fighter squadrons for the defence of Bengal.
- 3 Fighter squadrons for Madras and the east coast ports.
- 6 Fighter squadrons for Ceylon.
- 4 Fighter/Reconnaissance squadrons for support of the army in Burma.
- 4 Fighter/Bomber squadrons for support of the army in Burma.
- 11 Light Bomber squadrons.
- 4 Medium Bomber squadrons.
- 2 Heavy Bomber squadrons.
- 7 General Reconnaissance squadrons.
- 4 Flying-boat squadrons.
- 6 T.B. squadrons.
- 4 B.T. squadrons.
- a total of 64 squadrons.

Our actual strength at the time was:—

- 1 Fighter squadron (Mohawks) at Calcutta.
- 1 Fighter squadron (Audax)* at Dinjan.
- 1 Fighter squadron (Hurricanes) at Akyab.
- 3 Fighter squadrons (Hurricanes) in Ceylon.
- 1 Light Bomber squadron (Blenheims) in Ceylon.
- 1 G.R. squadron (Hudsons) at Calcutta.
- 2 Flying-boat squadrons (Catalinas) in Ceylon.

There was, on paper, a Light Bomber Squadron at Calcutta, but it had no serviceable aircraft.

There were also four Army Co-operation squadrons in India with obsolete types of aircraft suitable only for North-West Frontier.

Reinforcements of fighter and bomber aircraft in considerable numbers were on their way at this date, but our operational strength could not be materially increased before the middle of April.

There were some American heavy bombers in India which could assist in the defence of India in emergency, but they were birds of passage, intended for use in China and not under my control. I could not reckon on them in any plan of defence.

Thus the only portion of my command which had any scale of air protection at all was Ceylon.

* The Audax was not designed as a fighter and had been obsolete as an Army Co-operation machine before the war; its maximum speed was 150 m.p.h.

JAPANESE NAVAL RAID.

5. It was, as it turned out, fortunate that such defence as was available was mainly in Ceylon, since a Japanese naval raid into Indian waters took place in the early days of April, in the course of which Colombo was attacked by carrier-borne aircraft on the 5th April and Trincomalee on the 9th April. Our defending fighters inflicted considerable losses on the enemy aircraft, which did little damage on land; but they suffered some losses themselves; and the Blenheim squadron, which was sent to attack the Japanese aircraft-carriers, was practically destroyed without accomplishing anything. Had the attack been renewed it would have been difficult to meet. Though little damage had been caused on land, two 8-inch cruisers, Dorsetshire and Cornwall, and aircraft-carrier (Hermes) and some smaller naval vessels had been sunk by Japanese aircraft in the waters around Ceylon.

In the Bay of Bengal Japanese light forces and aircraft, sank just on 100,000 tons of merchant shipping, dropped a few bombs on Vizagapatam—the first on Indian soil, and caused a panic there and elsewhere on the Eastern Coasts of India, which, in the absence of naval and air forces, were practically defenceless.

This was India's most dangerous hour; our Eastern fleet was powerless to protect Ceylon or Eastern India; our air strength was negligible; and it was becoming increasingly obvious that our small tired force in Burma was unlikely to be able to hold the enemy, while the absence of communications between Assam and Upper Burma made it impossible to reinforce it.

Fortunately the enemy naval force withdrew, and no Japanese surface warships have since appeared in Indian waters. It is conceivable that the Japanese raid was made with the object of securing Indian rejection of the proposals brought out by the Cripps Mission, which were then under discussion at Delhi.

6. On the 13th and 14th April I met Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, at Bombay and discussed with him the defence of India. He confirmed that with his present force he could do nothing to prevent the invasion of Southern India or Ceylon, and could not send naval forces into the Bay of Bengal to protect shipping or the east coast of India. He also informed me that practically the whole of the Eastern Fleet would be engaged in operations against Madagascar and would not be available in Indian waters.

An appreciation from the Chiefs of Staff in London was received on the 23rd April. It confirmed my general appreciation of the danger to India, i.e., that an invasion of N.E. India by sea, land and air was the most probable threat, while an attack on Ceylon was possible; it recognised the powerlessness of the Eastern Fleet to offer effective opposition; accepted that the land forces in India were inadequate by at least one Armoured Division, one Army Tank Brigade and four infantry divisions, which deficiencies could not be met till late in 1942; and gave the air squadrons required as 66 (there were in India at this time 15 operational squadrons, rising to a total of 25 by the end of June).

The telegram ended with the conclusion:—

“ If Japanese press boldly westwards without pause for consolidation and are not deterred by offensive activities or threats by Eastern fleet or American fleet, nor by rapid reinforcement of our air forces in N.E. India, our Indian Empire is in grave danger.”

