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**OPERATIONS IN BURMA FROM 15TH DECEMBER, 1941,
TO 20TH MAY, 1942.**

The following Despatch was submitted to the Secretary of State for War on the 14th July, 1942, by GENERAL SIR ARCHIBALD P. WAVELL, G.C.B., C.M.G., M.C., A.D.C., Commander-in-Chief, India.

(To cover Reports by Lieut.-General T. J. Hutton and General The Honourable Sir Harold R. L. G. Alexander.)

1 This despatch covers reports by Lieut.-General T. J. Hutton and by General The Honourable Sir Harold R. L. G. Alexander describing the operations in Burma between 15th December, 1941, when the defence of Burma became the responsibility of the Commander-in-Chief in India, and 20th May, 1942, when the last troops of the Burma Army were withdrawn across the frontier into India. The despatch is intended to explain how the general strategical situation affected operations in Burma and to record the actions I took as the Commander chiefly responsible for them. Although the defence of Burma was three times transferred from one Command to another during the period, I remained personally responsible except for a period of about one week at the end of February, 1942.

2. The vital importance of Burma, in a war against Japan, to the Allied cause in general and to the defence of India is obvious. Through Burma lay the only route by which the Chinese armies could be kept supplied, and bases stocked for Allied air attack on Japan itself. From India's point of view, so long as Burma was in our possession, Calcutta and the great industrial centres of North-East India were practically immune from air attack, and her eastern land frontiers were secure from the threat of invasion.

BURMA BEFORE WAR WITH JAPAN.

3. Burma had been included, for operational purposes, in the Far East Command when this was established in November, 1940, with headquarters in Singapore. Administration remained directly under the War Office. So much, however, was the security of Burma of concern to those charged with the defence of India that several attempts were made by successive Commanders-in-Chief in India to have this arrangement altered and responsibility for the defence of Burma transferred to India. The recommendation to this effect made by my predecessor, General Auchinleck, was not accepted. Shortly after my appointment as Commander-in-Chief, India I paid a visit to the United Kingdom and personally pressed this change on the Chiefs of Staff, who again refused to alter the existing arrangement, on the grounds that the question had been fully considered when the Far East Command was established. The Japanese had by this time invaded Indo-China and thus brought danger to Burma much closer, but this fact was not held to justify the change.

On returning to India I paid a visit to Burma and Malaya and discussed the question with the Commander-in-Chief Far East, Air Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, and with the Governor of Burma, Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, and with the G.O.C. Burma, Lieut.-General D. K. Macleod. As a result I cabled to the C.I.G.S. on 11th November, 1941, again recommending the transfer of Burma to the Indian Command. I understand that my recommendation was supported by the Governor of Burma.

I was very greatly concerned by the extent of unpreparedness in Burma's defences of which I became aware during my visit. I realised that the number and training of the troops, their

equipment, the Intelligence lay-out, the size and organisation of the staff, the administrative system and the defensive arrangements were quite inadequate. So dangerous to India did I consider the situation to be that on my return I initiated the despatch to Burma of an additional Indian Infantry Brigade and battery and arranged for a senior administrative staff officer to visit Burma and to ascertain their most pressing needs. Though the administration of Burma was the responsibility of the War Office, it was obvious that, if Japan entered the war, it would be quite impossible for Burma's requirements to be met in time from the United Kingdom; and since any failure in Burma would endanger India, it was essential for the India Command, in spite of its own grave shortages, to put the defence of Burma on a reasonable basis. I also took up the question of the construction of an all-weather road from Assam to Burma as a matter of immediate urgency. (See also paragraph 39.)

4. The neglect of Burma's defences during the early part of the war was understandable. There seemed little pressing danger even should Japan decide to attack Great Britain. Burma was protected on the east by two neutral states, Thailand and Indo-China, both of which professed their intention to defend themselves against Japanese aggression, and by the natural difficulties of the mountainous undeveloped country on her border. So long as Singapore remained in British possession, there was little danger of a threat from seaward. Troops, equipment and staff were badly needed elsewhere, and it was only natural that Burma's requirements were placed by the War Office very low in the scale of priority. When Japan entered Indo-China in July, 1941, and her aggressive intentions became obvious, Burma became more nearly threatened and more attention should have been paid to her deficiencies. The cardinal mistake seems to me, however, to have been in placing Burma in the Far East Command instead of under India. Except as a subsidiary air base, Burma hardly entered into the strategical plans of the Far East Command, which was concerned with the defence of Hong Kong and Malaya; whereas for India Burma was a vital bulwark. Similarly in administration the War Office was too far away and too occupied with other matters to concern itself with, or even to understand, the needs of Burma, to which India would have given sympathetic consideration as part of her own defence problem.

In Burma itself more might have been done, in spite of all the deficiencies, to place the country on a war footing. Political considerations, the climate, under-estimation of the enemy, over-estimation of the natural strength of the frontiers, the complacency of many years of freedom from external threat, all combined to prevent the defence problem being taken sufficiently seriously.

BURMA PLACED UNDER COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, INDIA.

5 On 12th December, five days after the entry of Japan into the war, I received a telegram from the Prime Minister placing Burma under the Commander-in-Chief, in India for defence. In this telegram I was allotted the 18 British Division, then on passage to Mid-east, for the defence of India and Burma; I was released from the commitment to send 17

Indian Division to Iraq; and I was promised a special allotment of anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns. I was also told that four squadrons of fighter aeroplanes would be diverted from Mid-east to India. In a later telegram I was informed that Mid-east had been instructed to prepare plans to send six squadrons of Blenheim IVs to India for Burma.

I at once prepared to despatch to Burma the leading brigade group of 17 Indian Division which was about to embark for Iraq. I had asked the C.I.G.S. at the end of November to consider sending me some African troops for Ceylon or Burma, now that Gondar had fallen and the campaign against Italian East Africa was over; he replied on 16th December that two Brigades could be made available, the first of which could be ready to embark at the end of January. Thus when I visited Rangoon on 21st December I had, as I thought, ample forces in sight for the defence of Burma.

6. In Burma itself there were at this time two British infantry battalions, two Indian infantry brigades, and eight battalions of Burma Rifles (four of which had been raised since the beginning of the war). The Burma Rifles who composed practically half the available force were of doubtful fighting quality (see para. 4 of General Hutton's report). The artillery in Burma comprised only four mountain batteries and one four-gun 18 pr. battery. The Administrative services were so inadequate that they might almost have been termed non-existent.

There was also the Burma Frontier Force, the equivalent of approximately six battalions, divided into a number of detachments. They were composed not of Burmans but of Indians enlisted from the same classes as the Indian Army. This should have been a most valuable force but in actual practice proved disappointing and had little fighting value. It was normally under the control of the Civil Power and only came under army control for operations shortly after the outbreak of war with Japan, whilst remaining for other purposes subject to their own Inspector-General.

It should be realised that the Burma Army had had a very short existence and only dated from the separation of Burma from India in April, 1937. The inhabitants of Burma have shown themselves brave and tough fighters in defence of their country but as irregulars in guerilla warfare. Regular soldiering and discipline make no appeal to them.

7. The air forces nominally available in Burma at the outbreak of war were one fighter squadron equipped with Brewster Buffaloes and one bomber squadron of Blenheims. Actually the aircraft of the bomber squadron were in Malaya for armament training and were taken by Far East Command for Malayan operations. None ever returned to Burma. It may be noted that this Blenheim squadron was one of two borrowed from India by Far East Command (the only modern aircraft India possessed). There was thus only one squadron in Burma, armed with a type of fighter which proved unable to compete with the Japanese fighters.

The War Cabinet's proposals for air reinforcements were an immediate programme of four Fighter Squadrons, six Bomber Squadrons, two Army Co-operation Squadrons and one G.R. Squadron. On the 1st January Air Vice-Marshal Stevenson arrived to command in Burma. The forward elements of three

Hurricane Squadrons—aircraft and personnel—began to arrive on 21st January. It was not, however, until 26th January that a Squadron built up from these elements became operational. The total reinforcement of bombers arriving in the country before the decision to evacuate Rangoon was reached comprised the aircraft and personnel of 113 Bomber Squadron and the aircraft and crews of 45 Bomber Squadron.

India, after parting with her Blenheims to Far East, had no modern aircraft of any kind and could contribute only a flight of 4 Wapiti and 2 Audax aircraft (both completely obsolete types) to form a Coast Defence Flight. This was later replaced by a flight of Blenheim I aircraft. Later India sent the 1 Indian Squadron and No. 28 Squadron R.A.F. with Lysander biplanes. These squadrons, in spite of their out-of-date equipment, did much valuable work, and 1 Indian Squadron acquitted itself gallantly in the first service in this war of an Indian air squadron. No. 31 Bomber Transport Squadron equipped with Valencia and Douglas aircraft was also placed by India at the disposal of Burma.

The air defences of Burma, especially of the vital port of Rangoon, would have been overwhelmed at once but for the presence in Burma of the American Volunteer Group (A.V.G.), an air force manned by American pilots for the defence of China. It was equipped with P-40 fighters and led by Colonel G. Chennault. One of its two squadrons was alternately made available by the Generalissimo for the defence of Rangoon, and the pilots together with the R.A.F. Buffalo Fighter Squadrons saved the situation by their dash and skill.

8 In an appreciation about the middle of December, General Macleod estimated the maximum scale of Japanese attack at one or two divisions against Southern Shan States and one division in the south against Tenasserim. He stated that two infantry brigades, one field regiment and one field battery were the additional land reinforcements necessary to deal with the situation. He considered three bomber squadrons and two fighter squadrons were required.

Both Far East Command and War Office informed me that an attack in force against Burma was unlikely until the Japanese had completed their campaigns in Malaya and the Philippines.

9. After discussing Burma's defence problems with the Governor and G.O.C. I cabled from Rangoon on 22nd December to the C.I.G.S. an appreciation in which I emphasised the weakness of Burma's defences, the lack of an Intelligence system, and the need for air forces. I said that the *immediate* requirements of Burma were two bomber and two modern fighter squadrons, a divisional headquarters and two brigade groups, apparatus for a warning system and anti-aircraft artillery.

10 In view of the extensive re-organisation of the whole defence system of Burma, which was essential, I decided that it would be necessary to replace Lieut.-General Macleod, who had done his best with the very little available to him, by a commander with more experience of the organisation and administration of troops on a large scale. The Governor of Burma was anxious, for political reasons, to have an officer of the British Service if possible,

and I decided to appoint my Chief of the General Staff in India, Lieut.-General Hutton, to the command in Burma. His powers of effective organisation had been amply proved in India. He assumed command on 27th December, 1941.

OFFER OF CHINESE TROOPS FOR DEFENCE OF BURMA.

11. From Rangoon I flew to Chungking with General Brett of the United States Air Force to discuss the Japanese war with Marshal Chiang Kai-Shek. I wished to ensure that at least one of the A.V.G. Squadrons, which Colonel Chennault wished to remove to China, remained in Burma for the defence of Rangoon; also to obtain the temporary use of some of the Lease-Lend material for China, which was stacked in large quantities in the Rangoon docks and could not quickly be removed, to make good the most serious deficiencies in the Burma Army. To neither of these requests did I get a definite reply, though in the end one squadron of the A.V.G. always did remain for the defence of Rangoon, and some of the Lease-Lend equipment was placed at the disposal of the Burma Army. On the other hand, the Generalissimo offered to send to Burma the Fifth and Sixth Chinese Armies. Since it has been alleged that my refusal of this offer was a main contributing factor to the loss of Burma, I will state the facts of the matter from my point of view. I accepted at once the 93 Division, part of which was already approaching the Burmese border from Puerh, and the 49 Division as a reserve on the northern frontier of Burma at Wanting. These two Divisions constituted the Sixth Army, with a third Division, the 55th, which General Denny, head of 204 Mission in China, informed me was very scattered and would take some time to collect and was of poor quality. The Fifth Army, of good quality, was collecting round Kunming. I asked that it should not at present be moved into Burma, but should be held in reserve in the Kunming area. I considered that it would be well placed here either to move into Burma if required; or for the defence of Yunnan if the Japanese made an advance north from Indo-China against the Burmese road, a contingency which the Chinese had not long before represented as the enemy's most probable move; or for offensive operations into Indo-China in co-operation with an advance from Burma if all went well.

The Generalissimo made it perfectly clear that it was a condition of the acceptance of his offer that a separate line of communications should be available for his troops and that they should not in any way be mixed up with British troops. It was impossible at the time to provide a separate line of communication for the Fifth Army though it was possible to keep the communications of the 93 Division from Puerh separate from that of the British troops in Burma. I had at the time every reason to suppose that I should have ample British, Indian or African troops available to defend Burma, which did not seem immediately threatened: obviously it was desirable that a country of the British Empire should be defended by Imperial troops rather than by foreign. The Chinese who had no administrative services of their own would have complicated the already difficult administrative

problem in Burma. These were the reasons that were the motive of my qualified acceptance of the Generalissimo's offer. It should be noted that a Chinese "Army" was approximately the equivalent in numbers of a British division but with a much lower scale of equipment.

I am quite satisfied that my decision was justified by the military situation as it appeared to me at the time. Nor had I any reason to know that the Chinese attached great political importance to the acceptance of the offer. The Generalissimo himself showed comparatively little interest in the matter and made no attempt to press me; three-quarters of the lengthy discussions I had with him were devoted to the question of the establishment of an Allied Council at Chungking and to consideration of an ambitious plan for defeat of the Japanese in 1942.

From subsequent experience of the slowness of Chinese troop moves, I think that even if I had accepted the whole of the Fifth and Sixth Armies at once they would actually have reached Burma very little, if any, sooner than they eventually did.

As things turned out, I admit that it would have saved much criticism in China and in the U.S.A. had I accepted the Generalissimo's generous offer whole-heartedly and at once. I do not, however, think that it would have made any difference in the end to the defence of Burma.

12. When I returned to India, I found that the troops I was counting on for Burma were being taken from my control for the reinforcement of Malaya. Already the War Cabinet had ordered one brigade group of the 18 British Division and two brigade groups of the 17 Indian Division to Malaya, as well as anti-aircraft and anti-tank artillery. The remainder of the 18 Division was also put under orders for Malaya shortly afterwards. Thus of the two complete divisions on which I had reckoned one divisional headquarters and one brigade only remained. I still believed the African brigades available and expected the first to arrive in Burma by the middle of February. It was not until that date that I received a cable to say that the leading brigade was delayed. Actually it did not embark in East Africa till after Rangoon had fallen.

13. On 23rd December and 25th December the Japanese made two large scale air raids on Rangoon. They caused practically no military damage but civilian casualties in the first raid were high, and the flight of the population from Rangoon began. From now to the final evacuation of the city, the working of the essential services, the provision of labour to unload ships and the cessation of all business became a major problem for the Government and a serious military embarrassment. The presence on all routes leading towards India of many thousands of refugees, which soon grew to hundreds of thousands, was another problem that occupied both civil and military to the end of the campaign.

TRANSFER OF BURMA TO A.B.D.A. COMMAND.

14. On 30th December, 1941, I received a telegram appointing me to the newly constituted South-West Pacific Command (afterwards known as A.B.D.A.). Burma was included in this Command. I at once recommended that the defence of Burma

should remain the responsibility of Commander-in-Chief, India, for the same reasons for which I had previously urged its transfer to India from the Far East Command (see paragraph 3). I was, however, overruled on the grounds that Marshal Chiang-Kai-Shek must feel himself connected with the new South West Pacific Command. I think that this decision was a serious error from the military point of view. From my headquarters in Java, 2,000 miles distant from Rangoon, and concerned as I was with an immense area and many international problems, it was impossible for me to give as close attention to the defence of Burma as was desirable; nor had I any reinforcements at my disposal to aid Burma. They must come almost entirely from India. Moreover, administration of the forces in Burma had necessarily to be conducted from India; and it is always wrong to separate operational and administrative responsibility.

General Sir Alan Hartley who succeeded me as Commander-in-Chief, India, did everything possible to meet Burma's requirements. What was lacking was the close personal touch of the responsible commander. During the five weeks that Burma remained under A.B.D.A. Command, I was only able to pay two hurried visits; and owing to faulty signal communications, messages and reports from Burma sometimes took several days to reach me in Java. It was during these five weeks that the fate of Burma was decided.

15. I took over control of South West Pacific Command on 15th January, and established A.B.D.A. Command Headquarters in Java, near Bandoeng, a few days late. During the first half of January there had been little sign of enemy activity against Burma. The maximum scale of Japanese attack was still estimated as one division against Moulmein and one division against Kentung with possibly brigade groups against Toungoo and Mongpan. I admit that I did not at this time consider the threat to Burma serious; I over-estimated the natural difficulties of the wooded hills on the Burmese frontier. Nor did I realise the unreliable quality of the Burma units nor the lack of training of the British and Indian troops.

I was certainly guilty of an error of judgment in minimising the danger to Burma, but it is doubtful whether, even if I had appreciated it thoroughly, I could have done much more to help Burma. India had been sucked dry of trained troops by the requirements of Middle East, Iraq and Iran; and those most nearly approaching completion of their training had been sent to reinforce Singapore. Such as could be extracted from frontier garrisons and internal security duties were being sent to Burma as rapidly as possible. The same applies to administrative units. India was deficient of equipment for her own needs and could not meet those of Burma as well. Finally, and most important of all, India had no modern air force with which to support the Burma Army.

JAPANESE ATTACK ON BURMA

16. The Japanese advance on Burma began with engagements in the neighbourhood of Tavoy which was occupied by the enemy on 19th January. Meanwhile the garrison at Mergui further south was withdrawn without being attacked. On 20th January, fighting began in Northern Tenasserim with an attack

on the 16 Indian Brigade near Kawkaeik. These engagements are described in General Hutton's report. It is quite clear that the enemy were allowed to gain cheap initial successes through bad handling by local Commanders, lack of training and in some instances lack of fighting spirit on the part of our troops. It was an unfortunate beginning to the campaign and had serious results in raising the morale of the enemy and depressing that of our own troops. It became clear that the battalions of Burma Rifles, which formed so large a proportion of the army in Burma, were undependable.

From my point of view I received in Java telegrams indicating that the threat to Rangoon was considered to be imminent and that without additional and earlier reinforcement the G.O.C. did not think that Rangoon could be held. I knew that General Hutton was prepared for the loss of Mergui and Tavoy, but I had not received any information indicating the probable appearance of a Japanese force large enough to imperil Rangoon.

I flew from Java to Burma during the night 24th-25th January, spent the 25th at Rangoon and returned during the night 25th-26th January. I found the situation better than I had expected and, after discussing the situation with the G.O.C. I reported to the Chiefs of Staff that I did not consider the situation immediately serious, provided that the reinforcement of Burma with land and air forces proceeded without delay, and that some naval force was provided to prevent a landing near Rangoon from the Tenasserim coast. I had already on 19th January authorised General Hutton to accept any Chinese troops available. It may be remarked that those I had originally accepted on 22nd December, the 93 and 49 Divisions, had not by this date yet reached Burma.

17. On the night of 4th-5th February, I again flew to Rangoon and spent two days there. My purpose was partly to meet the Generalissimo who, I had been informed, was passing through Rangoon on his way to India. He went, however, straight from Lashio to Calcutta, and I did not see him. General Hutton had a very cordial and satisfactory interview with him.

I visited the troops, who were then holding a front west of the Salween River opposite Moulmein, and all commanders expressed themselves to me as confident of their ability to deal with the Japanese advance. I was impressed with the suitability of the dry paddy fields for armoured troops and decided to divert to Burma the 7 Armoured Brigade which was on its way from the Middle East to Malaya. By this time the troops in Malaya had been driven into Singapore Island and the Armoured Brigade was obviously of no use there, while Java also offered little scope for armoured troops, I therefore ordered the Brigade to be diverted to Rangoon. It played a very prominent part in all the fighting in Burma after its arrival in Rangoon on 21st February. The air situation over Rangoon was satisfactory, Hurricanes had begun to arrive and these, with the A.V.G. P.40s, had established and were maintaining air superiority over the enemy.

18. The battle at the Sittang River bridge-head on 22nd and 23rd February, which is

described in General Hutton's report, really sealed the fate of Rangoon and Lower Burma. In the withdrawal from the Bilu River to the Sittang and the action east of that River almost the whole of two brigades were lost.

BURMA RETURNED TO INDIA COMMAND.

19. By the time the Sittang River battle took place, two changes of importance in the control of the operations in Burma had been decided. I had ceased temporarily to be responsible for Burma, and the War Cabinet, in view of the proposed expansion of the forces in Burma, decided to place Lieut.-General Alexander in command of the troops in Burma. Lieut.-General Hutton remained as Chief of the General Staff to General Alexander.

The Chiefs of Staff had telegraphed me on 18th February asking my views on the desirability, in view of the loss of Singapore and Sumatra, of Burma reverting to the control of Commander-in-Chief, India. I replied that I had never varied in my recommendation that Burma should be under Commander-in-Chief, India, for defence. On 21st February I received orders that Burma was to come again under the command of Commander-in-Chief, India.

20. Soon after the middle of February I realised that it was most unlikely that Java could be held against the impending Japanese attack and that in view of the enemy command of the air it would be impossible to land the Australian Corps, which was on its way from the Middle East, in Java. I considered it absolutely essential that Rangoon and Burma should be held and recommended that the Australian Corps, or at least the leading Division of it, should be sent to Burma. My recommendation was supported by the Prime Minister but was not accepted by the Australian Government.* When this convoy changed course for Australia, the last hope of holding Rangoon practically vanished.

21. On 23rd February I was ordered to close down A.B.D.A. Command Headquarters and to reassume my appointment as Commander-in-Chief, India. I thus again became responsible for the defence of Burma within a few days of having handed it over. I left Java on the night of 25th-26th February. Realising that the situation in Lower Burma must be critical I wished to fly direct from Java to Rangoon. In view of the prevailing weather conditions, however, it was doubtful whether even a Liberator could make the distance direct, and the aerodromes in Southern Sumatra were in enemy hands. I had therefore to fly to Ceylon. I arrived at Colombo on the morning of 26th February, intending to take a flying boat on to Rangoon. I found, however, a cable from General Hartley advising that I should first go to Delhi. I arrived in Delhi on the evening of 27th February and was informed that there was a proposal in Burma, if no instructions were received to the contrary, to evacuate Rangoon. Since from the information available this proposal appeared to me premature, I cabled that action should be suspended till I could reach

* War Office footnote—The Commonwealth Government at that time considered that diversion of their Force would have exposed Australia to great risk at a time when the Japanese were advancing Southwards rapidly and when the invasion of Java was imminent

Burma, I also ordered that the convoys containing reinforcements which had been turned back from Rangoon should again be diverted towards that port.

I arrived at Magwe in Upper Burma on the morning of 1st March and held a conference with the Governor, General Hutton and Air-Vice Marshal Stevenson. There seemed to me no reason why Rangoon should not continue to be held at least long enough to enable the reinforcements on the way, 63 Indian Infantry Brigade and a field regiment, to be landed. There was no evidence of any great enemy strength west of the Sittang, the 7 Armoured Brigade was still intact, and Chinese troops were moving down towards Toungoo. I therefore gave instructions that any orders that might have been issued with a view to the evacuation of Rangoon should be cancelled and directed that all ships with troops or stores for Burma should proceed.

I flew during the afternoon with General Hutton to Rangoon. On arrival there we found a telegram from the G.O.C. 17 Division recommending the immediate evacuation of Pegu. I motored with General Hutton to Divisional Headquarters at Hlegu and found that the report on which the Divisional Commander's recommendation was based had proved a false one. The Divisional Commander was obviously a sick man, and I replaced him by Brigadier Cowan, who commanded the 17 Division with success for the remainder of the campaign.

On 2nd March I visited the troops of the 17 Division and 7 Armoured Brigade on the Pegu front and then flew to Lashio, since I had heard that Marshal Chiang-Kai-Shek would be there. I had two satisfactory interviews with him that evening and next day returned to India. At Calcutta I met General Alexander, who was on his way to take over command of the Burma Army, and instructed him to hold on to Rangoon for as long as possible.

While my intervention on this occasion postponed the evacuation of Rangoon for a week and enabled reinforcements of an Infantry Brigade and a field regiment to be landed, it eventually placed General Alexander in a difficult position and led to his forces being nearly cut off, as described in his report. On balance I am satisfied that we gained by the delay.

OPERATIONS AFTER FALL OF RANGOON.

22. Once Rangoon had fallen, there was comparatively little that G.H.Q. in India could do to influence the operations in Burma. Until the road from Assam was completed, reinforcements of personnel and stores could only be sent in by air, and the number of transport aircraft was extremely limited.

The chief requirement of the forces in Burma at this time, British and Chinese, was air support, which India was unable to provide in the necessary strength. At first it was hoped to maintain the ascendancy which our air forces in Burma had so far held over the Japanese in spite of great numerical inferiority. The loss of the port of Rangoon, however, stopped the flow of R.A.F. personnel and equipment planned by the Air Ministry, and the loss of the airfield organisation in Southern Burma greatly affected air operations. Once Rangoon had gone, the maximum force that could be

maintained in Upper Burma from the resources available was one Bomber Squadron, one Fighter Squadron and one Army Co-operation Flight, in addition to one A.V.G. Fighter Squadron. It was decided to form also a mixed Wing of one Fighter, one Bomber and one G.R. Squadron at Akyab. Shortage of aircraft, however, prevented this Wing being fully formed and with the exception of a few obsolescent fighters, all the serviceable operational aircraft—fighters and bombers—were absorbed by the formation of the Wing in Upper Burma. This Wing was based at Magwe, the only airfield left in Burma with any degree of warning. On the 21st and 22nd March, over a period of some 24 hours, it was attacked by the enemy in force. The available Hurricanes and Blenheims had been engaged in the early morning of the 21st against an enemy concentration of aircraft at Mingaladon on which they had inflicted severe losses. When the enemy retaliated only 12 of our fighters were serviceable and able to take off to engage the first raid. Although four of the enemy were shot down and two were damaged, the weight of attack got home. In his attacks the enemy made Magwe temporarily untenable for first-line aircraft and destroyed or rendered unserviceable 17 bombers and fighters on the ground. The cause of this reverse was our weakness in fighters, the failure of the warning system and an almost complete absence of aircraft pens and dispersal arrangements. The loss of these aircraft, which constituted practically the only air force available at the time, and the withdrawal of the R.A.F. to Lashio on the northern frontier of Burma and Loiwing in China, several hundred miles further north, made the support of the Burma Army an extremely difficult problem. Aircraft were only reaching India in small numbers, and it was essential to organise the defence of Calcutta and of Ceylon. I had reluctantly to decide that I must use the air forces reaching India to build up a defence in that country, and that I could not afford the heavy losses that Japanese numerical superiority, the lack of training of our air squadrons, the absence of a warning system and the difficult flying conditions in Upper Burma were bound to cause in an attempt to give air support to the forces in Burma. The Japanese air arm had therefore almost a free hand in the later stages of the Burma campaign, and it was fortunate for us that they failed to take full advantage of their opportunity.

23. I had little confidence in being able to prevent the Japanese from reaching the Burma oilfields at Yenangyaung or from occupying Mandalay if they made a determined attack on these objectives. We could not relieve or reinforce our troops of whom the majority had been fighting continuously for some months in difficult conditions, while the enemy had practically unlimited powers of reinforcing his land and air effort. During March and April he increased his forces in Burma by three divisions and gradually drove back the Chinese and ourselves.

I hoped that we might still manage to retain a hold on Upper Burma north of Mandalay and a common front with the Chinese. I discussed with General Alexander during a visit which I

paid to Burma at the end of March his dispositions in the event of a withdrawal north of Mandalay being necessary, and we decided that a part of the Imperial Forces might withdraw with the Chinese on Lashio and possibly even into China.

In the end the sudden break through of the enemy into the Shan States and quick capture of Lashio, together with the enemy threat up the Chindwin against the road into Assam, led to the whole of the Imperial Forces withdrawing by Kalewa and Tamu into India. This was agreed with the Chinese who decided to withdraw the Fifth Army up the Irrawaddy valley on Bhamo and Myitkyina.

24. The defence of the Andaman Islands was included in the defence of Burma during most of this period. Its military importance lay in its seaplane base, in the possibility of establishing an aerodrome there, and in its potential value to the enemy as a submarine base. The original garrison was one British company. For security against a Japanese raid a battalion of Gurkhas was added early in January. When it became obvious that Rangoon could not be held, it was decided to withdraw the whole garrison, which was successfully carried out on 12th March. On 23rd March the Japanese occupied Port Blair.

Akyab was held till early in May when Japanese infiltration by land and sea and attack by air made it obvious that it would require an effort disproportionate to its military value to hold it any longer, since it could no longer be used as an air base. The garrison and naval patrol were therefore withdrawn.

SUMMARY OF BURMA CAMPAIGN.

25. The loss of Burma has been from a strategical point of view our most serious reverse of the Japanese war. It has deprived our Chinese allies of a flow of munitions to continue their long resistance; it has made the establishment of air bases within effective range of Japan a matter of extreme difficulty; it has exposed India to a serious threat of invasion; and it has had a disastrous effect on British prestige in the East. The reasons for this reverse merit some examination.

26. The unpreparedness of Burma for war and its causes have already been mentioned; and I have recorded my conviction that to place the control of operations in Burma under a Far Eastern Command instead of under India was an error from the military point of view which it would require strong political reasons to justify.

27. From a geographical point of view the defence of Burma against an attack from Thailand was an awkward commitment. The fact that there was practically speaking only one means of entry into the country, by the port of Rangoon, was a source of weakness; and this port lay within a comparatively short range of enemy airfields in Thailand. The long narrow strip of Tenasserim, over 400 miles long and nowhere much more than 40 miles broad, was not easily defensible, while in the enemy's possession it was a threat both by air (there were several excellent aerodromes) and by sea.

If Moulmein in Upper Tenasserim fell, and here again the ground gave little scope for defence in depth, Rangoon was very closely threatened; while a force defending Rangoon against an enemy advancing from the line of the Salween River had the disadvantage of

fighting on a front parallel to its communications and with its base close behind, almost outside, its right flank.

If ever there was a country where attack was the best form of defence it was Burma. Unfortunately the means were not available.

28. Such plans and preparations as had been made for the defence of Burma suffered from three misconceptions:

(a) that the main attack would be directed against Kengtung in the Southern Shan States, the only place to which there were good communications in Thailand—a motor road from a railhead at Lampang. Actually the Japanese made no attempt to use this obvious route.

(b) that our air force would be able to prevent the enemy using the limited approaches to the frontier. The whole experience of this war is that air forces cannot prevent the use of a road or railway; and anyway there were no bombers in Burma.

(c) that the natural difficulties of the country on the frontier, few and indifferent tracks, hills and thick jungle and the formidable natural obstacle of the Salween River, would restrict the numbers the enemy could employ and dictate the direction in which he used them. Actually, we found ourselves up against a new feature in warfare—an enemy fully armed, disciplined, and trained on the continental model using the mobility, independence of communications and unorthodox tactics of the savage in thick jungle. It was perhaps little wonder that our troops were out-maneuvred and became bewildered.

29. British military authorities have seldom realised that an Intelligence system cannot be improvised and requires to be built up over a period of years. The study of Intelligence in peace is not encouraged and officers who specialise in it are apt to be regarded with suspicion. The operations in Burma are a striking example of the penalty we pay in war for this neglect.

30. There was never sufficient naval force to give any effective naval support during the Burma Campaign; and its absence made the G.O.C. always anxious about a landing near Rangoon. Actually the Japanese made no attempt at sea-borne invasion nor were any ships from convoys to Rangoon ever lost from enemy action.

Commodore Graham, R.N., with small forces did some good work in the protection of Akyab and the coast to the south in the later stages of the campaign.

The situation as regards air support has been sufficiently indicated in the narratives of General Hutton and General Alexander. I constantly endeavoured to obtain air reinforcements for Burma but they were not available.

The operations are a striking example of the importance of an adequate warning system, which conditions in Burma made it extremely difficult to organise.

The Japanese air force did not show itself particularly efficient or formidable in Burma, either in bombing or fighting. Our small air forces, skilfully and boldly handled, were more than a match for the enemy as long as good airfields and warnings were available.

Casualties and material damage from air attack were small but the moral effects were

considerable. This should not be so with well-trained and disciplined troops.

I should like to express my grateful thanks to Colonel (now Brigadier General) G. Chennault and to all the officers and men of the A.V.G. who did such skilful and gallant work in the defence of Rangoon.

I should also like to record the good services of Air Vice-Marshal Stevenson, who commanded the air forces in Burma from January, 1942, onwards, and of his predecessor Group-Captain Manning.

32. The troops who fought in the Burma campaign were subjected to a very severe strain. They were opposed by a well-trained, vigorous and determined enemy, usually superior in numbers; they had to fight in a type of country and under conditions quite unfamiliar to the majority; they had no relief and very little rest during more than five months, in the later stages they were almost entirely deprived of air support. After the fall of Rangoon they felt themselves cut off from outside help and from all amenities. Every effort was made to send mails and a supply of stores to Burma, but the limitations of air transport made it impossible to meet the full needs. Rations, however, thanks to the efforts of the administrative staff, were not short.

The importance of the Fifth Column in Burma has been exaggerated; the number of actual rebels who took arms against us or assisted the enemy was probably small. But the moral effect on the soldier of the knowledge that a proportion of the population was potentially hostile and treacherous was considerable. The defection of large numbers of the men of the units of the Burma Army also had a depressing effect.

In the circumstances the troops put up a remarkable performance and showed a fine fighting spirit.

Particular mention should be made of the 7 Armoured Brigade under Brigadier J. H. Anstice (7 Hussars, 2 Royal Tank Regiment, 414 Battery (Essex Yeomanry) R.H.A., A Battery 95 Anti-Tank Regiment), who, from their arrival in Burma in the third week of February till the end of the campaign, formed the mainstay of the Burma Army and kept up a very high standard of morale and efficiency. Owing to the fact that no tanks had been available in India, the infantry in Burma had had no practice in co-operation with armoured forces, which was in consequence elementary.

The 1 Indian Field Artillery Regiment, which went straight into action on landing at Rangoon and was continually engaged to the end of the campaign, greatly distinguished itself.

33. Lieut.-General Hutton did most valuable work in placing Burma on a war footing so far as could be done in the very limited time available. To reorganise the whole military system and to endeavour to create an administrative lay-out practically from nothing, while at the same time controlling difficult operations in the field, threw a very heavy strain on him. As C.G.S. to General Alexander he continued to give most valuable service till the arrival of Major-General Winterton.

I should like also here to pay a tribute to the work previously done by him as C.G.S. in

India during the expansion of the Indian Army, which owes much to his organizing ability.

34. General Alexander took over an extremely difficult situation and a somewhat shaken and disorganised army. By his cool and inspiring leadership he did everything possible during the remainder of the campaign to check the Japanese advance and to keep the army together. He also succeeded in establishing and maintaining good relations with the Chinese, though, as he says, a real combined command, owing to the difference in outlook and methods, was not possible.

35. Generally speaking, the standard of leadership of the Army in Burma was high. Lieut.-General Slim, Commanding the Burma Corps, Major-General Cowan, Commanding the 17 Indian Division, Major-General Bruce-Scott, Commanding the 1 Burma Division, were all good and resolute commanders; and it was largely due to their efforts that the enemy's superior numbers were kept at bay for so long and the final withdrawal so skilfully conducted. The majority of the brigade and battalion commanders also showed themselves competent and determined leaders.

36. Of the staff officers Major-General Goddard in charge of administration under both General Hutton and General Alexander, did outstanding work and was quite untiring. On the General Staff side Brigadier Davies, first with General Hutton and later under General Slim in the Burma Corps, did work of a high order.

The work of Major-General Wakely in charge of the lines of communication also deserves special mention.

37. The bearing and endurance of the Chinese troops who fought in Burma created a favourable impression. General J. Stilwell of the United States Army, who was placed by the Generalissimo in command of the Chinese troops in Burma, and General Lo Cho-Ying, who commanded the Fifth and Sixth Armies, were always ready to co-operate, although Chinese methods usually resulted in considerable delay in the execution of orders to put into effect the plans that had been concerted.

I should like to record the great impression that the Generalissimo, Marshal Chiang Kai-Shek, made on all commanders who met him; and to express my gratitude for the whole-hearted assistance he gave in the attempt to hold Burma.

38. The Civil Administration in Burma was faced suddenly by a series of most difficult problems due to the rapid Japanese advance, the bombing of Rangoon and the flight of a large part of the population. As might have been expected, parts of the administration stood the test well and parts collapsed. The Governor, H. E. Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, was always whole-hearted in his co-operation with the military, and his Counsellor, The Honourable Mr. John Wise, was also extremely helpful. But some of the executive branches, such as the Police, tended to break down under the strain.