7. May and June seemed likely to be the critical months for India. It was, therefore, disturbing to me to find that at the end of April the Eastern Fleet, instead of being strengthened, was likely to be further reduced for operations in the Mediterranean to provision Malta, that two brigades of the 5th British Division, on its way to reinforce India, were being diverted for the capture of Madagascar, to which also was being sent an East African brigade which I had been led to expect for Ceylon; and that the Australian Government was demanding the return to Australia of the two brigades in Ceylon.

I protested with some vigour, but the Minister of Defence, who had to look at the whole picture, decided that the attempt to relieve Malta must be made; that Madagascar should be occupied to secure the sea route to the Middle East and India; and that it was necessary for political reasons to release the Australian brigades.

Events proved his judgment correct; and the danger to India never developed. Great efforts were made to build up our air force; and during the summer two British divisions (2nd and 5th) gradually arrived. By July, when the monsoon broke, the critical period for India had passed.

DEFENCE OF NORTH-EAST FRONTIER OF INDIA.

8. Meanwhile, as described in my despatch dated the 14th July, 1942, the troops in Burma, under General Sir Harold Alexander, were being driven northwards; and after the Japanese break-through to Lashio in the latter part of April and the consequent collapse of Chinese resistance in N.E. Burma, I had to order the withdrawal of the Burma Army across the Indian frontier into Assam. This was completed by the 20th May.

The situation of Eastern Army (Lt.-General Sir Charles Broad) which was responsible for the defence of N.E. India was by this time as follows:—

IV Corps (Lt.-General N. M. S. Irwin) was responsible for the defence of Assam. The Burma Army (17 Indian Division and 1 Burma Division) passed under his command on arrival in India; apart from them he had only one brigade (1st Indian Infantry Brigade), which had been moved from the N.W. Frontier into Manipur State and was astride the Palel-Tamu road; and one battalion of the 49th Indian Infantry Brigade.

XV Corps (Lt.-General Sir Noel Beresford-Peirse) was responsible for the defence of Bengal against seaborne invasion or an advance up the Arakan Coast. It comprised 14 and 26 Indian Divisions, both incomplete, and certain troops which formed the garrison of Calcutta.

70 British Division (less one brigade group in Ceylon) was at Ranchi with the rôle of meeting any seaborne expedition which landed on the Orissa coast; it also constituted the only reserve available for Assam or Bengal.

Thus *IV Corps* had some 500 miles of frontier to guard with little except the tired and disorganised Burma Army; while the *XV Corps*

with two incomplete and partially trained divisions had to secure some 400 to 500 miles of land frontier and sea-coast. The 70 Division (two brigades only) was responsible for another 200 to 300 miles of the coast-line besides acting as general reserve. There was, until the arrival of the 5th British Division at Bombay, which was not completed till the 20th May, no other reserve available in India.

9. Certain auxiliary forces were formed to assist in the defence of N.E. India. On the frontiers of Assam and Bengal local levies were raised amongst the hillmen of the Lushai, Chin and Naga hills; this force, which amounted to some 2,500 men, was known as “ V ” Force. It was of doubtful fighting value but would have been of value to watch hill tracks, collect information and to harry the enemy’s line of communications had he advanced into the hills. A force was also organised to man river boats to patrol the great waterways that intersect Eastern Bengal. It was known as the Sundarbans Flotilla.

THE TRANSPORTATION PROBLEM.

10. Apart from the small number of troops available, the defence of N.E. India was complicated by the poverty of the communications from the rest of India into Assam and Eastern Bengal. Assam is cut off from the rest of India by the great Brahmaputra river which is unbridged throughout its length. Its level fluctuates during the year by as much as 25 feet and its course sometimes by several miles. The railway system east of the Brahmaputra was a single track metre gauge with no modern train control system and very limited resources in locomotives and rolling stock. The system was served by wagon ferries at two places over the Brahmaputra capable of dealing only with a very limited number of wagons per day. There is no all-weather road from India to the west bank of the Brahmaputra, while the only west to east road in Assam was the second class single width road which ran from Gauhati ferry to the North-East; so that the deficiencies of the railway could not be replaced by road transport; indeed, all vehicles had to be transported to Assam by rail. Nor could river transport solve the problem. Many steamers had been sent earlier in the war to the rivers of Iraq, and the river system merely led to the railway system on the east bank, which was the limiting transportation factor.

On the Bengal front, communications were no better. The delta of the Ganges is unbridged; and the railway, which terminated a short distance beyond Chittagong, is single line, metre-gauge. Some small use could, however, be made of sea transport.

11. I have already in my Burma despatch of the 14th July, 1942, given some account of the endeavours to construct a road from Assam to Burma. At the same time (about February, 1942) the construction of an adequate railhead and advanced base at Manipur Road station on the Bengal and Assam railway was undertaken. At the time this was a wayside halt in the heart of dense jungle at the spot where the road to Imphal takes off. It was unfortunately intensely malarial. Here a railhead had to be laid out in a short time, to handle 1,000 tons of stores a day, eventually rising to 2,000 tons, while depot areas had to be made to hold a

reserve of 30 days for a force of three divisions, together with a generous complement of non-divisional troops and labour.