Denial of essential materials to the enemy was on the whole effectively carried out. The oil refinery at Syriam, just outside Rangoon, and the oilfields at Yenangyaung were very thoroughly destroyed.

39. As will have been seen, much depended in the later stages on how quickly the process of driving a road from India to Burma could be accomplished. The project of a road between Assam and Upper Burma had been the subject of discussion for some years previous to the war, but no action had been taken. As a military necessity, it began to take shape in the late autumn of 1941; the actual orders to begin work at all speed were issued in the middle of December. India was to widen the metalled road already existing from Dimapur to Imphal in Manipur State (135 miles) and to make a road from Imphal to Tamu (65 miles) where only a bridle track existed. Burma Government was to make an all weather road from Tamu to Kalewa and thence to Ye-U (approximately 190 miles) between which places only a fair-weather cart track existed.

Up to February work inside India proceeded somewhat slowly, but thenceforward was pushed on with all possible speed. A motor road, not metalled, reached Tamu just in time for the withdrawal of the Burma Army. Maintenance by this road during the wet season would, however, have been impossible. Great credit is due to Major-General Wood who was specially placed in charge of the project in March, 1942, for the energy with which he furthered the completion of the road, and to Brigadier Gilpin, R.E., and the engineers under him for a fine piece of work in difficult conditions.

Owing to various difficulties, little work was ever done by the Burma Government on the Tamu-Ye-U sector and eventually India had to undertake to complete it. The withdrawal took place before work on an all-weather road could be begun; but some very good work was done in a very short time to facilitate the withdrawal by improvement of the existing cart track.

Report by Lieut.-General T. J. Hutton, C.B., M.C., on Operations in Burma from 27th December, 1941, to 5th March, 1942.

I SITUATION ON ASSUMING COMMAND.

1. *Staff and Services.* I arrived in Rangoon on 27th December and assumed command forthwith. I should like here to pay a tribute to the endeavours made by my predecessor, Lieut.-General D. K. MacLeod, in spite of an inadequate staff and inadequate resources, to prepare the country for war.

Briefly, the position was as follows. The H.Q. staff was totally inadequate and a few overworked staff officers were struggling to compete with problems quite beyond their powers. This was especially the case with the General and Administrative staffs on whose shoulders rested the responsibility for the direction of policy. There was no intelligence staff worthy of the name. For a time there was a serious shortage of cipher personnel and clerks. This was eventually remedied by the employment of a number of women who were organised early in January in an enrolled unit of the Women's Auxiliary Service, Burma.

Such nucleus of services, base or L. of C. organisations as existed consisted of units raised in Burma, partially trained and very weak in Governor's Commissioned Officers (G.C.Os.) and N.C.Os. and with few trained

reserves. While these units did useful work for a time they eventually became unreliable and there were a considerable number of desertions.

2. *Intelligence.* No arrangements had been made to provide for external intelligence before the war and as a result we were usually in complete ignorance of what was happening just over the Thailand border. The same applied as regards internal intelligence. The possibility that the country might be invaded and that it might be desirable to "leave behind" a suitable organisation to give us information had not apparently been considered. Efforts were of course made at once to remedy the defect but it is not a thing that can be done in a hurry.

3. *Responsibilities of Army Headquarters (A.H.Q.).* A H.Q. Army in Burma was at the same time a War Office, a G.H.Q., a Corps H.Q. and a L. of C. H.Q. (owing to the absence of any L. of C. staff). A.H.Q. had, as such, responsibilities which covered exactly the same field as G.H.Q. in India.

This organisation, or lack of it, clogged the whole machine. It also imposed an intolerable burden on the G.O.C. It was impossible for me with my vast responsibilities to keep detailed control of operations on 17 Indian Division's front and it was necessary to allow wide discretion to the Divisional Commander. Unfortunately on practically every occasion when a serious situation arose, I happened to be away visiting some other part of my command. A Corps H.Q. was essential from the first, it was eventually formed after the loss of Rangoon.

4. *The Burma Rifles.* The fighting troops consisted mainly of Burma Rifles. This force was in the process of expansion, a process which greatly accentuated its former weaknesses. Consisting of four different races, Chins, Kachins, Karens and Burmese, speaking different languages which few of the officers understood, it was of very limited value in serious warfare. The G.C.Os. and N.C.Os. were all very junior and inexperienced, some of the former having only two years' service. The language commonly used in the Army was Hindustani which was a foreign language to all the personnel, including of course the officers; of the latter it was hardly likely that the best regular officers would be attracted by service in the Corps—though many of them did good work. The Emergency Commissioned Officers (E.C.Os.) who formed the majority were of exceptionally good quality and consisted mostly of members of big firms who had had extensive experience of conditions in the jungle. Their knowledge of local languages was in most cases good and many also had a smattering of Hindustani.

It was soon discovered that while these units were of considerable value for reconnaissance and patrol work in the jungle, they were not as a whole fit to stand the test of serious operations against an enemy like the Japanese. Eventually a large proportion of the Burmese and some of the Karens deserted, and the active battalions had to be reconstituted without them.

The Sappers and Miners, Army Service Corps, Hospital Corps, etc., were all of similar personnel, mostly Burmese, and the results were similar.

This question has been dealt with in some detail because it vitally affected the campaign. Instead of Indian battalions stiffening, as was hoped; the Burma Rifles, the effect was exactly the opposite. However, as more than half the forces available consisted of Burma Rifles there was no alternative to making use of them even after their lack of training began to be disclosed.

The possible failure of the attenuated services behind the Army, especially M.T., was a source of constant anxiety. As regards equipment and transport the situation was equally serious and no units had their full scale and some, such as signal units and A.A. batteries, had practically none. The force, such as it was, was quite unprepared for war. Reserves were of course practically nil.

5. *Levies.* As regards levies or guerrillas, efforts had already been made to start an organisation in the Shan States. This was now extended to the Karen country of North Tenasserim. Although started very late in the day it was undoubtedly of value in providing a foundation for larger scale operations in the future, a deterrent to Japanese infiltration of the hills in that area and a valuable threat to the so-called free Burmese of the plains below.

6. *Burma Frontier Force.* There was also the Burma Frontier Force of the equivalent of six battalions which had only just been taken over by the Army from the Civil Administration, but the Inspector-General remained responsible for the administration of the force. It consisted for the most part of good Indian personnel but was numerically weak in officers and neither its organisation nor its training really fitted it to take part in active operations against a first-class enemy.

7. *British and Indian Troops.* The remainder of the troops available consisted of two British battalions, two Indian infantry brigades and one Mountain Regiment.

8. *Enemy Forces.* Very little was known about the enemy owing both to the lack of intelligence and of aircraft for reconnaissance. The thick jungle country rendered air or even ground reconnaissance very unproductive. It was known, however, that there were three or four Japanese divisions available in Thailand of which at least two could probably be made available for operations against Burma. In view of the weak state of our forces and the approach of the monsoon there appeared to be every reason why the Japanese should invade Burma as early as possible.

9. *Appreciation.* A full appreciation of the defence problem of Burma was completed by me on 10th January. It formed the basis of policy throughout the period of my command. I should like here to refer to the valuable help and assistance given me throughout my tenure of command by my B.G.S., Brig. H. L. Davies, whose judgment and military knowledge proved invaluable in dealing with a most difficult situation.

10. *Bombing of Rangoon.* On the 23rd December and again on the 25th December just before I arrived, Rangoon was bombed by a large force of enemy aircraft. These attacks were directed against the dock area and in the neighbourhood of the power station. Extensive damage was caused by fires among the crowded wooden houses and huts in the bombed area

and civilian casualties due mainly to anti-personnel bombs were very heavy indeed, amounting to approximately 1,700-2,000 people killed. Very little damage of a military nature occurred and the only damage to the docks was the destruction of one transit shed.

11. *Effects of Bombing.* The bombing had, however, a very serious repercussion as servants, menials, all subordinate employees, and coolies including the dock labourers, at once commenced to leave the town. As there were many ships loaded with military stores for the Army and with Lease and Lend stores for China waiting discharge, the results were serious.

Practically all Government offices, shops, markets, hospitals etc., lost almost the whole of their subordinate staffs as also did the Ordnance, Military Works, Transportation services, etc. For a time there was in some cases great difficulty in obtaining and preparing food as almost all servants, cooks, etc., had also departed.

Rangoon town was not raided again; thereafter the enemy directed all his efforts against the aerodrome at Mingaladon and that neighbourhood. As a result of this policy labour gradually regained confidence and a useful proportion returned to work.

Taken as a whole, however, the situation was never restored. Military units for essential work became available only on a very limited scale and the working of all transportation, works, labour, etc., for services was most precarious throughout the period prior to the fall of Rangoon.

12. The organisation of the A.R.P. services in Burma was carried out by Mr. de Graff Hunter who did most excellent work in spite of great difficulties in securing suitable personnel. This organisation, like others based on locally recruited personnel, soon showed a tendency to disintegrate in face of attack.

13. *Fighter Successes.* During the first two air raids over Rangoon the R.A.F. and A.V.G. fighters were most successful and not less than 61 enemy first-line bombers and fighters were claimed as destroyed on these two days. A further large number were shot down during subsequent raids.

It is significant to note that on no occasion were the oil installations in the Rangoon area attacked and later we were able to remove with confidence for use elsewhere a proportion of the A.A. artillery detailed for the defence of Syriam.

14. *Observer Corps.* I should here like to draw attention to the fact that until the Central Telephone Exchange in Rangoon closed down on the 28th February no enemy air raid reached the Rangoon area without warning passed by the Observer Corps posts. Until Tenasserim was lost the average period of warning was forty minutes but this of course gradually decreased as the enemy closed in on Rangoon.

In all cases the Observer Posts were manned by local inhabitants who passed the warning by pre-arranged codes over the Posts and Telegraphs or Railway systems, the average time taken to pass a warning message being about two minutes. The success of the system depended on the wholehearted support of the Posts and Telegraphs officials and in particular thanks are due to Mr. Nesbitt-Hawes the D.G., P. and T., who devised the communication system and who until the last was always

ready to give his personal attention to any demand made on his Department, also to Major Taylor who was the officer in charge of the whole of the warning system in Burma.

15. *A. A. Artillery.* When I arrived in Burma some A.A. equipment for the locally raised Burma Auxiliary Force (B.A.F.) units had just come from India. Later on, both British and Indian light and heavy batteries arrived and it was possible to organise a thin scale of defence for vital points. All units acquitted themselves well and a very considerable number of enemy aircraft were shot down—including one by the third shot fired by the 1 Heavy A.A. Regiment B.A.F.

II. REINFORCEMENT POLICY.

16. *Reinforcements.* The first reinforcement to reach Burma was the 46 Indian Infantry Brigade which arrived towards the end of January in time to take part in the fighting west of the River Salween. It consisted of young troops and had been destined for Iraq where it was intended it should complete its training. It was not really fit for active operations without further training and had no experience in jungle warfare.

The only other reinforcements in sight from India consisted of six Indian battalions which it was intended to withdraw from the frontier and equip on the lower scale for service overseas. These eventually constituted the 48 Indian Infantry Brigade, consisting entirely of Gurkhas which arrived about 1st February, and did very good work on the Bilin River, and the 63 Indian Infantry Brigade, which arrived just before the fall of Rangoon. Two East African Brigades which had done excellent service in the Italian campaign, were accepted by India for service in Burma, one to arrive at the end of January and one a month later. Neither of these materialised, though it was only late in February that Burma was informed that they had been diverted elsewhere. There is no doubt that they would have been invaluable at a critical period.

17. *British Battalions.* A further reinforcement sent in response to my urgent demands for British troops, both for internal security, as reinforcements to 17 Indian Division, and for reasons of morale, consisted of three British battalions taken from the garrison of India. One, the 2 D.W.R. (Duke of Wellington's Regiment), arrived in time to take part in the battle of the Sittang, and the others, 1 Cameronians and 1 W. Yorks (West Yorkshire Regiment) did very good work during the fighting near Pegu. These battalions had been given only a few days notice of mobilization and embarkation and some were incomplete in transport, but none the less showed magnificent spirit throughout the operations—a tribute to the value of trained and experienced British troops even though not specially trained for jungle warfare conditions.

18. *Armoured Troops.* A further reinforcement, which proved invaluable, was the 7 Armoured Brigade whose fighting spirit and efficiency were the admiration of the whole Army. Unfortunately it only arrived after the battle of Sittang when it was instrumental in enabling the 17 Indian Division to re-organise round Pegu.

19. *Summary.* It will be seen, therefore, that the reinforcements provided for Burma after the outbreak of war consisted of an Armoured Brigade, three British battalions and three Indian brigades. Of these only two infantry brigades arrived before the battle of the Sittang, which, as will be seen later, practically settled the fate of Rangoon.

The three Indian Brigades, though good material, all suffered from the weakness of having a large proportion of inexperienced officers and recruits in their ranks, and also from having had no training in jungle warfare. The 48 Indian Infantry Brigade did especially well, and also some of the Battalions of the 46 Indian Brigade. As regards the 63 Indian Infantry Brigade, I was informed by General Hartley that it required a period of training before being employed in operations.

III. CO-OPERATION WITH THE CHINESE.

20. *Situation on Arrival.* On my arrival in Burma one regiment of 93 Division "Force Trellis," was already moving towards the Southern Shan States with the object of taking over the defence of the Mekong River, west of the road Kengtung-Mongpayak, with H.Q. at Mongyawng.

The rest of the Division was located about Puerh in China and we were responsible for supplying it with rice.

The remainder of the Sixth Army, which included the 49 and 55 Divisions was stationed near Paoshan on the China road. The Fifth Army was on the Yunnan-Kweichow border. Shortly afterwards the 49 Division, "Force Zigzag," moved up to the border of Wanting in reserve.

21. *Command.* It had been laid down by the Generalissimo that all Chinese troops were to be under my command and he was most insistent that all breaches of discipline were to be reported to him personally. He was anxious, however, that they should be given their own area and not be mixed up with our own troops. We were to be responsible for the supply of rice and any other requirements that could be spared including if possible medical stores and mosquito nets.

On about 15th January, 1942, I visited Kengtung and discussed the possible move of the remainder of the 93 Division from China to the Kengtung area. On 19th January when the situation in Tenasserim area became serious, the move of this Division was ordered and 1 Burma Brigade gradually withdrew from their positions south-east of Kengtung.

It was laid down in my directive that no additional Chinese troops were to be brought into Burma without reference to H.Q. South-West Pacific Command (A.B.D.A. Command). On 21st January, 1942, however, I obtained General Wavell's permission to bring in another Chinese Division, the 49; the Governor was consulted and agreed.

On 29th January it was decided that the 49 Division should come into the Southern Shan States via Lashio, and take over the area east of the River Salween about Takaw, and that 55 Division should move forward to Wanting (Chinese frontier) to complete training and equipment.

22. *The Fifth Army.* On 31st January I sent a personal cable to General Wavell saying that the Chinese appeared anxious to send us the Fifth Army and requested permission to make arrangements with General Hou for moving them to Lashio where they would be readily available either for the defence of Burma or for offensive operations against Thailand. I pointed out that such an arrangement would enable us to concentrate all our own forces for the defence of Rangoon, and to refute any accusations by the Chinese that we were unwilling to accept the assistance offered.

23. *Stores and Equipment.* Up till now, war stores for 93 Division had been brought in by the Puerh route. It was now suggested that everything should in future be brought via Lashio and an ordnance dump be established at that place.

About this time there was considerable difficulty over "Lease and Lend" stores. A crisis was precipitated by a number of Chinese lorries etc. being requisitioned by the Army and R.A.F. in Rangoon, with the agreement of the U.S.A. representatives who discussed the matter with General Wavell. This was unfortunate but quite accidental, those concerned being unaware of the political importance of this material. The Chinese eventually agreed to a number of stores vital to the defence of Burma being released to Burma Army.

24. *Meeting with the Generalissimo.* On 2nd February I started for Chungking by air to meet the Generalissimo, but unfortunately my aircraft crashed at night on the way to Lashio. On arrival I heard that General Wavell was expected at Rangoon to meet the Generalissimo, but owing to the lack of any definite news of his date of arrival the latter, who had arrived at Lashio, decided to proceed direct to India and to settle with me the policy to be pursued in respect of co-operation. Our discussion was in every respect most satisfactory and he agreed to all my proposals and in particular to take over the front about Toungoo with the Fifth Army which was in readiness to enter Burma for that purpose.

The Chinese Minister for War issued orders for the move of the rest of the Sixth Army (less 93 Division already there) on 3rd February. In that order it was stated that "H.Q. Sixth Army after moving into Burma will come under orders of G.O.C. Burma."

On 11th February I visited Taunggyi and met the Chinese representative there. At that meeting it was decided that 55 Division would go to area Bawlake and not remain in reserve at Loilem. Chinese Fifth Army started moving to area Toungoo on about 29th February but only 200 Division arrived in Burma before the loss of Rangoon.

It will be seen from the above summary that every effort was made to get more Chinese reinforcements into Burma. It is unnecessary here to go into the reasons for the delays that occurred. Many of them, due to administrative reasons, were inevitable, others were due to the Chinese system of command and administration which involved getting confirming orders from the Generalissimo before any move of importance could be carried out.

25. *Liaison Arrangements.* I was greatly assisted in these arrangements by General Dennys whose untimely death in an air accident was a serious blow to the cause of co-operation with the Chinese. As the Chinese had no transport and no administrative or medical services, and our own resources were already inadequate, we were forced from the beginning to improvise an organisation for them. A liaison staff was built up on the basis of one officer and one civil representative to be attached to each division and Army; these were added to later as occasion required. Each was supplied with W/T taken from our own meagre resources.

At H.Q. it was proposed to have General Dennys as Chief Liaison Officer, with Brigadier J. C. Martin as Chief Administrative Liaison Officer, and another Brigadier, who did not join till later, as G.S. Liaison Officer. The H.Q. staff consisted mainly therefore of Brigadier Martin, Colonel Hobson and Colonel Holmes who did magnificent work with most inadequate resources and spared no pains to smooth the way for our Chinese Allies. The fact that eventually we were able to move, feed and maintain an army of some 95,000 men including 28 and 38 Divisions, without the help of any regular administrative units at all, either British or Chinese, is a remarkable example of successful improvisation.

26. *Medical.* We were fortunate in being able to secure for the use of the Chinese an American Missionary Ambulance Unit under Dr. Seagrave. It was supplied by us with a certain amount of medical stores and did very good work. We were also able eventually to place a certain number of our own medical units at the disposal of the Chinese. There was in fact no possible alternative.

27. *Armament.* It should be noted here that while the Chinese units were fairly well equipped with L.M.Gs., mortars, etc., they had very little artillery. They had on the average only one weapon for three men so that the fire power of a division was about equal to that of one of our brigades. The balance of men were used as porters, for employments or for digging but were always available to replace casualties. The results of this organisation were not therefore as bad as might be expected.

28. *Air Support.* It was a great disappointment to the Chinese that throughout the operations we were unable to provide them with any effective air support. After their experience in China they placed great reliance on this factor and its absence undoubtedly affected their morale.

29. *Policy as regards Employment of Chinese Troops.* It was my general policy to concentrate as early as possible the whole of the Imperial Forces available in the south of Burma with the object of holding up the Japanese advance in the area where they had the best communications and presented the greatest threat to Rangoon and the communications with China. Sooner or later I hoped to develop an offensive into Thailand based on Moulmein.

At the same time I hoped that the Chinese forces would advance into Northern Thailand and keep occupied a considerable number of the enemy forces. Although communications

were poor according to our standards the fact that an abundance of rice was available in Northern Thailand made this region particularly suitable for an offensive by the Chinese. Unfortunately this offensive, though practicable, never took place. The Generalissimo did not consider the Sixth Army by itself to be strong enough to undertake it, and the course of operations in the south rendered it more important to use the Fifth Army to relieve 1 Burma Division towards Toungoo than to deploy it further north on the chance that an offensive would be undertaken in time to relieve the situation. Actually the last division of Sixth Army had only just begun to reach its forward positions in the Northern Shan States at the time of the fall of Rangoon.

30. *Relations with the Chinese* Finally I should like to pay a tribute to the Generalissimo for his wholehearted support and co-operation throughout the operations and to the senior officers of the Chinese forces under my command whose fighting spirit and appreciation of the problems involved, and the difficulties under which we laboured, evoked my warmest admiration. In particular I should like to mention—

Lt.-General Kan Li Chu, Commander, Sixth Army.

Lt.-General Lu Kuo Ch'uan, 93 Division.

Major-General Fisher T. How, Chief Liaison Officer at my H.Q.

Colonel Gordon W. K. Chu, Assistant Liaison Officer at my H.Q.

It may be desirable to mention in conclusion that we treated the Chinese throughout on a basis of complete equality and did everything possible to overcome the difficulties arising from lack of mutual confidence in the past and from the series of military reverses we suffered in Burma and elsewhere, which naturally lowered our prestige.

IV. AIR SUPPORT.

31. *Preparations.* It is unnecessary here to refer in detail to air operations which will no doubt be described by Air Vice-Marshal D. F. Stevenson, who arrived in Burma to assume command on about 1st January. His predecessor, Gp. Capt. E. R. Manning, R.A.F., had done everything possible to prepare aerodromes and to ensure the successful employment of the large air force it was hoped would be made available in this theatre.

32. *Weakness of Air Forces.* Actually, however, these forces never arrived in sufficient strength materially to affect operations on land, though the outstanding successes of the fighters of the A.V.G. and our own forces achieved a very considerable mastery of the air over Rangoon. The air battle of Rangoon was a brilliant example of the achievement of well trained personnel and aircraft of high performance against vastly superior numbers. This success has perhaps led to the impression that during the operations covered by this report we were in the happy position of having air superiority. This is definitely incorrect and in the battle zone our troops were subject to frequent attack from the air throughout the operations.

Had a sufficient number of bombers been made available a very effective use of these might have been made against the enemy's communications with Malaya. Unfortunately the

weakness of our land forces resulted in the loss of the aerodromes which were so well placed for the purpose of offensive air operations and in the end lost us much of the warning system, already referred to above, to which our successes in the air were very largely due.

33. *Close Support.* As regards the close support of our land forces every effort was made by the A.O.C. to make the best use of the small forces available. Their inferiority in numbers, however, rendered it necessary to employ most of them in operations against the enemy air forces or in "beating up" enemy aircraft on the ground. These latter operations were conducted with very marked success. In addition to keeping in check the enemy's aircraft which endeavoured to attack our troops on the ground, very successful co-operation was given during the period immediately after the loss of Moulmein. Subsequent intelligence reports show that very considerable casualties were inflicted on the enemy. Co-operation with the Army was made especially difficult by the thick jungle and lack of intelligence which rendered it almost impossible to indicate suitable targets even when aircraft were available. Owing to the thick country, air reconnaissance was seldom instrumental in obtaining information of positive value, except of movements on the rivers or coastal waters and on certain roads which were visible from the air.

34. *Withdrawal of R.A.F. from Rangoon* Owing to the loss of the ground warning system after the battle of the River Sittang, it was decided to withdraw a good deal of the R.A.F. to Akyab or Calcutta and the remainder to Magwe. This, while based no doubt on sound operational grounds, was naturally disheartening to the troops and resulted in some unfair criticism of the R.A.F. The aerodrome at Highland Queen close to Rangoon was in fact retained in use until just before the arrival of the enemy forces in its immediate vicinity.

Finally I should like to pay tribute to the unfailing support and encouragement I received throughout from Air Vice-Marshal D. F. Stevenson and to the assistance he gave me in the appreciation of military problems

V. NAVAL CO-OPERATION.

Close co-operation with such naval forces as were available, the control and escort of shipping, and the appreciation of naval problems, was obtained through the medium of Captain J. I. Hallet, R.N., and subsequently of Commodore C. M. Graham, R.N.

35. *The Burma Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve.* The B.R.N.V.R., then in its infancy, consisted of a few armed launches. Its officers were British and Burman and the ratings were almost wholly Burman. It maintained an examination service at the mouth of the Rangoon river, carried out minesweeping and furnished a Mergui Archipelago patrol. During the operations on the Tenasserim Coast every possible assistance was given by these craft both in reconnaissance and in the withdrawal of our forces from Mergui, Tavoy, and Moulmein which is referred to elsewhere. In spite of their inadequate numbers they undoubtedly proved a considerable deterrent to coastal operations of the type employed by the enemy with so much success off the coast of Malaya. Eventually, owing to desertions, and

other causes, the Burma Navy, like the "Burma Army" largely disappeared but not before it had done most valuable work.

36. *Naval Assistance.* Except for one visit by a sloop of the R.I.N. sent by Commander-in-Chief East Indies in response for an urgent request for naval assistance, and the despatch of a most welcome reinforcement of 100 Marines, naval operations proper were almost entirely confined to the escort of convoys. Towards the close of the period, however, another sloop of the R.I.N. was successful in intercepting and capturing off the mouth of the Rangoon River a party of some 35 of the Free Burma Army under the leadership of a Japanese officer.

37. *Evacuation.* The successful evacuation by sea of the whole of the rear parties and protection troops left to carry out the demolitions in Rangoon, carried out under the very nose of the enemy, was highly creditable to all concerned, including the R.A.F., who afforded air cover during the passage of the dangerous waters south-west of Rangoon.

38. *Enemy Action.* The fact that not a single transport was ever attacked by either surface craft, aircraft or submarine during the whole of the operations is a proof of the success achieved in timing the arrival and departure of convoys and the provision of air cover and seaward reconnaissance. This was not of course achieved without detriment to air operations elsewhere, and imposed a severe strain on the small air forces available.

That co-operation was so successfully achieved was largely due to the practice of holding daily, or twice daily, meetings of the three commanders and to the effort to ensure that as far as possible all communications with higher authority on major policy were sent either as from the combined commanders or else were the subject of inter-service agreement before despatch.

39. *Higher Command.* Finally it is necessary to point out that the fact that Burma was included in the sphere of the Commander-in-Chief Eastern Fleet and subsequently transferred to that of Commander-in-Chief East Indies rendered it especially difficult to obtain naval support or guidance as to naval policy. For a considerable period the exact definition of responsibility was very vague.

40. *Inshore Operations.* A further matter that deserves future consideration was the absence of any organisation, or of suitable craft, for inshore operations on the coast line from India to Malaya. The possibilities of such action, in close co-operation with troops or marines especially trained in boat work, was very considerable, and it is suggested that it should in future be recognised as a special branch of naval activities. Attempts were made to develop an organisation of this kind based on the detachment of 100 marines referred to above. Before they had completed their training, however, the evacuation of Rangoon rendered it necessary to withdraw them up the River Irrawaddy where they have since done most valuable work.

VI. ARMY ADMINISTRATION.

41. *Lack of Preparation.* The following remarks are virtually a summary of administrative difficulties and of the reasons for admin-

istrative shortcomings during the period of the campaign under review. That there has not been an administrative breakdown is, in my opinion, entirely due to the efforts of my Major-General in charge of Administration, Major-General E. N. Goddard, and his staff, to keep the machine working in circumstances of almost insuperable difficulty which persisted throughout the campaign.

A gloomy picture is portrayed, which is nevertheless considered to be accurate. If the campaign had been an advance, instead of a withdrawal, many of the defects and shortcomings would not have been evident (e.g. poor discipline) and others would have been of less importance.

The course of the campaign should be a warning that the civil and military administration must come on to a war footing before hostilities commence. It is unfair to the troops, to the civil population, in fact unfair to everybody, to expect our loosely knit peace time system of civil and military administration to adapt itself quickly to war conditions.

The main administrative lesson of the campaign during the period is to prove once again that unless the administrative conception from the outset is sufficiently broad operations will be hampered. This is particularly true in a withdrawal.

42. *Basis of Administrative Plan.* After I arrived in Burma, the War Office laid down that administrative preparations were to be made on the basis of a force of four divisions. Demands were made therefore for L. of C. administrative and ancillary units, including a Corps H.Q. on this basis, but owing to the passage of events none of them materialised before the loss of Rangoon. Large amounts of equipment and personnel which had been urgently demanded by Burma before my arrival, were also sent out by the War Office, but practically all failed to arrive in time. Administrative difficulties were greatly accentuated by the necessity of giving fighting units the preference in the allotment of shipping, and also by the fact that certain ships had to be turned back owing to inability to handle them in Rangoon.

43. *Insufficiency of Administrative Units.* At no time during the campaign has there been an adequate number of administrative units; transport, supply, medical, transportation, provost, rest camps and mess, ordnance, and labour units have all been less than the number required to administer the force. Improvisation has been necessary on a scale which has made confusion inevitable. The problem would have been less complicated if the administrative layout had been set up before active operations commenced.

44. *Civil Departments.* The whole conduct of the military administration has been complicated by A.H.Q. having to deal with numerous civil departments and agencies who do not realise how quickly events move in war and are thus unable to realise that it is necessary to have unified control well ahead of any likely emergency. The civil railway and inland water transport agencies could not be persuaded, until it was too late, that it was vital to have unified control and to form some military operating units. The result was a breakdown in railway transportation which prevented the

backloading of valuable and vital stores from Rangoon to the extent that would otherwise have been possible; and great confusion and waste of effort in the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company.

45. *The Base.* The base must be far enough in rear of the zone of operations to obviate the need to move it. Rangoon was too far forward. Base installations should have been sited in Upper Burma before the outbreak of war.

The force was too highly equipped with M.T. for the terrain which in the main demanded a very comprehensive employment of pack transport.

The tendency of many Burma units, including administrative units, to disintegrate has caused administrative confusion and inefficiency apart from the effect on operations. Owing to demands for administrative units in the Middle East and elsewhere, Burma was advised to raise as many of such units as she could from available indigenous material. This is not generally possible under war conditions and the personnel available were quite unreliable.

46. *Transport* Units landed without their transport which had to be improvised. Improvised transport impaired fighting efficiency and was instrumental in lowering morale. As the theatre of operations approached Rangoon it was essential that transport should sail in the same ship (or the same convoy) as the unit to which it belonged. As it was troops had to go into battle as soon as they landed, without transport, and much equipment was lost in consequence.

Transport has been very short and but for 620 lorries presented by the Generalissimo from Lease-Lend the force would have been immobilised.

Transport for supplying the Chinese armies was obtained by taking up large amounts of civilian transport employed on the Burma road. A complete firm with its staff, workshops, spares and lorries was eventually taken over as an army unit and proved invaluable. The drivers, however, were local civilians who proved of very doubtful quality.

47. *Discipline.* The continued withdrawal and the inevitable straggling resulting from fighting in thick jungle undoubtedly affected discipline to a considerable extent. The presence of a large number of young officers and soldiers accentuated this.

It is a mistake to "make units up" with recruits and young officers just before they go on service. It would be better to send them into their first battle below strength and to make them up gradually later when the trained men have become accustomed to war conditions.

Similarly it would be better to send units into battle on a low scale of equipment and transport than to make them up to a new scale to which they are unaccustomed, when they are just on the point of embarkation.

48 *Provost, etc* The lack of Provost, Rest Camps and Mess Units has all tended to break down administration and, therefore, to impair discipline.

The units from India were undoubtedly handicapped owing to the lack of interpreters or liaison personnel who could speak the local

language. Every effort was made to remedy this deficiency which had not been foreseen in pre-war plans.

The composition of brigades and divisions has constantly been changed which is not conducive to the maintenance of an esprit de corps. Great stress is laid in India on this factor during training, and it is regrettable that owing to unavoidable causes, the shortage of troops and of reinforcements, and heavy casualties, brigades and even units had to be broken up.

49. *Disembarkation* One of the best administrative achievements during the period has been the disembarkation arrangements, especially during the period subsequent to the 21st February. Lack of civilian dock labour, frequent changes of orders, a virtual breakdown of transportation all tested the embarkation staff to the full. Lieut.-Colonel Hallett, the chief embarkation staff officer, is to be congratulated on a very fine achievement in that disembarkation was so quickly and successfully carried out under most difficult conditions.

50. *Medical.* Medical staff had to be created and although medical conscription had been accepted it had not been enforced to any considerable extent by a committee appointed by the Burma Government. Many potential medical officers were thus lost.

The Indian Hospital Corps (I.H.C.) have been satisfactory. The Burma Hospital Corps (B.H.C.) poor originally in quality and quantity, has failed badly in the time of stress owing to mass desertions. The B.H.C. was eventually in danger of disintegrating altogether.

Sweepers, cooks, water carriers and washermen were difficult to find after the bombing of Rangoon.

Lack of transport has been a serious handicap. Two Motor Ambulance Sections arrived with no cars. One improvised Motor Ambulance Section has never had more than 15 cars. All were Fords and all broke their backshafts. Field ambulances arrived without transport.

Every medical unit must have transport of some kind included in its War Equipment Table (W.E.T.). Field medical units must be self mobile. It is impossible to get transport from any pooled sources in a crisis, and so valuable equipment is lost.

All existing medical services were badly handicapped by the cheeseparating policy adopted when they were raised. Burma Army units were raised on a reduced scale totally inadequate for their work.

Two improvised Ambulance Trains were provided initially. They were not good, being non-corridor, but they have been of great value and have saved the situation many times. Number 3 Train was made up just before the crisis and was fortunately kept where it was intended, on the Prome line. This has time and again proved its value. Without these trains medical evacuation would have collapsed.

The initiative and resources of some members of all classes of the medical services, especially British, Indian and Karen, have been excellent on many occasions, and have frequently surmounted considerable difficulties and kept the service going.

Partly owing to the above mentioned difficulties and partly owing to the conditions of the campaign, there is no doubt that the wounded have suffered very considerable hardship. The D.M.S., Colonel Treffrey Thomson, and his staff, have made every effort to improve matters but would be the first to agree that there has been much in the medical situation to cause them very serious concern.

Apart from the difficulties met in dealing with our own casualties the virtual breakdown of the civil medical services has imposed considerable additional strain on the military organisation. Furthermore, the arrival of Chinese troops with practically no medical organisation at all has rendered it necessary to provide not only stores and equipment that could ill be spared but also medical units, staff and beds in our own hospitals.

51. *Amenities.* A great deal has been done in the face of much difficulty by Lieut.-Colonel A. Campbell, Chief Amenities Officer, to provide some small amount of amenities to the troops.

52. *Canteens.* No canteen organisation existed before the war, and although a Defence Services (Burma) Canteen was set up in January or February with the assistance of India, it never really got started.

As will easily be realised the canteen situation was a potent contributory factor in lowering the morale of both officers and men.

53. *Transportation.* The Director of Transportation arrived in the country on 29th January. There were no military transportation units whatsoever, except a Docks Operating Company which did very good work.

The railway administration was not to be convinced of the necessity of raising some military units, operating under military control, to run the railways in the operational area. India was unable to provide them and it was not found possible to raise them locally. Experience elsewhere suggests that if this had been done, the railways would have stood up to the strain better than they did. The same remarks in general apply to the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company, but the personality of the Manager, Mr. Morton, assisted by some British officers enabled the organisation to do some excellent work in the later stages after it had been taken over by the military. The lesson is that transportation must be organised for war.

VII. THE INTERNAL SITUATION.

54. *Civil Officials.* In view of the fact that I and most of my staff were entirely new to Burma we were naturally dependent on civil officials for assistance in those cases where local knowledge was required. I should like therefore to pay a tribute to the unfailing support and assistance I received throughout from the Honourable Mr. John Wise, Defence Counsellor, and by Mr. Potter, head of Military Finance.

55. *Internal Situation.* As regards the internal situation there were from the beginning, many alarmist reports. There is no doubt that the enemy had thoroughly organised their sympathisers in Burma before the outbreak of war, and received very great assistance from them. On the other hand, a larger proportion of the population and subordinate officials remained loyal than many of the British

officials expected, and though there were many treacherous attacks on our troops there were also many cases of willing assistance being given to stragglers and others.

The worst feature of the situation was the attitude of undisciplined elements towards the unfortunate Indian population who were robbed and maltreated in a most shameful manner, in spite of the efforts of many well disposed Burmans to help them.

With the progress of invasion and the organisation of the so-called Free Burma Army, the situation naturally grew worse, but it is fair to say that during the period covered by this report, the traitor forces achieved remarkably little, though their presence was a constant threat which imposed a corresponding strain on our military organisation.

56. *Martial Law* Throughout the period covered by the Report, the Government were opposed to the institution of Martial Law, partly owing to its association in the minds of the people with the civil rebellions of former years.

During the last days of Rangoon when looting, arson, etc., were already rife, it was decided to hand over the town to the military. A military commandant was appointed, but this was too late in the day to enable him to make any material improvement in the situation.