Much other work had to be done to improve the communications in Assam. A new railhead and advanced base was made at Ledo; an additional river port was made at Doinaigon on the Brahmaputra north of Jorhat, and the railway was extended to meet it; many additional crossing places were made on the railway and the control system improved; the ferry capacity over the Brahmaputra at Gauhati ferry was greatly increased; and other improvements to the railway, road and telegraph system carried out.

12. The transportation problem would have been an extremely difficult one in any event. It was further complicated in 1942 by the following events. There was an exceptionally heavy monsoon which caused extensive flooding and interruption of railway communications north of the Brahmaputra and elsewhere; and also resulted in continual landslides on the road to Imphal, which was the sole line of communications to a large part of the force. This was followed by the worst malaria epidemic which India had known for many years; there was a particularly high incidence amongst lorry drivers and transportation personnel, which had a cumulative effect in worsening the situation. Finally, from August onward, the rebellion organised by Congress after the breakdown of the Cripps negotiations in April was directed especially against our communications to N.E. India.

The Japanese raid into the Bay of Bengal (see paragraph 5) in April caused for some time the practical closing of the Bay of Bengal and the eastern ports to shipping and threw extra strain on the railways. The port of Chittagong was closed altogether and much of the port equipment was removed in May, when a Japanese attack on Chittagong seemed probable.

13. The transportation and other difficulties enumerated above naturally had a considerable effect on the efficiency of the troops. Those in Manipur, who were dependent on the Imphal road for supply, had to subsist on less than full rations for a considerable portion of the summer, and the resultant malnutrition increased their susceptibility to malaria and other disease. It was impossible also, owing to the breaking of the road, to provide satisfactory medical accommodation and equipment or to evacuate the sick to better conditions. This again increased the sick rate. Many of the troops had been through the exhausting Burma campaign and should have been relieved and rested had the reliefs or transport facilities been available. In October, November and December, when conditions began to improve, some 20,000 sick had to be evacuated from Eastern Army area. This was in addition to some 15,000 who had been evacuated before the rains, when the army returned from Burma.

The disturbances caused by Congress in August threw a fresh strain on the army, which had to be used for internal security instead of its legitimate work of training and equipping for the dry weather season. The equivalent of 58 battalions had to be employed; of these 24 belonged to the Field Army and the equivalent of 7 were formed from Reinforcement

Camps and Training Centres; the remainder were battalions already allotted to internal security duties. The employment of units from Reinforcement Camps and Training Centres resulted in delay to the flow of reinforcements to formations on the Eastern Frontier which were already seriously below strength owing to the high incidence of malaria.

I should like to pay a tribute to the admirable spirit and discipline shown by the troops engaged on the unpleasant task of restoring order during these troubles. The civil services, armed and unarmed, worked in close co-operation with the military forces in dealing with disorders. The work of the police, who were often isolated, was generally admirable, and their steadfastness greatly lightened the burden thrown on the troops.

REFUGEE PROBLEM.

14. Besides the troops evacuated from Burma, India had to deal with some 400,000 civilian refugees from Burma in varying states of distress. Some came by sea from Akyab, before it fell into Japanese hands; large numbers came through Imphal; and others by the Hukawng valley route to Ledo. The arrangements to feed and transport these numbers presented a very serious problem, while from the security aspect it was necessary to set up some organisation to try and prevent the infiltration of enemy agents. The arrangements for the reception of refugees were placed by the Indian Government under Major-General E. Wood, who received invaluable assistance from the organisation controlled by the Indian Tea Association. The Imphal route, by which the majority of the 180,000 refugees entered Assam, was comparatively easy; but the route up to the Hukawng valley from Myitkyina by Maingkwan and Shingbuiyang to Ledo was from Shingbuiyang onwards only a difficult mountain track with several rivers to cross. After the rains began, mud and swollen rivers made this route practically impassable from end of May onwards, and a number of the refugees were marooned at Shingbuiyang for the monsoon period, having to be fed by air; while some perished in the attempt to get through. Other parties who attempted to reach Ledo from Fort Hertz via the Chaukan pass were only rescued with considerable difficulty.

CHINESE FORCES IN INDIA.

15. When the Japanese broke through to Lashio in April part of the Chinese forces in Burma were cut off from return to China. Part of these sought to reach India. One Division, 38th, which had been operating with the British forces, reached Imphal in good order about 6,000 strong. Part of the remainder of the Chinese Fifth Army eventually got through to India by the Ledo route; others made their way north-east into the Kachin country north-east of Myitkyina and returned to China by mountain tracks, though only after considerable losses from starvation and disease.

General Stilwell himself, the American Chief of Staff to the Generalissimo, had been cut off in Burma and had to make his way on foot to Assam.