57. *Policy as regards Evacuation* The policy of H.M.G. as regards evacuation was quite clear. If it proved to be impossible to hold Rangoon it was essential that the demolition of the oil refineries, oil storage and other important installations should be as complete as possible. It was also laid down that it was not desirable that the Army should become bottled up in Rangoon, which was in itself indefensible, but that it should if necessary withdraw in order to carry on the war in Upper Burma.

This would in any case retain for a time the possession of the oilfields, cover the projected road to India, protect important aerodromes, and perhaps most important of all, ensure our continued co-operation with the Chinese forces. A considerable period was also required to complete the necessary arrangements for the denial of the oilfields to the enemy. As regards the oil it was found possible by moving certain plant from Rangoon to develop a very considerable output of M.T. petrol and 87 octane spirit in the oilfields—amounting possibly to about two million gallons a month—a most valuable example of foresight on the part of my staff.

58. *Demolitions.* At that time all the information available pointed to the fact that if it was not possible to hold Rangoon and the oilfields, the greatest service that could be rendered to the Allied cause would be a complete denial of the oil and refinery resources of Burma. It had been suggested that the Japanese war effort might collapse for lack of oil.

This involved very detailed planning and a vast amount of highly technical preparatory work. This was carried out under the general supervision of Mr. Forster, whose enthusiasm and drive combined with his previous experience, was most valuable. He was most ably assisted by Captain Scott, R.E., and members of the various oil companies who had

undertaken the work. This work, to which I gave considerable personal attention, was very fully justified by results both in Rangoon and in the oilfields. The destruction of the refineries and oil tanks was remarkably complete and all the personnel involved, military and civil, were successfully evacuated.

As regards other demolitions considerable planning and preparation was also necessary. Arrangements were made to destroy all port facilities and to sink a number of ships in places where they would prevent the use of the jetties. The power station, port and the telegraph installations, workshops, bridges, fixed defences, etc., were also successfully destroyed.

In view of the hardship involved for the civil population, without any material military advantages, of destroying the Rangoon water supply, this was left intact. The widespread destruction of rice mills or boats was avoided for similar reasons. A wholesale "scorched earth" policy was not practicable and would probably have created more problems for us, in the form of refugees, than it would for the Japanese.

59. *Refugees.* A considerable number of people, especially women and children, and including a large number of Indians, left Rangoon by sea during the early stages of the campaign. In order to provide increased facilities I took action to ensure that returning transports should be made available for this purpose. In view of subsequent events it is fortunate that evacuation on a large scale did take place.

A large number of Indians evacuated by walking across the hills from Prome to Taungup, whence they could be cleared to Chittagong in small craft. Lack of food, water and medical attention on the route caused much suffering and many deaths including a large number from cholera. Cholera was also present in the area south of Prome and a serious epidemic was anticipated.

60. *Evacuation Plans.* The arrangements for evacuating Rangoon were in three stages. The warning stage during which all non-essential personnel would be encouraged to depart leaving only those required to run essential services. The second stage in which the final arrangements for demolition, etc., would be completed and all civilians not required in connection with this work would be evacuated. Finally, the demolition stage on completion of which all the personnel concerned and the military for guarding them were to depart in transport for which special arrangements had been made.

61. *Route of Evacuation.* The route of evacuation for the majority of the population was inevitably the main Mandalay road and railway. The proximity of the enemy to this line after the battle of the Sittang and the small forces available to cover it rendered it very important that the first stage should not be left too late. The unreliability of the railway transportation personnel was another factor and it was only by the closest margin that the last few trains succeeded in getting away. Evacuation by the Prome route was of course possible, but the fact that the railway ended at that point and the presence of cholera and serious unrest made it undesirable to use it more than necessary. Another factor was the importance of avoiding serious congestion on either route

both of which were of course essential for military purposes.

A further difficulty arose from the fact that Rangoon was only 80 miles south-west of Pegu and that the Pegu road joined the Prome road 21 miles north of Rangoon. Unless therefore personnel were moved out of Rangoon City in good time they might well find themselves cut off from the north.

The preparation of the above measures naturally took considerable time and imposed a severe burden on an already overworked staff. In the event the interval between stage 1 and stage 2 was considerably longer than was anticipated, partly owing to lack of pressure on the part of the enemy after the battle at the Sittang and partly owing to the anticipated arrival of reinforcements which made it possible even up to the last moment that the position might be retrieved. During this period a certain number of people evacuated under stage 1 were brought back to keep essential services and transportation services in action till the last moment. During this period large quantities of personnel and stores were disembarked and moved up-country to Prome and Mandalay.

VIII. OPERATION IN THE SOUTHERN SHAN STATES AND IN TENASSERIM.

62. *Dispositions.* The dispositions when I arrived in Burma were as follows:—

Mergui, 2 Burma Rifles and two companies 3 Burma Rifles with a Frontier Force Detachment and an aerodrome guard.

Tavoy, 6 Burma Rifles, Tavoy Company of the Tenasserim Battalion B.A.F. and aerodrome guards.

Moulmein, 1/7 Gurkha Rifles, 8 Burma Rifles and the remainder of the Tenasserim Battalion B.A.F. also one Indian Mountain Battery.

Near Kawkareik, 4 Burma Rifles watching the Thai frontier. All the above were under the command of Commander 2 Burma Brigade in Moulmein.

Rangoon, the 1 Glosters and 3 Burma Rifles (less two companies) were under the Brigadier commanding Rangoon Area.

Southern Shan States, the 1 Burma Division consisting of an Indian Mountain Regiment, one 18-pounder Battery B.A.F. (4 guns), 13 Indian Infantry Brigade and 1 Burma Brigade consisting of the 2 K.O.Y.L.I. and 1 and 5 Burma Rifles. There were also some Frontier Force Detachments.

Mandalay Area (in reserve), 16 Indian Infantry Brigade (less one Battalion) and 7 Burma Rifles.

63. *Minor Operations in the Southern Shan States* There were no serious operations undertaken in the Southern Shan States during my period of command. A raid into Thailand up the River Kemapyu obtained useful information and there were several encounters between our Frontier Force columns or guerrilla detachments and the enemy on the frontier in the neighbourhood of the Kengtung-Chiengrai road. The Chinese 93 Division also undertook some raids across the Mekong River which inflicted considerable casualties and obtained valuable information.

Although the enemy was not very active during this period, there were known to be considerable numbers of Japanese as well as Thai troops in Northern Thailand and there were persistent reports indicating early invasion on this front. The distance from our junction with the Chinese on the Indo-China border to the mouth of the Salween was some 300 miles and to guard this we had only one division consisting of two infantry brigades and a few of the Frontier Force Detachments already referred to. The road from the River Salween through the valuable Mawchi mines to Toungoo was practically unguarded. The situation was therefore one which caused me considerable anxiety, especially when it became necessary to withdraw troops from the Southern Shan States to deal with the more threatening situation in Tenasserim.

64. *Tavoy and Mergui.* A few days after my arrival on 27th December, I visited Moulmein and Kawkaik and shortly afterwards Mergui and Tavoy.

The forces at these latter places were primarily for the defence of the aerodromes and though Mergui was to some extent defensible against land or sea attack Tavoy certainly was not—with the forces available. Mergui was, however, 300 miles from Moulmein and communications consisted of the road Ye-Tavoy-Mergui which crossed many ferries and was for the most part through thick jungle. There were a considerable number of known tracks from the Thai border, only a few miles away, by which the road could be intercepted. From Ye to Moulmein there was a railway and no road. Withdrawal from either of these places would obviously be difficult, especially as the total naval forces available consisted of two small motor launches, and other suitable craft were manned by native crews who were not likely to face any operations in the presence of the enemy. In any case there were not enough of such craft to enable the Mergui garrison to be evacuated in one lift. In view of these circumstances and the certainty that sooner or later the Japanese would begin to work up the coast or across the border from Thailand, it was decided that in event of a serious threat the Mergui garrison would be evacuated to Tavoy which would then be capable of defence. Furthermore, provided a stop could be put across one track leading in from Thailand it should be possible for the Tavoy force, if necessary, to withdraw by land towards Moulmein.

65. *Kawkaik.* One battalion of the Burma Rifles north-east of Kawkaik was watching the Thai border at Myawaddy and holding the pass over the Dawna Range which was covered throughout its length with thick jungle. In face of any serious attack its position was obviously very isolated. Although only 45 miles from Moulmein as the crow flies the only road available was 90 miles in length. It traversed two wide rivers by ferries and ran for 30 miles parallel to the Thai frontier and toward the Three Pagodas Pass into Thailand—a very likely avenue for any enemy invasion. The supply route was by launch up to Kyondo on the Gyaing River. ^{၀၀၂}

In view of these circumstances I decided to move H.Q. 16 Indian Brigade and one battalion then in reserve, down to Tenasserim as early

as possible both to strengthen the Kawkaik position, watch the Three Pagodas Pass, and garrison Moulmein. With this accession of force it became possible to push a detachment down to the Ye-Tavoy road with a view to keeping open communication with Tavoy.

66. *Lack of Intelligence.* Information at this time, as ever, was practically nil. The thick jungle prevented any considerable information being obtained from air reconnaissance for which resources were very limited, and for political reasons no attempt had been made before the war to organise any source of intelligence in Thailand. There was therefore every prospect of an attack without warning coming at any time. Any offensive action beyond that of patrols or attacks upon isolated posts, was with the forces available, quite out of the question.

67. *Formation of H.Q. 17 Indian Division.* On the 5th January the senior staff officers of the 17 Indian Division having arrived an advanced headquarters was established at Moulmein and Brigadier Bourke assumed the command.

The Commander of the 17 Indian Division arrived on 10th January and then assumed command although the remainder of his headquarters did not arrive until serious operations were already in progress. Although he had little time to study the problems involved he entirely agreed with the plans and dispositions proposed.

68. *Enemy Activities.* During the early days of January many reports were received indicating that the Japanese were concentrating in some strength between Raheng and the frontier at Myawaddy, and on the 11th January the total was given as 5,000 in this area.

On the 3rd some interesting information was received from some police agents who had been arrested in Thailand and subsequently released. They stated that while in captivity they had overheard some Japanese officer discussing future plans which included plans for an advance on Tavoy which was to take place in three weeks time. The information which these men brought back proved to be substantially correct.

69. *Troop Movements.* In consequence of a decision to move the whole of the 16 Indian Infantry Brigade to the Moulmein area, the troops in this area were disposed on the 14th January as follows:—

The Commander 16 Indian Infantry Brigade took over responsibility for the defences about Kawkaik, where 1/7 G.R. and 4 Burma Rifles (which was very weak) were now joined by 1/9 R. Jats and a mountain battery. One company of 1/7 G.R. was posted about Kyungyaung to watch the Three Pagodas Pass into Thailand.

The 4/12 F.F. Regiment of this Brigade was left in Moulmein under the 2 Burma Infantry Brigade with the role of keeping open the road from Ye to Tavoy as far south as the road and track junction at Migyaunglaung.

The 7 Burma Rifles was at this time also ordered to Moulmein.

70. *Operations at Tavoy.* On the 16th January two companies of the 6 Burma Rifles came in contact with a Japanese force, estimated at about 100, at Myitta on the track leading from the north of Tavoy to the frontier.

The companies apparently withdrew for the night with the intention of attacking the next day. Reports had been received that further enemy forces were coming down the river and there is little doubt that they were correct. The following day the two companies supported by a company of the 3 Burma Rifles (the two companies of this Battalion having been transferred from Rangoon) advanced again to the attack. It is hard to get a clear picture but the attack failed and meanwhile the Japanese had worked round the flanks and ambushed the transport. For the time being the force was broken up into small parties, most of whom eventually made their way back to Moulmein through the jungle.

It should be mentioned here that the 6 Burma Rifles was a newly raised Battalion which had had no opportunity for carrying out higher training in any form, and in the absence of any definitely appointed commander the action of these three companies was probably not too well planned or directed.

During the next two days a good deal of useful information was forwarded to Tavoy regarding the movements of Japanese troops by men of the Tenasserim Battalion and by mine managers and so on. In some cases these reports were passed through by telephone after the Japanese had passed by.

However, early on the morning of the 19th the enemy appeared near the Tavoy aerodrome and commenced to attack it. At first the detachment of the Kokine Battalion The Burma Frontier Force put up a spirited defence but were eventually forced to withdraw and the aerodrome was lost.

The remainder of the troops in Tavoy now completely disintegrated. The enemy had established himself astride the road leading to Ye and most of the troops eventually found their way back to Moulmein moving in small parties through the jungle.

In these operations round Tavoy, parties of the Tenasserim Battalion B.A.F. did excellent work under their officers in blowing up bridges and roads and many of them remained behind for long periods after the other troops had left, eventually getting back through the jungle or by boat and bringing with them much useful information.

71. Southern Tenasserim. Before recording the main operations which started at Myawaddy and ended at the River Sittang it is convenient to dispose of the remaining event in Southern Tenasserim.

The Japanese were in occupation of Victoria Point and it was known that patrols were working up towards Mergui. With the possibility of Tavoy falling into the hands of the enemy Mergui would be in a very precarious position. Consequently on the 18th January, it was decided, during my absence in Kengtung, to evacuate Mergui while there was yet time and to transfer the troops to Tavoy and to make every endeavour to hold the aerodrome at that place. I confirmed these orders on my return.

Before this move could be completed Tavoy had fallen, so the garrison and civil officials, etc., were evacuated direct by sea to Rangoon where the last parties arrived on the 24th January.

72. Effect of Operations. The results of the action at Tavoy were unfortunate. It had caused the withdrawal from Mergui and it is

possible that in the light of after events that it might have been wiser to hold on to Mergui even if the eventual withdrawal of the garrison or part of it were thereby prejudiced. Its retention would have enabled our air forces, small as they were, to have carried out effective bombing attacks along the L of C supplying the enemy's forces in Malaya. It should be remembered, however, that at the time the plans were made our air forces available for this purpose were practically nil and that if the plan actually made had succeeded it might have ensured the retention of Tavoy for a considerable period.

Another and perhaps more serious effect of the operation at Tavoy was that the units of the Burma Rifles involved suffered a serious loss of morale from which they did not entirely recover. The enemy received a corresponding encouragement to undertake similar enterprises in future.

73. Operations in Northern Tenasserim. Before dealing with the operations in Northern Tenasserim it is desirable to draw attention to the fact that nearly all the fighting took place in dense jungle for which form of warfare the Japanese were especially trained while our troops were not. Communications were very limited and in the jungle runners had to be almost entirely relied upon.

The mobility of the Japanese brought home the fact that our troops had far too much baggage and reserves of all sorts with them which often in the end were either lost or had to be destroyed.

Throughout the operations leading up to the Battle of the Sittang I had constantly in mind the necessity for fighting as far forward as possible so as to have room in which to deploy the expected reinforcements. I therefore took every unit I could from elsewhere, including 1 Burma Division, to strengthen our forces on this front. This involved taking considerable risks in the Southern Shan States, on the Karenni front and in Rangoon. There was also an internal security problem that might become critical at any time.

74. First Japanese Attack. Active operations on a larger scale commenced on the 20th January when 1,000 Japanese troops, reported to be Thais but probably Japanese, attacked the post of the 1/7 G.R. at milestone 48 on the Myawaddy road. Other positions were heavily bombed and machine gunned at intervals throughout the day. There was every indication that a large scale attack was about to take place.

The following morning the attack developed as expected and most of the forward troops were forced out of their positions.

By midday the enemy were severely pressing the main position of the 16 Indian Infantry Brigade about Kawkareik. As they appeared to be in considerable strength (it was later estimated from the information that became available that there were about 2,500 enemy troops in the initial attack) and no reinforcements or reserves were available, it was possible that if 16 Indian Infantry Brigade tried to fight it out on this position it might be overwhelmed. Orders were therefore issued that this Brigade was not to get so involved as

to render withdrawal impossible. The Divisional Commander was told at the same time not to give up more ground than necessary and that an intermediate position should be occupied.

It appeared afterwards that the attack was not, in fact, nearly so heavy as had been originally reported and there seems little doubt that more seasoned troops could have maintained their position for the time being.

75. *Withdrawal commenced.* On the 22nd January the withdrawal commenced and unfortunately there was a certain amount of confusion.

The Brigade, however, managed to disengage and during the succeeding day withdrew without further molestation from the Japanese to Moulmein not, however, without losing most of its animal transport, its signal equipment, many of its weapons and all its M.T.

Part of the losses in transport etc. was due to the ferry boat being sunk which rendered impracticable a withdrawal by road and necessitated a move across country by a track impassable to vehicles. The operation, as the small number of casualties showed, was not a very happy start to the operations for the defence of Burma. The company of 1/7 G.R. that the enemy attacked in the first instance did especially good work and the 4 Burma Rifles showed up very well.

On the 23rd January in view of the disorganised state of the troops at his disposal and the fact that the enemy were believed to be in considerable strength the Commander of the 17 Indian Division represented the view that he considered it desirable to move his Division right back to the area Bilin—Kyaikto—River Sittang where he could concentrate his troops in a strong position and establish a secure base from which to deliver a counter stroke.

76. *Decision to hold Moulmein.* In my opinion a withdrawal on this scale was quite unjustified and I decided that at any rate Moulmein should be held and if time permitted I proposed to move up the 2 K.O.Y.L.I. from 1 Burma Division to reinforce it. I did not, however, intend to have a brigade closely invested in that place. Arrangements for a withdrawal were therefore to be planned. The first requirement was to regain touch with the enemy, which had been entirely lost as a result of the withdrawal and was not really regained until the enemy attacked Moulmein on 30th January.

By the 25th, H.Q. 16 Indian Infantry Brigade was established at Martaban with 1/7 G.R. less two companies, one of which was still missing from the Kawkaik position, two companies of the 4 Burma Rifles and the 1/9 R. Jats. The 46 Indian Brigade was ordered up to the area about Bilin. This Brigade which consisted of 7/10 Baluch, 5/17 Dogras, 3/7 Gurkhas had arrived in Burma on the 16th but without its transport which did not arrive till 30th. It was, as already explained in Part I, by no means fully trained.

On the following day 100 men of the 1/7 G.R. turned up having marched across country to the Salween.

The enemy did not press forward his advance with any great speed and it was evident that

he was bringing forward more troops and probably deploying on a wider front. Reports were received to the effect that they were in some strength just east of Paan and this was confirmed the following day.

77. *Attack on Moulmein.* Early on the morning of the 30th January the Japanese started an attack on the aerodrome situated about four miles beyond Moulmein and held by the detachment of the Kokine Battalion The Burma Frontier Force. This detachment fought well and continued to hold on to the aerodrome until ordered to withdraw at midnight.

Moulmein itself was held by the four Battalions of the 2 Burma Brigade, 3 Burma Rifles, 4 Burma Rifles, 7 Burma Rifles and 8 Burma Rifles, with the 12 Mountain Battery R.A.; extended along a seven mile perimeter. 4/12 F.F.R. less one company was in reserve. At noon Brigadier Ekin took over the command and at that time found the situation to be in hand, but having visited the units and seen something of the position he came to the conclusion that in the face of a heavy enemy attack it would be very doubtful whether this extended line could be held. Orders were therefore issued by the Brigadier for the line to be withdrawn towards Moulmein in order to form a "Box" which it was hoped would be proof against penetration.

During this operation a battalion of the Burma Rifles failed to take up their allotted position with the result that there was a gap between the 8 Burma Rifles and the 4/12 F.F.R. and this latter unit was soon at close grips with the enemy and had a difficult time.

At 1900 hours the situation was certainly serious and as no reinforcements were yet available for sending into Moulmein it looked as though it would be necessary to withdraw from the town. As he estimated that there were probably not more than a thousand Japanese attacking, the Brigadier thought that there was still a possibility of holding the town and told the Divisional Commander on the telephone that he would make a final decision later.

The Brigade Commander, however, made preparations for withdrawing if necessary and sent Major Ward, R.E., commanding the 1 Field Company Burma Sappers and Miners, to collect all available launches alongside the jetties. He managed to collect fifteen and to keep them there until they were required. These boats were manned by local crews and in charge of serangs and they worked extremely well under very trying conditions.

78. *Decision to Withdraw.* During the night it became increasingly obvious that a withdrawal would be necessary and on this being reported to the Divisional Commander he agreed and considered that it should be carried out as soon as possible.

At about 0730 hours on the 31st January the embarkation began and by 1000 hours eleven ships had left with troops. Throughout this time the Japanese were closing in round the jetties and considerable fighting was in progress. However, the bulk of the troops got away although the ships in their passage over to Martaban were subject to machine gun fire and shelling.

The month of January therefore ended with our troops west of the River Salween with the exception of small parties of men who did not get away with the ships or who had got separated from their units. Many of these turned up later having managed to cross the river in native boats or on rafts, etc.

79. *Reasons for Withdrawal.* The question may well be asked as to whether it was necessary to evacuate Moulmein. While the initial attack was probably carried out by only one enemy regiment there was every reason to suppose that the remainder of a division was moving up and this afterwards proved to be correct. With the enemy established to the north and south of the town and probably on the island of Chaungzon to the west, no communication with the town would have been possible and in the absence of any naval or military boat crews, etc., operations for relief, even if troops had been available, would probably have been impossible. The area had not in any way been prepared for defence and required at least two infantry brigades to hold a secure perimeter. Furthermore the water supply came from outside the only line which it was possible to hold. In view of these considerations it is quite clear that a decision to hold Moulmein any longer would almost certainly have involved the loss of the garrison and possibly have hastened the fall of Rangoon.

At one time I hoped that the arrival of reinforcements would enable me to establish a strong force across the River Salween at Paan. This would have covered the northern flank of Moulmein and secured its communications across the River Salween. It would also have secured the most promising jumping off place for a counter-offensive.

80. *Request for Naval Assistance.* About this time a signal was despatched to G.H.Q. South West Pacific Command (A.B.D.A. Command) pointing out that Moulmein would probably fall and requesting that warships should be sent to protect the coast as otherwise the enemy would be able to move up the coast from Malaya at will.

81. *Casualties.* The casualties suffered by our troops up to and including the evacuation of Moulmein amounted to 617 all ranks, a considerable proportion being "missing." It should be noted, however, that in jungle fighting involving a withdrawal, practically all dead and wounded are likely to be counted as missing in addition to prisoners and those who, getting separated from their units, may turn up later as stragglers. There is no doubt that the enemy suffered considerable casualties at Moulmein though probably very few at Kawkaik.

Although the Divisional Commander was still anxious to withdraw to the Bilin River and to give up Martaban, I issued orders that the Division was to fight hard to hold the line of the River Salween and to give no ground. As far as possible, however, the Division was to be dispersed in depth so as to be able to deal with enemy infiltration.

The general plan was now to hold Martaban securely and the line of the River Salween to the north of Paan, with the remainder of the 17 Indian Division distributed back in depth along the road to Kyaikto.

Two companies of the 3/7 Gurkha Rifles held Martaban while the 1/7 G.R. were about Paan. The 4 Burma Rifles watched the river between these two places and the 5/17 Dogras were ordered to Duyinzaik and to carry out active patrolling.

82. *Reorganisation.* A good deal of reorganisation was now necessary within the Division and it was decided to reconstitute the Brigades so as to include a battalion of the Burma Rifles in each Brigade as it was felt that these battalions would be of greater value when brigaded with other troops.

83. *Reinforcements.* On the 3rd February the 48 Indian Infantry Brigade which had arrived in Rangoon on 31st January without its transport and had been held in Army Reserve, was ordered forward to Bilin to join the 17 Indian Division. The Divisional Commander was instructed to keep this Brigade concentrated and not to use it until there was a real necessity to do so.

84. *Enemy Action.* Martaban was now subjected to a good deal of shelling and bombing and small parties of the enemy succeeded in crossing the Salween at different points. In view of the enclosed country and long distances involved it was very difficult to locate them, especially as no information was forthcoming from the local inhabitants. Apart from this there was a lull on the front which gave our troops a much needed breathing space for reorganisation. The 1/7 G.R., however, showed a greater activity in the Paan area. They maintained a post and patrols on the far side of the river and had several very successful encounters with the enemy. Eventually, however, his increasing strength in this area forced their withdrawal across the river.

On the 5th February 7/10 Baluch relieved the 1/7 G.R. opposite Paan who then moved to Bilin. The 2 K.O.Y.L.I. which had been transferred from the 1 Burma Division in the Southern Shan States moved to Thaton while the 8 Burma Rifles and 1/9 R. Jats moved into reserve at Bilin.

85. *Martaban Road cut.* On the 9th a Japanese party which had no doubt infiltrated through the jungle led by local guides cut the road at milestone 8 a few miles south of Paung and established a strong road block there. Two carriers of the 5 Dogras failed to force a passage and two armoured cars of the Rangoon Battalion B.A.F. which came on the scene a little later were put out of action. In spite of further attacks the enemy was not dislodged from his position here. The 3/7 G.R. later succeeded in opening a way through Thebyugon and thence across country to Thaton.

86. *Martaban.* On the following day (10th) Martaban was again subjected to a considerable amount of shelling and a good deal of enemy activity was observed, all of which indicated that the enemy were likely to make a renewed effort in the near future. It was also known that some parties of the enemy were on our side of the river.

In view of the situation the Divisional Commander represented his desire to evacuate Martaban and to withdraw his line in order to get on to a less extended front. For the reasons given already I did not wish to give up more

ground than was necessary and moreover as soon as the enemy got possession of Martaban it would have been easy for him to pass over troops and stores from Moulmein. I therefore issued orders that Martaban must continue to be held.

87. *Loss of Martaban.* The reports received on the 11th disclosed a somewhat confused situation but did indicate that the enemy had started the next phase of his plan.

About six hundred Japanese were now in the area about Martaban and a further 2,000 were reported to have landed on the swamps and mud flats further up the coast and would no doubt be working their way in towards the road.

The 3/7 G.R. were forced to withdraw from Martaban but were still covering the exits of that place; they inflicted very heavy casualties on the enemy and at one time charged them with the bayonet which caused them to run for cover throwing away their arms as they did so.

On this day also, about a battalion of the Japanese crossed the Salween near Paan and were believed to have surrounded the 7/10 Baluch. To restore the situation in this area the 5/17 Dogras were ordered to counter-attack from the direction of Duyinzaik.

By the evening of the 13th the situation was a little clearer. The 5/17 Dogras, only one hundred strong and much disorganised arrived back from Duyinzaik where they had been heavily engaged for the past two days, but there was still no news of the Baluch, who it was believed must have been surrounded.

88. *Condition of Troops.* The Divisional Commander now reported that, while he still had the 48 Indian Infantry Brigade intact and in hand, in the 16 and 46 Indian Brigades there was only one battalion, the K.O.Y.L.I., in a fit state to fight.

In view of the extent of his front and the condition of his troops he wished to withdraw to a better defensive position with a less extended front. While again pointing out the necessity for fighting as far forward as possible I gave him permission to withdraw if and when he considered such a course essential.

On 13th February I sent an appreciation to General Hartley, Commander-in-Chief, India, which emphasised that the situation for the next month, until more troops became available, was likely to be critical and envisaged the possibility that we might be forced back to the line of the River Sittang. The difficulties likely to be encountered in an event of a forced withdrawal across this river were especially stressed. It also pointed out that the loss of Pegu would be likely to seal the fate of Rangoon and referred to the policy of stocking bases in Central Burma with a view to continuing the campaign and covering the road to India in the event of Rangoon being lost. It ended with an appeal for more troops, especially British, as early as possible.

89. *7/10 Baluch.* On the 14th February, the news was received that some survivors of the 7/10 Baluch after 48 hours of heavy fighting had managed to fight their way out and were withdrawing to Duyinzaik. The following day this Battalion was visited by the Divisional Commander who found that its strength was about six officers and 250 men. There is no doubt that this Battalion fought most gallantly whilst completely surrounded by superior

numbers and that it was only after all ammunition was exhausted that a small remnant was forced to surrender. The survivors consisted for the most part of a company that was detached from the Battalion and men who were away with the transport.

90. *Withdrawal to Bilin.* At midday on the 15th February, the Divisional Commander reported that, in view of the pressure on his front, he proposed to withdraw to the River Bilin which he felt confident he could hold. Accordingly as a first step the 46 Indian Infantry Brigade commenced to withdraw behind the Bilin.

On the 16th, H.Q. 2 Burma Infantry Brigade was ordered to move to Nyaunglebin together with the 7 Burma Rifles as soon as transport could be made available. A reconnaissance party started off at once. The object of this move was to ensure that the line of the River Sittang to the north should be at any rate patrolled, and also, if possible, prepared for defence. Most units of the Burma Rifles were no longer fit for further fighting without rest and re-organisation, and certain Indian battalions were in a similar condition. It was hoped, therefore, as reinforcements became available, to withdraw these battalions into reserve across the River Sittang.

About the same time the 1 Burma Rifles which had reached the front from Mergui via Rangoon and which had not been engaged, were sent up to Papun to cover the left flank. This Battalion carried out its task very well and after several weeks in the jungle eventually joined 1 Burma Division near Toungoo. Two detachments of about a company each were also placed to watch likely crossings over the River Salween between Papun and Paan and a Burma F.F. column was detailed to protect the left flank of the 17 Indian Division.

At 12.05 hours a report was received to the effect that a party of Japanese estimated at being from 300 to 1,000 strong, had crossed the Salween at Yinbaing and were advancing on Mepli. A company of the 8 Burma Rifles were sent to investigate and contacted the Japanese at Kuseik.

In the evening Thaton was evacuated and the bridge at Yinnein was demolished, and on this date the 1/4 G.R. of 48 Indian Brigade were put into the line and carried out a counter-attack to restore the situation on the left flank.

Heavy fighting took place on most parts of the front on the 17th February and it was evident that the enemy were trying to work around the left flank of the Division. The remainder of the 48 Brigade was now brought up into line on the right of 16 Indian Brigade, where both 5/17 Dogra and 8 Burma Rifles were found to have vacated their positions. To protect the right flank an organisation of watchers backed up by Burma Military Police was put in operation along the coast.

The 2 K.O.Y.L.I. now became heavily engaged with the enemy about Danyigon and were out of touch for some considerable time.

91. *Pegu Force.* The possibility of the Japanese crossing the estuary of the River Sittang by boat and cutting off our communications with Pegu or of going further afield and landing near the Rangoon River had been considered for some time past, but beyond small detachments of the Burma Frontier Force and Burma Military Police, there had been no troops spare

for this task. The arrival of reinforcements now made it possible, however, for more effective steps to be taken, and on the 18th February, the Pegu Force was formed. This Force consisted of the 1 W. Yorks, F.F.6 and detachments of the Burma Military Police, and was given the role of protecting Pegu from the south east linking up with the 17 Division at the Sittang Bridge. An armoured train was provided to operate in the Delta area. A similar organisation consisting of a company of the 1st Glosters, F.F.7 and some Military Police were responsible for the approaches to Syriam from the sea.

92. *7 Armoured Brigade.* In anticipation of the arrival of the 7 Armoured Brigade every effort had been been made to strengthen bridges, and to convert railway bridges for the passage of tanks in order to give them as large an area in which to operate as possible.

All possible steps were also taken to ensure that the disembarkation of the Brigade could be carried out as quickly as possible after its arrival, and that there would be no delay in moving the units to their concentration areas. It was obviously doubtful whether the Brigade would be in time to assist in the defence of the area east of the River Sittang, but the Brigade arrived in Rangoon on the 21st and, thanks to the excellent work of all concerned, it was got forward in time to impose considerable delay on the enemy west of the River Sittang and to relieve the pressure on the tired troops in the Pegu area.

93. *Bilin Position.* It is now necessary to turn back to the operations on the Front of the 17 Indian Division which was occupying the Bilin position.

During the 18th the enemy definitely increased his pressure against our troops and succeeded in crossing the river to the south of the village of Bilin.

In this area a counter attack was delivered by the 48 Indian Infantry Brigade which, while succeeding in holding up the enemy advance, did not succeed in pushing him back over the river. Further to the north the enemy were working round the flank of the 16 Indian Infantry Brigade. The 2 K.O.Y.L.I. which had put in a gallant counter attack, had suffered heavy casualties, but was holding its own. It should also be mentioned that on this date some very effective bombing was carried out by the R.A.F. on enemy troops south of the Bilin River. The night passed with our troops in close contact with the enemy along the north bank of the River.

On the 18th a wide turning movement was initiated by 4/12 F.F.R. with the object of attacking the enemy's right flank. The operation achieved considerable success and heavy fighting ensued. It left the Division, however, without any reserves and weak along the coast. The troops were becoming very weak and exhausted. The enemy also established himself in the rear of the right flank—presumably by landing from the sea. In view of the situation, I ordered up the 2 D.W.R., the only unit I had in hand, to protect the rear of the Division.

94. *Question of Withdrawal.* During the morning of the 19th I visited the Division. A counter attack by 2/5 R.G.R. had not altogether succeeded in driving the enemy out of Thattkyon in rear of the right flank. The

enemy was well established in the centre of the position and there was every indication that he was bringing up strong forces against the left flank. The situation was, therefore, such that there appeared to be grave risk of not being able to disengage the troops unless a further withdrawal was ordered.

In view of the strong position on the River Sittang in rear, the anticipated arrival of reinforcements and especially tanks, a decision "to fight it out" on the River Bilin had little to recommend it. In view of subsequent events there is little doubt that had the withdrawal been further deferred the Division would have been practically destroyed and Rangoon left open to the enemy.

I, therefore, told the Divisional Commander to make all necessary preparation for withdrawal and to judge for himself when the necessity for doing so had arrived. Subsequent orders were issued to the effect that all transport should be got across the River Sittang at an early stage of the withdrawal, and that the 2 D.W.R. should be sent back to guard the bridgehead as early as possible. I myself had personally ordered the retention of one company at that place, in view of the weakness of the garrison.

On 18th February, I sent to A.B.D.A. Command and the War Office an appreciation which after referring to the severe check that had been inflicted on the enemy on the Bilin River indicated that if, as appeared probable, he was able to renew his attack with fresh troops, it might not be possible to continue to hold the position. It also pointed out that if the battle went badly, the enemy might succeed in crossing the River Sittang without much difficulty which would render the evacuation of Rangoon an imminent possibility. After reviewing the meagre resources of troops available, and future reinforcements, it is stated that probably the best that could be hoped for was that it would be possible to hold up the enemy on the line of the River Sittang. This would, however, involve an immediate threat to the main road and railway from Rangoon to Mandalay which was the main route of supply of China and for the evacuation of civilians, stores and base installations from Rangoon. After referring to the difficult problem of whether to start evacuation of non-essential personnel at once, with its obviously bad effect on morale, or risk congestion and confusion at a later stage, it concluded by stating that five divisions in all were essential to the defence of Burma of which two would be required for the defence of the River Sittang. It expressed doubts, however, as to whether sufficient troops could arrive in time to save Rangoon and said that unless they could do so more quickly than was at the time visualised, the risk of losing Rangoon within the next few weeks was considerable. The accuracy of this was very fully borne out by events. On the 20th February, after the decision to withdraw to the River Sittang, a further telegram was sent which, after describing the condition of the troops, dealt in some detail with the necessity for taking preliminary measures for the evacuation of Rangoon. It stated that after consultation with the Governor and Combined Commanders, it had been decided to commence certain measures under the evacuation scheme which would not, however,

be detrimental to the actual defence of Rangoon. These included the diversion of certain ships carrying administrative units which would be very difficult to unload in the existing conditions and whose presence would seriously complicate the evacuation problem. It made it clear that fighting troops should be continued to be sent as reinforcements and that every effort would be made to hold Rangoon. It also dealt with the evacuation of women and children and the denial of the oil refineries. It concluded with emphasizing once again the need for a Corps Commander and also for a Senior General Officer to undertake liaison duties with the Chinese Armies.

There can be no doubt now that the timely adoption of these measures was amply justified, without them there would have been chaos.

95. *Withdrawal begins.* On the 20th February after three days of almost hand to hand fighting, the forward troops managed to disengage from the enemy and the first stage of withdrawal commenced. The withdrawal was co-ordinated by the Commanders of the 48 and 16 Brigades. The only unit that had any difficulty in getting away was the 1/9 R. Jats, which was partially surrounded and owing to a delay in receipt of orders to withdraw was caught by a pre-arranged bombing attack intended for the enemy. This delayed the withdrawal of 48 Brigade till 1500 hours and it was eventually ferried to Kyaikto by M.T., reaching that place at about 2030 hours.

The intention now was for the 17 Indian Division to form a strong line on the west bank of the River Sittang, and it was hoped that, if any enemy managed to cross in any strength, the 7 Armoured Brigade would be able to deal with them. It may be mentioned here that while the paddy land looked most suitable for the employment of tanks, it was found that the small bunds between the fields necessitated the tanks slowing down to take them, and thus making them vulnerable and slow.