16. I decided to place all Chinese troops that had reached India in a camp at Ramgarh that

had previously been an Italian Prisoner-of-War camp. Here they would be re-equipped and trained by the United States forces.

Towards the end of September I received through the American staff a request from the Generalissimo that additional troops should be flown from China into India to make up the force at Ramgarh to a complete corps of two divisions, which, after equipment and training, would operate from India into Burma. I accepted this proposal after approval by His Excellency the Viceroy and His Majesty's Government. The troops were flown in during October, November and December, and by the end of the year the numbers of the Chinese force at Ramgarh amounted to approximately 30,000.

MILITARY SITUATION DURING SUMMER:

17. By the end of June immediate anxiety for the safety of India had lessened. The 5th and 2nd British Divisions were arriving, though neither was yet complete, much anti-aircraft artillery and other units had reached India, and the air strength was gradually increasing. The Eastern Fleet was still incapable of disputing command of Indian waters with a Japanese fleet; but the enemy had shown no signs of mounting an expedition against India, and the monsoon weather made this improbable for some months. India therefore had a breathing space to reorganise, train and prepare.

The 23rd Indian Division was gradually formed in Manipur, and the 1 Burma Division, which was now renamed 39th Indian Division, was withdrawn to Shillong to refit and reorganise. The two Indian armoured divisions which were being formed began to receive some equipment. A force was sent to Ceylon at the end of June to replace the two Australian brigades which were withdrawn.

18. Meanwhile, however, events in other theatres affected India's preparations. The operations to capture Madagascar had delayed the arrival of reinforcements and equipment, but had removed a potential menace to India's line of communications with the United Kingdom.

The reverse suffered in the Western Desert in June and the close approach of Rommel's army to the Nile delta caused the diversion of units and equipment, especially aircraft and tanks, from India to the Middle East. Though India was still far from secure, the danger to Egypt was obviously far more threatening; and on the 30th June I cabled to General Auchinleck offering any assistance that India could afford. He asked for an anti-tank regiment, which I sent, together with 100 carriers and other aid.

A danger more nearly affecting India arose from the German advance towards the Caucasus, which threatened Persia and Iraq and the Persian Gulf. A large proportion of the garrison had been moved across to Egypt to meet the threat to the Delta, and it seemed to me that the only way to reinforce Persia in time to halt a German advance through the Caucasus, should the Russians fail to hold the Caucasus—as at one time seemed possible—would be to send troops from India, weak though her defences were. I therefore offered to make available one or both of the two newly arrived British divisions (2nd and 5th) and an

armoured brigade. Eventually the 7th Armoured Brigade and 5th Division were despatched to Iraq. They left India in September

MEETING IN CAIRO.

19. Early in August I received a summons to meet the Prime Minister and C.I.G.S. in Cairo, where the whole position in the Middle East was to be discussed. I also accompanied them to Moscow for conversations with the Soviet Government and General Staff.

So far as India was concerned, the main outcome of these discussions was the decision to relieve the Middle East Command of responsibility for Persia and Iraq, so as to enable it to concentrate on the defeat of Rommel's army and the removal of danger from the Nile Delta. The command of Persia and Iraq, which secured the western frontier of India, had already passed during the war from Middle East to India and then back again. It was now suggested that they should again be placed under the C.in-C., India. I was willing to accept this additional responsibility, provided that the R.A.F. allotted to these countries was under the control of the A.O.C.-in-C., India. Difficulties arose about this, and it was decided to create a separate Command, P.A.I.C., directly under the War Cabinet. It was decided that India should retain the 2nd British Division which had been provisionally held in readiness to reinforce Persia and Iraq.

EXPANSION OF THE AIR FORCE.

20. As has already been indicated, the air strength in India in March was almost negligible. To build it up, much more was, of course, required than the supply of air squadrons or aircraft. A programme to construct over 200 airfields had to be undertaken, which threw a heavy strain on the material resources of India (such as cement), on the transportation system by rail and road, on the engineer personnel and supply of labour. In March there had been only some 30 to 40 airfields suitable for operation, even in fair weather; by the end of November the number was approximately 150. A large programme of signal construction was also necessary; repair and salvage organisations had to be brought into being; schools for training had to be arranged, and many other establishments formed. Nothing but a rudimentary warning system existed in Eastern India, and much work was required before it was even reasonably effective.

No details of the expansion need be given. By the end of 1942 there were 29 squadrons operational and another 20 forming, in addition to 2 squadrons of transport aircraft and 1 P.R.U. squadron. This was much short of the minimum force considered necessary for the security of India, but a great improvement on the defencelessness of March. Balloon barrages were established at Calcutta and Jamshedpur.

The Indian Air Force took part in the expansion, and is being raised from 4 squadrons equipped with obsolete machines to 10 squadrons with modern aircraft.