96. *Plan of Withdrawal.* The 17 Indian Division's plan for the withdrawal was for 48 Brigade to move back first, going into divisional reserve. It was to pass through 46 Brigade which was already in the Kyaikto area. 46 Brigade was to act as rearguard to the 17 Division. On 21st February the leading battalion of 48 Brigade was only to go as far as the quarries, two miles east of Mokpalin. The remaining battalions were to halt on positions some four or seven miles further back along the main road. To strengthen the bridgehead defence consisting of the 3 Burma Rifles and one company 2 D.W.R., the Divisional Commander subsequently ordered the 4/12 F.F.R. to the Sittang bridge area.

The 2 D.W.R. less one company remained with 46 Indian Infantry Brigade and it was also decided that units should retain their transport.

97. *Communications.* The withdrawal across the river was bound to be a difficult operation as only the one bridge existed, but a power ferry for M.T. with three boats had been placed in position as an alternative means, and was provided with landing stages of elaborate construction.

It should be noted here that in this area communications were extremely difficult, apart

from the railway there was a road only as far as Waw some 10 miles west of the Sittang Bridge, on the east side there was no road until reaching Kyaikto 16 miles beyond the River. Every effort had been made to complete the road, and to deck over the railway bridge. By excellent work on the part of Mr. Stewart of the Burma Railways, the latter and the power ferry were completed, but the "road" was still a very dusty and rough track through the jungle. It may be added, that the River Sittang at this place was nearly 500 yards wide and very swift. The rapidity of the current, the enormous rise and fall of the tide (40 feet) and the existence of a bore, were considered to render it unsafe for navigation, and nobody but a very strong swimmer could hope to cross it by that means.

98. *Visit to Lashio.* As the withdrawal of 17 Indian Division on 20th had been successfully begun, I felt able on 21st to fly up to Lashio to meet the Generalissimo on his way back to China. It was obviously most desirable that I should do so in order to hasten as far as possible, the arrival of the Chinese troops in Burma. Unfortunately he decided at the last moment not to land, and flew straight on to Chungking. I returned to Rangoon by air on 22nd to find a very serious situation had arisen on the River Sittang. It is necessary first however, to describe what had taken place on 21st during my absence.

99. *Events of 21st.* By 12.00 hours on the 21st both 48 and 16 Indian Infantry Brigades had passed through 46 Brigade at Kyaikto. During the afternoon 46 Brigade commenced its withdrawal and although bombed from the air it was not followed up. The order of march was 48 Brigade leading, followed by 16 Brigade M.T., 46 Brigade M.T. and then 16 Brigade followed by 46 Brigade. One battalion of 46 Brigade moved by the railway line, all the remainder by the road and track.

Between 12.00 and 15.00 hours the troops between Kyaikto and Mokpalin were very heavily bombed and machine gunned by aircraft which were considered by many people to be our own. Whether this was the fact and whether the fault lay with the Army or the R.A.F. was not satisfactorily cleared up at the time.

By 18.30 hours on 21st H.Q. 48 Brigade and 1/4 G.R. were established in Mokpalin with the remaining battalions of the Brigade supporting them and seven miles further south as laid down by Divisional H.Q.

The 16 and 46 Brigades spent the night 21/22nd on the road between Kyaikto and Mokpalin and the time of start for the 22nd was fixed between the Brigadiers concerned. It was agreed that 16 and 46 Brigades M.T. should start at about 03 00 hours, in that order, followed by 16 Brigade and 46 Brigade. By 06.00 hours the whole of the troops in the rear of the column were on the move.

100. *Situation about the Sittang Bridge.* We must now return to the head of the column.

The movement from the Quarries started at 04.00 hours on 22nd February with the 1/4 G.R. leading, followed by Divisional H.Q. and H.Q. 48 Indian Infantry Brigade.

The 1/4 G.R. were given the task of protecting the west bank of the bridge against parachute attack and the bridgehead was still therefore dangerously weak. The passage of M.T.

across the river was completely held up for three hours by a 3-ton lorry which got off the roadway. Movement did not therefore start again till 06.30 hours.

At 08.30 hours, as the 7/10 Baluch was marching through the railway cutting immediately east of the bridge, the enemy put in a heavy attack from the north-east of the bridgehead. One and a half companies of the 3 Burma Rifles holding that sector were forced back and the attack went through almost to the end of the bridge itself. An Advance Dressing Station north of the bridge was overcome. The A.D.M.S., D.A.D.M.S. and all medical personnel were taken prisoner. Two companies of the 4/12 F.F.R. at once counter attacked and re-took the original position on the north and north-east of the perimeter. The Battalion was supported by the 7/10 Baluch. The bridgehead was again lost and re-taken later. D Company 2 D.W.R. then on the west bank was ordered across the River and took up a position on the south-east of the bridgehead perimeter. The ferries immediately above the bridge were destroyed in view of the situation and there was no communication with the remaining battalions or brigades which were still a considerable distance on the far side of the river.

At about 14.00 hours the bridgehead was shelled. About this time two platoons of 1/3 G.R. reached the bridgehead. It transpired later that the 2/5 R.G.R. and 1/3 G.R. had staged an attack on the enemy between them and the bridgehead. These platoons, whilst taking part in the attack, had lost direction in the dense jungle. They were subsequently employed in the defence of the bridgehead. During the remainder of 22nd and during the night heavy pressure continued on the bridgehead. The original garrison had had considerable casualties and 1/4 G.R. less one company were brought up to reinforce it. In spite of heavy fire stragglers started to come in via the river bank from the south—all telling the same story of troops ambushed, cut up and scattered. It seemed as if no unit of the Division remained intact, and as the enemy pressure gradually increased the Commander 48 Brigade after consulting the Divisional Commander by telephone and obtaining his consent, decided to blow the bridge before daylight on the 23rd.

At 05.30 hours on the morning of the 23rd, after very heavy fighting, the bridge was blown.

The destruction of the bridge left the other two Brigades and two battalions of 48 Brigade on the far side of the River in a very precarious position and it is necessary now to return to the story of their action on 22nd.

At about 08.45 hours on 22nd heavy fire was opened on 3/7 G.R., the leading battalion of 46 Brigade, an immediate counter attack failed to dislodge the enemy and further attacks developed on both flanks. 5/17 Dogras and one company 2 D.W.R. endeavoured to deal with these attacks but while doing so a further attack was made on the rearguard—2 D.W.R. Severe casualties were sustained on both sides.

101. *Bridgehead recaptured.* About 10.00 hours Brigadier Ekin, Commander 46 Brigade, organised a sweeping movement through the jungle which enabled the troops on the road to move forward and join 16 Brigade, three miles further on. This Brigade was also by this

time heavily attacked. This action continued till dark on 22nd and the column under the Brigadier 46 Brigade encountered about 20 00 hours a large enemy force moving up the railway line on Mokpalin. By now the forces involved were much split up and various elements eventually made their way through the jungle and crossed the river higher up. Meanwhile Brigadier Jones, 16 Indian Infantry Brigade had been fighting hard and a number of gallant counter attacks had been carried out by battalions of that Brigade and the Gurkha battalions of 48 Brigade which were cut off from the bridge. By 09.00 hours on the morning of 23rd he had cleared the enemy from the bridgehead and organised its defence with his own Brigade, two battalions of 48 Brigade and portions of all three battalions of 46 Brigade. He also had the Divisional Artillery and most of the M.T. with him. By this time, however, the bridge had been blown and there were no boats.

Very determined attacks supported by artillery and air bombing were still being made by the enemy from the south and east and there was no hope of organised withdrawal. Brigadier Ekin now succeeded in joining 16 Indian Infantry Brigade and after discussion it was decided that the only course possible was to start withdrawal by every means possible before disorganisation became complete.

Great credit is due to those officers and men who held their positions to the last to cover the withdrawal of the others and the evacuation, so far as it was possible, of the wounded. Many men swam the River, a most formidable undertaking involving nearly an hour in the water. A large number who attempted it were unfortunately drowned in the attempt. Others crossed, under fire all the time, on improvised rafts on which they carried such of the wounded as they could collect. Others with the aid of ropes collected in Mokpalin crossed the gap between the remains of the bridge, also under fire. A number of others who could not swim, forced their way through the jungle and crossed some miles higher up, where the River is narrower, in boats or rafts. Quite a number did not get back to our lines for many days, or in a few cases weeks, afterwards.

It has only been possible to obtain the names of a few of those who performed outstanding acts of gallantry on this day. Many swam the River again and again under fire bringing over parties of wounded and the whole episode, disastrous as it was, is a magnificent example of heroism on the part of all ranks of the forces engaged. The fact that a large proportion of men eventually rejoined their units shows that at no time was there any disposition to surrender to the enemy. Brigadier Ekin swam the River about 15.00 hours and Brigadier Jones about an hour later. Although many of the troops were able to make good their escape few were able to bring back their arms and practically all transport and equipment had to be abandoned. Many of the transport mules which had been turned loose swam the River on their own and joined up with other units which had mules.

102. *Condition of Troops.* From this date onwards none of the Infantry Brigades concerned could be regarded as more than remnants, ready to defend themselves doggedly but otherwise unfit for any of the normal operations of

war. If they could have been pulled out for a few weeks to rest and refit, and if it had been possible to provide their deficiencies in personnel, equipment and transport, no doubt they would have recovered. In existing conditions this was of course impossible and after only a short pause they were again engaged in the severe fighting at Pegu which eventually culminated in the loss of Rangoon.

It was afterwards ascertained that the enemy had brought up for this action part at any rate of another Division—the 33rd. This Division moved via Paan and jungle tracks north east of the Thaton-Bilin-Kyaikto road and was no doubt intended to annihilate our forces east of the River Sittang. Our timely withdrawal, however, prevented his carrying out his plan in full. By forced marches he was able to launch an attack on the bridgehead at the Sittang and thus bring about its premature destruction. He was also able to ambush our columns on the march and inflict heavy casualties. The success of the latter operation was no doubt partly due to the disorganisation caused by the bombing already referred to. It is interesting to note that it was reported by stragglers that the tracks used by the enemy were most carefully marked with paper arrows and that the enemy undoubtedly had the assistance of local guides.

There is no doubt that the battle of the River Sittang was nothing less than a disaster. Except for about two battalions which both suffered heavy casualties the Division had lost practically all its equipment, transport, guns and ammunition. The men that were eventually collected had in some cases retained their rifles but many had lost them in crossing the River Sittang and others had had in addition to discard some of their uniform including even their boots. Their morale was naturally low and many were utterly exhausted. Steps were of course immediately taken to distribute such transport, arms, clothing and equipment as could be made available, though this amounted to little. A large number of men who were unarmed had to be put on trains and evacuated to reinforcement camps up country where they could be rested, re-armed and equipped. Owing to transportation difficulties many of them did not rejoin their units until after the loss of Prome. The 46 Indian Infantry Brigade had to be broken up and many units were amalgamated or re-distributed, among these were 5/17 Dogras, 7/10 Baluch, 1/7 Gurkhas, 3/7 Gurkhas, 1/3 Gurkhas. The following table shows the state of battalions of 17 Indian Division on the evening of 24th February.

STATE OF INFANTRY OF 17 INDIAN DIVISION (EVENING 24TH FEBRUARY)

| Bde. | Bn. | B.Os. | V.C Os | O.Rs. | Rifles | Brens | T.S. M.Gs. |
|---|------------------------|-------|--------|-------|--------|-------|------------|
| 16 | 2 K O.Y.L.I. | 6 | | 200 | 50 | 2 | 2 |
| | 1/9 R. Jats | 8 | 10 | 550 | 50 | | 2 |
| | 1/7 G.R. | 6 | 4 | 290 | 50 | 2 | |
| | 8 Burma Rifles | 3 | 3 | 90 | 60 | 2 | |
| Total 16 th Bde. | | 23 | 17 | 1,130 | 210* | 6 | 4 |
| 46 | 7/10 Baluchi | 5 | 3 | 200 | 90 | | 2 |
| | 5/17 Dogra | 1 | 3 | 100 | 70 | | |
| | 3/7 G.R. | 5 | 5 | 160 | 30 | | |
| | 2 D.W.R. | 16 | | 300 | 150 | 4 | 6 |
| Total 46 Bde. | | 27 | 11 | 760 | 340* | 4 | 8 |
| 48 | 1/3 G R | 3 | 4 | 100 | 40 | 5 | 8 |
| | 1/4 G R. | 12 | 18 | 650 | 600 | 30 | 30 |
| | 2/5 R G R | 6 | 6 | 215 | 30 | 2 | 2 |
| | 4/12 F F.R. | 9 | 13 | 480 | 200 | 9 | 16 |
| Total 48 Bde | | 30 | 41 | 1,445 | 870* | 46 | 56 |
| Total Div | | 80 | 69 | 3,335 | 1,420* | 56 | 68 |
| Approximate Deficiency | | 100 | 65 | 4,500 | 5,800 | 300 | 300 |
| Immediate deficiency of weapons | | | | | 1,700 | 120 | 100 |

* Note the small number of rifles available

IX.—PEGU AND THE LOSS OF RANGOON.

103. *Troops available.* On the 23rd February, I met the Commander 17 Indian Division near Pegu and was able to ascertain the state of the Division. One squadron of tanks was now available for operations and as it could not get across the Sittang-Rangoon

River canal at Waw it was decided to concentrate and reorganise the remnants of the 17 Indian Division in the area Waw-Pegu.

In addition to the 17 Indian Division the forces that now became available were 7 Armoured Brigade which included 7 Hussars, 2 R. Tanks and 414 Bty. R.H.A. The Cameronians were attached to the Armoured

Brigade as a motorised regiment and the 1 W. Yorks were still watching the coastal area to the south of Pegu.

104. *Fighting in front of Pegu.* On 26th February and succeeding days there was considerable fighting about Waw where for the first time Burma Traitor forces took an active part in operations. The enemy, unwilling to meet our tanks in the open now attempted to work across the plains by night with the object of infiltrating into the jungle to the west of the main road from Pegu to Toungoo. This road was cut at Pyinbon on the 25th but the situation was restored by the Armoured Brigade. Unfortunately there were not sufficient troops available to close the gap between 17 Indian Division and the Burma Brigade at Nyaunglebin so that this gap of some 30 miles remained open to enemy penetration.

In view of the convincing reports of enemy infiltration through the Yomas with the object of cutting the Prome road and also the bad reports about the internal situation in that area, one squadron of tanks and a company of 1 W. Yorks were sent back to Tharrawaddy on 27th February. This place held a very important dump of supplies and petrol which at this time was quite unguarded. In view of subsequent events it was fortunate that this move was carried out. About the same time the remnants of 16 Indian Infantry Brigade, which was very weak, was withdrawn to Hlegu, the location of Divisional H.Q. A further appreciation dealing with the probable course of enemy action was despatched on the 27th February. This dealt with the probable future action of the enemy and foretold the probability of his infiltrating across the open country west of the Sittang by night into the close jungle of the Pegu Yomas, and eventually cutting the Rangoon-Prome road. It went on to describe the action taken or proposed to be taken and finished up by stating that the prospects of the successful defence of Rangoon in the absence of the early arrival of the 7 Australian Division (which was at that time expected) were not good.

In view of the general situation at this time the question of carrying out the demolition and evacuation of Rangoon had to be kept under constant review. This was especially necessary as the 1 W. Yorks which had been covering Syrian refineries from the sea had had to be withdrawn to assist in the defence of Pegu. The coast line was therefore undefended and except for some small detachments close to Syriam there was nothing to prevent the enemy landing a force to seize the refineries. A final decision was, however, postponed in view of the anticipated arrival of reinforcements and the probability of a visit from General Wavell to discuss future policy. He arrived on 1st March.

On 1st March, Brigadier Cowan assumed command of 17 Indian Division. On 2nd and 3rd March the enemy occupied Waw in some strength and an attack by the Armoured Brigade and Cameronians, though partially successful, failed to clear it completely.

On 4th March I flew to Toungoo where H.Q. 1 Burma Division had just arrived. 2 Burma Brigade was still in Nyaunglebin and a successful little operation had recently been carried out by Brigadier Bourke against Shwegyin where there was a considerable number of

Burmans led by Japanese officers. In accordance with my instructions, the Divisional Commander was to concentrate as many of his troops as possible south of Toungoo but it must be remarked that in addition to two battalions of the Burma Rifles and some Frontier Force columns he had only a total of three Indian battalions in his Division. Some of the Burma Rifles had already deserted with their arms (under an officer) and others were known to be shaky.

On 3/4th March the enemy had occupied Kyaikhla (south-west of Waw) and Payagyi 12 miles north of Pegu on the Toungoo road. An attack by tanks and infantry was launched in the late afternoon of the 4th against the latter. Considerable casualties were inflicted and a gun and mortar were captured, but the force available was insufficient to prevent further penetration in this area. Meanwhile the enemy had occupied Tandawgyi close to Payagyi.

105. *Pegu Road cut.* On the 5th I visited H.Q. 17 Indian Division at Hlegu intending to go on to see 48 Indian Infantry Brigade at Pegu but the road was cut by the enemy and I was unable to proceed. The position at that time was that the 48 Brigade was holding the outskirts of Pegu while the Armoured Brigade with the Cameronians and 1 W. Yorks were acting in a mobile role in the open country to the east. Owing to the presence of many water courses and the fact that the small bunds surrounding the rice fields proved an unexpectedly serious obstacle to the tanks, their operations were much restricted.

106. *Enemy Infiltration.* The enemy, under cover of darkness, had now succeeded in passing a considerable number of troops across the open country to the north of Pegu whence he was able to cross the Pegu River and enter the thick jungle. It was no doubt his advanced troops which had cut the road west of Pegu at a place where there is thick jungle on both sides of the road. Attempts to drive back the enemy had failed and the 48 Brigade was still in no condition for offensive action.

107. *Landings on the Coast.* Meanwhile landings had been reported on the Coast west of the Rangoon River and although one ship-load of 55 well-armed "Free Burmans" under a Japanese officer had been intercepted by the Navy it was known that several hundreds of armed men, Japanese or Burmans, had landed successfully. In these circumstances there was very considerable danger that the demolition of the oil refineries might be interfered with. There were absolutely no reserves available to deal with this incursion but fortunately these forces did not show very much enterprise.