21. Air operations during the monsoon from June to October were naturally on a small scale; but were notable for the skill and determination with which crews operated in bad weather. Targets on the Burma coasts, in the Chindwin valley and on Akyab Island were

attacked with success; and a constant reconnaissance of the Bay of Bengal, over enemy aerodromes in Burma and of the Port of Rangoon was maintained as far as possible. Air information was, however, severely restricted not only by the weather but by shortage of long-range aircraft. During this period the enemy air force was almost completely inactive.

EVENTS DURING MONSOON FROM JUNE TO OCTOBER.

22. On the eastern front of India there was little military activity during the monsoon period. Some good patrol work in difficult conditions was carried out in the Chindwin valley by troops of the 23rd Division and local levies. The rains were exceptionally heavy, and all northern Burma and Assam are highly malarial during the rainy season. It seemed at one time that the enemy intended to move from the Chindwin and Myitta valleys into the Chin Hills, which were held only by local levies whom we could not support in the absence of communications. The Chins became alarmed by Japanese threats and depressed by shortage of food, and there was a danger that they might come to terms with the enemy. The danger was averted by vigorous bombing of the enemy and the dropping of supplies to the Chins.

I had determined in June to re-occupy Fort Hertz (Putao) in the extreme north of Burma, in order to protect the landing ground there and to raise and support Kachin levies to operate between Myitkyina and Fort Hertz. There was no road from India to Fort Hertz, and a detachment could only be flown in by air. It was September before this was possible and it had to be preceded by a small detachment dropped by parachute to prepare the landing ground.

INTERNAL SITUATION.

23. Reference has already been made to the disturbances organised by Congress in August and their effect (see paragraph 13). Internal trouble of a different kind necessitated the use of troops and the declaration of martial law in part of Sind north of Hyderabad. A fanatical sect of Moslems known as the Hurs had long terrorised a considerable district through which the main line from the port of Karachi runs. On the 16th May, 1942, a gang of Hurs derailed the mail train from Karachi and then attacked it. It was impossible to tolerate such dangerous lawlessness on one of the principal lines of communication in India. Since the police and civil authorities were unable to deal with the situation, a military force was sent and martial law declared. Major-General R. Richardson, M.C., was appointed Military Administrator. Under his able direction the situation soon improved, but so deep-seated was the terrorism of the Hurs, and so difficult the country, which contains large areas of marsh and of desert, that the troops were still employed at the end of the year.

A company of a Parachute battalion was employed for some time in operations to round up bands of Hurs, probably the first use of parachutists in civil disturbances.

Recruiting was not affected by any internal trouble, and some 60,000 recruits continued to be enlisted each month.

24. In July a small expedition to Datta Khel in Waziristan became necessary to deal with

tribal disturbances inspired by the notorious Fakir of Ipi. The operations were short and successful. On the whole the situation on the N.W. Frontier during 1942 was noticeably stable.

REORGANISATION OF COMMANDS.

25. During the period covered by this review it became necessary to reorganise the system of Military Commands in India. Three Armies were constituted to deal with the threats of invasion of N.W., N.E. and Southern India, while a Central Command was created in order to relieve the Army Commanders of large areas with internal security problems only, and of a considerable amount of responsibility for administration and training. Lt.-General N. M. S. Irwin took over command of the Eastern Army, Lt.-General Sir Noel Beresford-Peirse that of the Southern Army, and Lt.-General H. B. D. Willcox the Central Command.

OCEAN BASES.

26. When Japan entered the war, and especially after the loss of Singapore, the Navy felt the need of additional bases in the Indian Ocean. Bases were selected at Addu Atoll in the Maldives, Diego Garcia in the Chagos Archipelago, Seychelles and Mauritius. India was made responsible for the garrison of these and also of Cocos Island and Rodriguez (East of Mauritius). The defences of Addu Atoll were originally designed on a considerable scale, but were later reduced. Scrub typhus and malaria caused a very high sick rate in the garrison and labour units working on the airfield and defences; but this showed signs of improvement by the end of the year as a result of jungle clearance.

After the occupation of Madagascar I suggested that Mauritius, Rodriguez and Seychelles could better be garrisoned from E. Africa. This was accepted and on the 1st September these places passed to the E. African Command. I returned the Mauritian garrison from Diego Garcia to Mauritius during September and replaced it by Indian troops.

PREPARATIONS FOR OFFENSIVE.

27. Even before we had been driven out of Upper Burma, I had in April issued instructions for the re-conquest of the whole of Burma to be planned. An estimate was to be made of the troops required, of the measures for their maintenance, and of the special training and equipment necessary; airfields and the maintenance arrangements for a large air force were to be planned, since air superiority was the first requisite for operations against Burma by land or sea.

Planning has continued ever since, and has shown the difficulties of the problem and the extensive preparations required. There is no connection by rail or road between India and Burma, and the country through which routes must be made to support an invasion is extremely unfavourable—high hills, dense jungles and fever-ridden valleys, with no local supplies available and a very limited population to provide labour. Moreover, the rivers and mountain ranges all run from north to south. Communications in this direction, therefore, that is with the grain of the country, are comparatively easy; whereas movement from west to east, against the grain, is very difficult. Any advance that we make from Assam

or from the coast will thus have great natural obstacles to overcome, whereas the enemy based on Rangoon and the south can operate up and down the valleys with much greater freedom. The poor communications to N.E. India, from which the advance must be made, have already been described.

Nor are the approaches for a sea-borne expedition more favourable. Down the whole of the west coast of Burma runs the steep jungle-clad range of the Arakan Yoma, passable only by a few bridle paths. The south coast, from Point Negrais to the south of the Rangoon river, is the delta of the Irrawaddy, a tangled wilderness of mangrove swamps and creeks, impassable for any but an amphibian force in small boats and extremely difficult even for it. Further east, the Gulf of Martaban is shallow with extensive mud flats which preclude a landing anywhere north of Moulmein. A land advance from Moulmein on Rangoon, which must be the objective of any expedition against South Burma, has to cover more than 100 miles and to cross several large rivers, while exposed to flank attack from Thailand.

The climate practically restricts operations to a period of less than six months, from November to the middle of May, since in the S.W. monsoon the rainfall is so heavy as to render most roads impassable and to restrict all flying operations; and the stormy winds make landing on the west coast impracticable. Finally, the whole of Upper Burma and most of Lower Burma are intensely malarial.

28. Early in June I considered that definite plans for the recapture of Burma could be put in train; and I cabled home outline plans of operations. I said that I proposed to operate in a series of small columns against the line of the river Chindwin from Kalewa to Homalin, with possible separate advances from Ledo and Fort Hertz against Myitkyina. I would then push on to the line Kalewa-Katha-Myitkyina; and exploit any success towards Shwebo, Bhamo and the line of the Irrawaddy.

I pointed out the difficulties due to the poverty of communications both in Assam and in Upper Burma, the unhealthy climate, and lack of trained troops. I asked especially for the strengthening of the Air Force at my disposal. At the same time I instructed G.O.C.-in-C. Eastern Army to undertake a limited offensive, as outlined above, into Upper Burma, with October 1st as date for commencement; and to push troops from Chittagong towards the Burma border, and to improve communications with a view to an advance into Arakan later on. Meanwhile I continued to plan a sea-borne expedition against Lower Burma, with an original target date of November 1st.

29. The succeeding months were a period of frustration so far as plans for an offensive into Burma were concerned. The heavy monsoon, the severe incidence of malaria, and the Congress disturbances of August and September delayed the preparations in Assam for the advance into Upper Burma and interfered with the training of the troops; while the continuance of operations in Madagascar deprived India of troops, ships and landing craft which were necessary for the preparation of the sea-borne expedition. On the 3rd July I had to report that I could see no prospect of mounting an expedition against Lower Burma before January, 1943; and early in September the

G.O.C.-in-C., Eastern Army, informed me that he would be unable to begin operations from Assam before the 1st March, 1943.

In a cable of the 18th July, the Chiefs of Staff had stated the conditions in which a full-scale expedition against Burma might be launched in the winter 1942-43; they were most unlikely to be fulfilled. Also, after detailed discussion with G.O.C.-in-C., Eastern Army, I had to accept his view that an advance into Upper Burma could not begin before the 1st March.

It was obvious therefore that I had to content myself with only very limited objectives for the winter of 1942-43; and I accordingly issued instructions in the middle of September, 1942, defining the object of operations during this period as:—

(a) To develop communications and establish ourselves in a favourable position for reconquering Burma and reopening the Burma Road at the first opportunity.

(b) To bring the Japanese to battle with the purpose of using up their strength, particularly in the air.

I said that my intentions were:—

(a) To capture Akyab and to reoccupy Upper Arakan.

(b) To strengthen our position in the Chin Hills.

(c) To occupy Kalewa and Sittaung, and thence to raid the Japanese L. of C.

(d) To make such administrative preparations as would allow of the rapid advance of a force towards Upper or Lower Burma should opportunity offer during the campaigning season of 1942-43.

30. On the 18th and 19th October I discussed with General Stilwell, the American Chief of Staff to Marshal Chiang Kai-Shek, Chinese co-operation in an offensive into Burma. He produced a plan drawn up by the Generalissimo for the reconquest of Burma which was generally on the same lines on which we were already working, i.e., an advance by land forces into Upper Burma and a sea-borne expedition against Lower Burma. He proposed that a large Chinese force should advance from Yunnan into North-East Burma at the same time as the Chinese Corps being assembled at Ramgarh in India (see paras. 15 and 16) advanced from Ledo on Myitkyina and a British force from Manipur towards Mandalay. We agreed that these plans were generally suitable, but that the date by which they could be put into execution could not yet be definitely fixed.

OPERATION FOR CAPTURE OF AKYAB.

31. Early in autumn I set on foot preparations for a sea-borne expedition to recapture Akyab. It was at first intended to be carried out at the beginning of December, but neither the shipping, troops or necessary air force could be made available for various reasons, principally the prolongation of operations in Madagascar. By the middle of November I was forced to abandon hope of being able to mount a sea-borne expedition against Akyab, and decided that the only chance of capturing it was by an advance from Chittagong down the Arakan coast to secure the Mayu Peninsula, whence an attack on Akyab could be launched from short range. This plan had the disadvantage that it made surprise most unlikely, and Arakan

was a most unfavourable theatre, into which I should certainly not have made a deep land advance on any scale had sea transport been available. I also realised that the troops available had had little opportunity of training in jungle warfare. I hoped, however, that, if the advance in Arakan could proceed rapidly, it would be difficult for the Japanese to reinforce in time; and considered it was better to take the risks involved than to remain inactive on this front during the winter.

Instructions for this operation were issued to G.O.C.-in-C., Eastern Army, on the 19th November, 1942. The progress and results will be described in a subsequent despatch. By the end of the year 14th Indian Division had crossed the Burmese frontier and had occupied Maungdaw and Buthidaung, from which the Japanese withdrew without fighting. The division was preparing to push on down to Foul Point at the southern end of the Mayu Peninsula, from whence it was intended to launch an assault on Akyab. Unfortunately, rain had already delayed the progress of the division.

NORTHERN BURMA OPERATIONS.

32. I had a conference with General Stilwell on the 17th December at which plans for Upper Burma in the early part of 1943 were discussed. General Stilwell was anxious, in spite of the administrative difficulties, to secure as much of northern Burma as possible, in order to cover the construction of a road from Ledo by Myitkyina to Paoshan to join the Burma Road, and also to secure the airfield at Myitkyina. The construction of the Ledo-Myitkyina road had now been undertaken by the Americans. It was agreed that all preparations should be continued with the object of an advance into Upper Burma from Yunnan (Chinese force), Ledo (Chinese Corps from Ramgarh) and Manipur (British IV Corps), to begin on the 1st March if the progress of road-making and administrative situation permitted.

33. On IV Corps front, 23rd Indian Division had advanced two brigades into the Tamu area in the Kabaw valley, while 17th Indian Division moved forward towards the Chin hills down a new road which was being constructed towards Tiddim. There was some patrol incidents in the Kabaw and Chindwin valleys but no major action.

In northern Burma Kachin levies based on Sumprabum did some excellent work in harassing Japanese forces north of Myitkyina. In the Hukawng valley a small force of Japanese and rebel Burmans advanced to Shing-buiyang in October but withdrew after bombing attacks by the United States Air Force.

OPERATIONS OF THE R.I.N.

34. The main work of the Royal Indian Navy in the period under review has been convoy duty. Several Japanese submarines were known to be operating in the Indian Ocean, but no ship in convoy was lost. A number routed independently were sunk, chiefly in the vicinity of the Mozambique Channel, but generally speaking enemy submarines were not numerous. Ships of the R.I.N. made a number of depth-charge attacks on possible submarines, but no sinkings were claimed.

On the 11th November H.M.I.S. *Bengal*, commanded by Lieutenant Wilson, while, on passage from Australia to India conveying the

Dutch tanker *Ondina*, encountered two Japanese armed merchant cruisers south of Cocos Island. Though the enemy was greatly superior in strength, H.M.I.S. *Bengal* closed at once and fought a most spirited action at close range, sinking the larger of the enemy ships. The Dutch tanker gallantly supported *Bengal*. This action reflected the greatest credit on the commanders and crews of *Bengal* and *Ondina*.

Launches of the R.I.N. and of the Burma navy operated from Chittagong in support of the army's advance in Arakan.

AIR OPERATIONS, OCTOBER-DECEMBER.

35. With the improvement of the weather after the monsoon, a systematic air offensive was begun against the enemy airfields and communications in Burma, to the extent that our resources allowed. Attacks were made both by day and night and had undoubtedly very considerable effect. The air force also provided direct support for the Army in Arakan and Assam; defended by fighters Calcutta, Chittagong and other vulnerable points; protected shipping in the Bay of Bengal; carried out visual and photographic reconnaissance; and dropped large quantities of supplies in the Chin hills for the local troops, at Sumprabum for the Kachin levies and for the garrison of Fort Hertz.

The Japanese air force showed only sporadic activity. Between the 25th and 28th October the enemy made a series of heavy raids on airfields in the Dinjan area which the Americans had lately taken over. One of these caused considerable damage, since the warning system proved ineffective. In December, the enemy attacked our forward airfields in the Fenny and Chittagong areas and the docks at Chittagong; he caused little damage. At the end of the year he made a series of small attacks by night on Calcutta. These did little damage but caused an exodus of labour.

SUMMARY.

36. From the above it can be seen that the Indian Command had a full and eventful year in 1942. It had been rudely awakened from a somewhat detached interest in the war by the shock of Japan's aggression and the wholly unexpected disasters in Malaya and then Burma. When the danger approached closely, both the armed forces and the nation were unprepared to meet invasion. Ever since the beginning of the war India had sent troops abroad almost as quickly as they could be trained, and had kept in India, except for the minimum necessary for the defence of the N.W. Frontier and internal security, only new formations under training, with incomplete equipment. In 1942 a considerable proportion of these half-trained formations had been sent to Malaya or Burma in the hope of holding up the enemy. So that in March, 1942, India had not a single fully-trained division. The Air Force, as shown, was similarly ineffective and the Eastern Fleet was unable to control Indian waters. So India stood in greater peril of invasion than for some hundreds of years.

That India was able six months later to pass from a defensive to an offensive basis may be counted something of an achievement, especially in view of the administrative difficulties and internal troubles that were encountered. Prompt assistance was sent from the United

Kingdom, and as many troops and air squadrons as could be reasonably spared from our commitments elsewhere were allotted to India.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

37. I should like to place on record my appreciation of the invaluable assistance and wise advice given me by His Excellency the Viceroy and Governor-General, the Marquess of Linlithgow, K.T., P.C., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., O.B.E., D.L., T.D.

38. I am greatly indebted to His Excellency Colonel Sir John Herbert, G.C.I.E., Governor of Bengal, and His Excellency Sir Andrew Clow, K.C.S.I., C.I.E., Governor of Assam, and to the civil officers of those Provinces; also to His Excellency Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, G.B.E., Governor of Burma, and his officers, and to Vice-Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton, K.C.B., D.S.O., Commander-in-Chief, Ceylon.

39. I have received most valuable co-operation from Admiral Sir J. F. Somerville, K.C.B., K.B.E., D.S.O., Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, and Rear-Admiral A. F. E. Palliser, C.B., D.S.C., Flag Liaison Officer, Eastern Fleet, in connection with problems affecting the Royal Navy; and from Vice-Admiral Sir H. Fitzherbert, K.C.I.E., C.B., C.M.G., Flag Officer Commanding, Royal Indian Navy.

40. I have been in daily touch with Air Chief Marshal Sir R. E. C. Peirse, K.C.B., D.S.O., A.F.C., on Air Force questions, and have formed a very high opinion of his abilities and character. Under his direction the co-operation of the Air Force with Army and Navy has been outstanding. I wish also to mention the services of the following R.A.F. officers: A.V.M. W. H. Stevenson and Air-Commodore T. M. Williams.

41. I am very grateful to General Sir Alan F. Hartley, K.C.S.I., C.B., D.S.O., my Deputy, who has given me most loyal support

and assistance; his great experience of India and the Indian Army has been invaluable.

42. The work of my Chief of General Staff, Lieutenant-General E. L. Morris, C.B., O.B.E., M.C., has been of a very high order. He got through an immense amount of work without fuss or friction; and his sympathetic but firm personality promoted smooth and efficient working in the complex Indian military machine, which had not been geared to a major war on its immediate borders and required considerable working up.

43. I was ably assisted both by the Civilian Staff, C. MacI. G. Ogilvie, Esq., C.S.I., C.B.E., I.C.S., as Secretary, and his successor, C. M. Trivedi, Esq., C.S.I., C.I.E., O.B.E., I.C.S., who took his place when the original Defence Department was divided into Defence and War Departments, and E. T. Coates, Esq., C.S.I., C.I.E., I.C.S., my Financial Adviser, and by the Principal Staff Officers (Lieutenant-General W. H. G. Baker, C.B., D.S.O., O.B.E., Adjutant-General, Lieutenant-General W. G. H. Vickers, C.B., O.B.E., Quartermaster General, and Lieutenant-General Sir C. A. Bird, K.C.I.E., C.B., D.S.O., Master General of the Ordnance). I wish to record the services of these officers and also of my Engineer-in-Chief, Major-General R. L. Bond, C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C., who directed the very large programme of airfield construction and other work; and of my Director of Medical Services, Major-General A. C. Campbell Monro, C.B., I.M.S., who effected a great improvement in the medical services in difficult conditions.

44. Command of the Eastern Army, which was responsible for the defence of the threatened frontier of India, was exercised first by Lieut.-General Sir C. N. F. Broad, K.C.B., D.S.O., and after August 1942 by Lieut.-General N. M. S. Irwin, C.B., D.S.O., M.C.; both these officers carried out a most difficult task of command and administration with ability and energy.

NOTICE

The following amendment should be made to the Despatch submitted by General Sir Claude J. E. Auchinleck C.B., C.S.I., D.S.O., O.B.E., A.D.C. on Operations in the Middle East, 5th July, 1941-31st October, 1941.

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Para 27, sub-para 4 for "Brigadier J. R. Slater" read "Brigadier J. N. Slater."

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