In these circumstances I ordered Major-General Cowan, who had just assumed command of 17 Indian Division, to clear the road and withdraw the 48 Brigade to Hlegu, the 16 Brigade at that place being brought back to cover Taukkyan cross roads. The action was necessitated as much by the situation at Pegu as by the fact that another enemy column stated to include tanks, which had also crossed the Pegu River, was proceeding west by a jungle track and had already passed through Paunggyi, north of Hlegu. It was obviously only a matter of hours before it would cut the Prome road north of Rangoon. The 63

Indian Infantry Brigade was at that time concentrated near Hlawga station but was still without its transport which, although the ships were then coming up the river, could not join it for 24 hours. Apart from 2 R.T.R., less one squadron, now withdrawn to Hlegu, one British battalion split up in detachments in Rangoon and Syriam, one squadron tanks and a company of 1 W. Yorks on the Prome road, there were no other troops of any value available.

108. *General Alexander arrives.* While still at Divisional H.Q. I heard that General Alexander had arrived, and I therefore suspended any action on my instructions until he had been able to visit Divisional H.Q. and judge the situation for himself.

It is necessary here to mention that on 22nd February, I received a telegram from A.B.D.A. Command stating that the War Cabinet had decided that, in view of the proposed large increase in the Army in Burma, Lieutenant-General Alexander should be appointed as Commander-in-Chief Burma, and that I should remain as C.G.S. after his arrival. I remained therefore in Burma till the end of April.

X. CONCLUSION

109. *Enemy Organisation and Methods.* Perhaps the most important characteristic of the Japanese soldier is his ability to live almost entirely on the country and to dispense with the enormous administrative organisation in rear of the fighting troops that is required by most armies.

He achieves this by being tough. He can live for five days on the rice he actually carries and he has been taught that he must reduce his expenditure of ammunition to that which he can carry. He uses any means of transport available—porters, civilians, bullock carts, boats, captured M.T., etc., but has little in the unit. His troops do not expect to be carried everywhere in M.T. The other main point is his insistence on the offensive spirit and the tactics of envelopment. Quite small forces will work round the rear of a much larger force and may succeed in defeating it entirely by bluff.

They are very thorough. There is no doubt that their officers have carefully studied the terrain of Burma and know far more about the jungle tracks than our own troops. They have arranged long ago for an intelligence service, for local guides, etc. They do not hesitate to fight in plain clothes or enemy uniform if it suits their purpose and, although they may deny any deliberate policy of committing atrocities, both officers and men often kill or maim prisoners or wounded after capture in a most brutal and coldblooded manner. They neglect enemy wounded completely—even more than they do their own.

Owing to the weakness of their administrative organisation, there is likely to be a considerable pause between the main phases of an operation. Furthermore if they lose the initiative they may well run short of either food or ammunition, or both. They are extremely careless as regards protective dispositions and in the presence of an enterprising enemy could be made to pay dearly. They do not like being attacked and when the day comes to take the offensive there is little doubt among our troops of their ability to defeat them.

In the jungle they make great use of whistle signals and battle cries, a method which our troops have tried to imitate. It is worth considering whether bugle calls would not also be valuable. They make great use of night for infiltration and to avoid being caught in the open by armoured fighting vehicles.

110. *Reasons for Loss of Rangoon.* The main reasons for the loss of Rangoon may be summed up as:—

(a) Reinforcement too late and in insufficient numbers.

(b) Inadequacy of defence preparations in practically every respect.

(c) Unsuitable organisation and training of our own forces.

(d) The superior numbers, preparations and training of the enemy.

The battle east of the River Sittang really settled the fate of Rangoon, but the enemy preferred to await reinforcements before pushing on. The decision that the 7 Australian Division could not be spared to go to Burma and the diversion at the last moment of the East African Brigade, a strong Brigade which had seen service, removed any prospect of retrieving the situation.

The inadequacy of the defence preparations in Burma has been sufficiently brought out by the narrative above. Without a sound foundation of this kind it is very difficult to make the best use of reinforcements thrown in at the last moment and throughout the campaign there has been the immediate menace of an administrative breakdown.

We had failed to secure the support of the local population or to arrest the leaders of disaffected elements. Owing to our failure to reinforce in time the enemy was nearly always a march ahead of us. It is easy to see that even one more infantry brigade received early in January would have sufficed to turn the scale in practically every battle from Kawkaik to Rangoon.

Throughout the operations the enemy was in superior numbers, usually about two to one on the actual battle front. Any idea that the Army in Burma during this period was driven back by inferior numbers is entirely incorrect.

111. *Training.* The lack of troops specially trained and equipped for jungle warfare, as compared with the specialist troops brought against them, or indeed troops sufficiently trained to take part in operations against an organised enemy in considerably superior numbers, was a very important factor.

112. *Burma Rifles.* Attempts had been made to turn the personnel of the Burma Rifles into regular soldiers of the standard pattern. Had they been suitably organised, trained and equipped as a frontier corps specially for jungle warfare, and placed under selected officers they might have been invaluable.

113. *Burma Frontier Force.* The Burma Frontier Force came under Army control for operations only at the commencement of the war. The Frontier Force had recently been expanded and was composed largely of good Indian material, but had few officers. It would have paid to have sent many of the good E.C.Os. available to the Frontier Force instead of to the Burma Rifles. The fire power of battalions was restricted by an insufficiency of mortars and automatics, which were not

available in quantity until after the war with Japan had broken out, and units were then required to employ them in action before they had time to learn the efficient use of them. Owing to the fact that in peace there were no major frontier problems in Burma, the Burma Frontier Force were not ready or trained for serious war and units were further handicapped during action by the fact that they had an excess of baggage and transport, and that their peace time system of administration was quite unsuitable for war. These factors affected the efficiency of the Burma Frontier Force and as a consequence it offered little resistance to the enemy.

114. *Jungle Warfare.* As regards the British and Indian Army units, the jungle has never, whether in India or Burma, been regarded as a "good training area." In the former this was understandable at a period when practically all the troops available were earmarked for Mid-East. In Burma it was incomprehensible. Jungle warfare was obviously inevitable if Burma were attacked and it is well-known to require a very high standard of training.

115. *Organisation and Equipment.* As regards organisation and equipment, most of the units in Burma, or which came to Burma from India, were on a mixed scale of M.T. and Pack. This I am now convinced was thoroughly unsound as units tended to get tied to roads and were unable to move across country with the same freedom as the Japanese. It introduced a road bound mentality among both officers and men. It has also provided the enemy with an admirable form of tactics, which consists in placing road blocks at suitable defiles behind our lines, so placed that they had to be cleared up before M.T. could pass.

In a country like Burma, or in any country without many roads and not normally passable to M.T., battalions should be organised entirely on a pack basis, and not with an unduly high scale of transport. All M.T. should be concentrated into a brigade unit which is tactically and administratively self-sufficient and can, if necessary, be sent to another part of the battlefield. Unless this is done, even late in the day, we shall continue to have units tied to roads and incapable of operating away from them. This organisation is equivalent to the regimental organisation which exists in foreign armies, for which it is essential we should devise some adequate substitute.

116. It is for consideration whether the demand for mechanisation and a high standard of equipment has not been overdone in recent years. For service in Europe or in the Middle East, it is no doubt justified though the Germans still retain horse transport in the infantry battalion. The Japanese have shown that a highly trained and disciplined army can achieve great things with a very light scale of equipment and no M.T. This was not only the case in the jungle and hills, but also on the plains east of Pegu and latterly both north and south of Prome. The secret, I believe, lies in the N.C.Os. of the Japanese Army, they are very highly trained, enforce very strict discipline and are given great privileges. Their soldiers are veterans and not raw recruits.

117. If all the Indian Army units did not show themselves to the best advantage in the campaign, it must be attributed to:—

(a) The presence of large numbers of recently joined and very young recruits in the ranks.

(b) A number of very recently joined officers who did not know their men and whose knowledge of Hindustani was hardly sufficient to get their confidence quickly.

(c) The effect of units being thrown into battle before they had time to collect themselves.

(d) The utterly strange conditions of warfare in the jungle.

(e) A distrust, often exaggerated, of units of the Burma Army.

As regards the latter many officers and men of all classes did well, and some units, but as a whole they were a source of serious weakness to the force of which they formed a large proportion throughout the operations.

118. *Achievements of the Army in Burma.*— There is no doubt, however, that although some units and some individuals may have failed, the Army in Burma, as a whole, fought extremely well. For many months they withstood the onslaught of superior numbers, with little reinforcement, no rest, and practically no hope of relief. During most of the time they have suffered heavily from enemy air attack and have received little or no support from our own air forces. They have had no canteens, few amenities and practically all lost their complete kit early in the campaign. The climatic conditions have been very trying. The fall of Singapore has undoubtedly had a depressing effect on morale. Discipline has naturally suffered to a considerable extent; this however has been largely due to the lack of any provost units to check straggling in the early stages.

Finally, it is fair to say that owing to the losses and hardships they had sustained, two brigades of the 17 Indian Division, i.e., about one-third the Imperial Forces that I handed over to General Alexander, were undoubtedly in no shape for a long and arduous campaign in the defence of Upper Burma, and I should like here to express my admiration for what they have achieved under his leadership. The position, however, was by no means hopeless. The remainder of the force available consisting of the Armoured Brigade, the weak 1 Burma Division (containing the 13 Indian Infantry Brigade and 1 and 2 Burma Brigades), the 63 Indian Infantry Brigade and three British battalions, had not been heavily engaged and there was also every reason to anticipate that the large Chinese forces now appearing in the field would give a good account of themselves.

Report by General the Honourable Sir Harold R. L. G. Alexander, K.C.B., C.S.I., D.S.O., M.C., on Operations in Burma from 5th March, 1942, to 20th May, 1942.

1. The following is a report on the operations of the Allied Forces in Burma from my arrival in that country on the 5th March, 1942, up to the 20th May, 1942, by which date the rear guard of the Imperial Forces had withdrawn into India.

2. I arrived by air at 12.00 hours on the 4th March at Dum Dum aerodrome Calcutta, where I met the Commander-in-Chief in India,

General Sir Archibald Wavell, and there he gave me a resumé of the situation in Burma and a verbal directif to the following effect:—

“ The retention of Rangoon was a matter of vital importance to our position in the Far East and every effort must be made to hold it. If, however, that was not possible the force must not be allowed to be cut off and destroyed but must be withdrawn from the Rangoon area for the defence of Upper Burma. This must be held as long as possible in order to safeguard the oil fields at Yenangyaung, keep contact with the Chinese and protect the construction of the road from Assam to Burma.”

PART I.—OPERATIONS RESULTING IN THE LOSS OF RANGOON.

3. After this conference with the Commander-in-Chief I flew to Magwe, which I reached that evening. On the morning of the 5th March I flew to Rangoon, arriving at Army Headquarters at midday.

4.* *Situation at the Time of my Arrival.* On arrival at Army Headquarters I found that General Hutton was away at the front, and, in his absence, the situation was explained to me by the staff as follows:—

17 Indian Division were holding the area Pegu-Hlegu with—48 Infantry Brigade and 7 Armoured Brigade in area Pegu; 16 Infantry Brigade—Hlegu.

Both these Infantry Brigades were very weak and disorganised as explained in General Hutton's Report.

63 Infantry Brigade, having just disembarked, was at Hlawga, sixteen miles north of Rangoon, but its transport was still on board ship.

1 Burma Division having handed over the defence of Southern Shan States to Chinese Sixth Army was located:—

13 Indian Infantry Brigade—Mawchi.

1 Burma Brigade—Pyu.

2 Burma Brigade—Nyaunglebin.

There was a gap of 40 miles between forward elements of 1 Burma Division and 17 Division. There were Japanese forces in Waw and the neighbouring villages north and north-east of Pegu, and in addition Japanese columns had been infiltrating across the Sittang River between Pegu and Nyaunglebin under cover of darkness for some days. These had entered the Pegu Yomas, the jungle country north and north-west of Pegu.

5.* *Operations at Pegu.* In view of this situation, which looked, to say the least, serious, I set off at once for the Headquarters of 17 Division at Hlegu where I met General Hutton and Major-General Cowan, commanding 17 Division. The situation was here explained to me again but in more detail and General Hutton told me of the orders for the evacuation of Rangoon which he wished to issue but had held up pending my arrival. I was not satisfied that Rangoon could not be held but it appeared to me that the only course of action which could save the situation was to effect a junction between 1 Burma Division and 17 Division with the object of preventing any further Japanese infiltration into the Yomas. I accordingly ordered 17 Division to carry out offensive

operations against the Japanese at Waw and in the neighbouring villages with a view to relieving pressure on their immediate front, and at the same time I ordered 2 Infantry Brigade of 1 Burma Division to advance south from Nyaunglebin to join hands with 17 Division. The offensive carried out on 5th March by the 17 Division and part of the Armoured Brigade from Pegu was locally successful but during this operation the Japanese attacked from the wooded country bordering Pegu on the west and succeeded in capturing a part of the town. Considerable fighting took place there on 6th March but 17 Division were not successful in ejecting the Japanese. Meanwhile, the wider enemy encircling movement which had been in progress when I arrived had developed, and the road from Rangoon south-west of Pegu which had been under snipers' fire on 5th March was definitely cut on 6th March.

6. *Decision to withdraw from Rangoon.* Counter-attacks to open the road failed and I then ordered 63 Indian Infantry Brigade to be put at the disposal of the Commander 17 Division.

An attack on 6th March by this Infantry Brigade to open the road was not successful and the situation by noon on this day was as follows:—

The troops cut off in Pegu consisted of—
7 Hussars, 48 Indian Infantry Brigade, 1 W. Yorks, and 1 Cameronians.

† There was further confirmation that a force of 2,000 Japanese previously reported by Burma Frontier Force patrols had passed through Paungyi about 30 miles north of Hlegu and was moving in a south-westerly direction.

‡ It was also confirmed about this time that a number of traitor Burmans with Japanese officers had landed at the mouth of the Rangoon River, threatening the Syriam refineries where there was only a small garrison.

In view of this situation I considered that the retention of Rangoon was quite impossible with the comparatively small forces at my disposal, dispersed as they were and with part of them already encircled.

I therefore decided that the right course of action was to order the destruction of the oil refineries at Syriam, the evacuation of Rangoon and the regrouping of my forces north of Rangoon in the Irrawaddy valley. The order to put the Denial Scheme into operation was issued at midnight on the 6th March.

7. *Force cut off and breaks out at Taukkyan.* On the morning of the 7th March, Army Headquarters, administrative units and troops not required to cover the demolitions in Rangoon area moved out of Rangoon on the Prome road. Near Taukkyan, twenty-one miles north of Rangoon at about 11.00 hours, the leading vehicles of Army Headquarters ran into an enemy road block and the column was held up. Attempts by the 1 Glosters, 2/13 F.F. Rifles and some tanks of the 7 Hussars throughout the day failed to clear the block. It must be remembered here that the force in Pegu was still cut off, all the efforts on the 6th March of the 63 Infantry Brigade to relieve it having been unsuccessful.

* See General Hutton's Report, Section IX.

† See General Hutton's Report, paras. 104, 106 and 107.

On the 7th March, however, the force in Pegu was ordered to cut its way out and this it eventually succeeded in doing with the loss of some of its transport. Meanwhile, 63 Infantry Brigade had concentrated near Hlegu and it was decided to use this brigade to attack the road block north of Taukkyan early on the 8th March, strongly supported by tanks and artillery.

This attack of 63 Infantry Brigade was unsuccessful in effecting an immediate clearance of the road block. The situation was very serious but such troops of 16 Indian Infantry Brigade as were available were collected from Hlegu, together with some tanks, and another attack was carried out later in the morning. This attack succeeded. The road block was found to be clear and, although there was a good deal of sniping which made it necessary to piquet the route with the 16 Infantry Brigade, the column moved north without further serious interference. That this was possible was partly due to the fact that the Japanese, in their eagerness to reach Rangoon, had passed further round our left flank and were actually entering the north-west outskirts of the town as our troops were moving north through the road block.

While the column, consisting of Army Headquarters, administrative units, etc., moved northwards from Taukkyan, the withdrawal of the remainder of 17 Division from Pegu and Hlegu continued. On the night of the 8th March, 17 Division (less a detachment of tanks and infantry which had been sent to keep open the road Taukkyan—Tharrawaddy) was concentrated in the Taukkyan area. It may be remarked here that intensive bombing attacks by the enemy could have done great damage, as the whole force was now concentrated in a comparatively small area.

That this did not take place was due to the temporary but complete ascendancy which had been established by the R.A.F. during recent Japanese attacks in which the enemy had sustained very severe losses. The few enemy bombers which did attempt to attack the Taukkyan area were kept at a great height by our light and heavy anti-aircraft artillery.

The move northwards from Taukkyan was commenced on the morning of 9th March.

My intention was to concentrate 17 Division in the area Thonze—Tharrawaddy—Letpadan and to hold the line Henzada—Sanywe Ferry—Thonze—Thonze Chaung.

The withdrawal from Taukkyan was without enemy interference and concentration in the new area was completed by evening of 11th March.

8. *Effect of the Loss of Rangoon.* The effect of the loss of Rangoon was very serious, since it is the only point of entry to Burma through which personnel and supplies can be moved in large numbers.

9. Rangoon was the base port for Burma and after the fall of that city the army was fighting facing its former base and with no L. of C. behind it. In the absence of a road to India the army was virtually cut off from outside assistance and could be supplied only with the very limited numbers of personnel and small quantities of stores which could be brought in by air. Base and L. of C.

installations and reserves of various commodities had already been moved north of Rangoon and this back loading had to continue throughout the withdrawal, which placed an enormous strain on the administrative machine and on the transportation agencies. Civil heavy repair installations in the Rangoon area which could not be moved were lost altogether and the maintenance of mechanical transport and equipment became a matter of great difficulty.

10. The destruction of the refineries, where the refining of all crude oil from the oil fields had been carried out, very much reduced the output of motor and aviation spirit and lubricating oils and rendered the Allied Forces in Burma dependent on such spirit as could be produced by improvised methods in the oil fields themselves, when reserve stocks had been consumed.

11. The loss of the Rangoon aerodromes with their efficient warning system had the most serious consequences for the R.A.F. and on the air situation in Burma. This will be touched on in more detail in a later paragraph.

12. Turning to the enemy side of the picture, the fall of Rangoon transferred to the Japanese nearly all the advantages in communications which had previously been held by the Imperial Forces. Instead of having to supply their army by difficult mountain roads the Japanese were now able, after effecting repairs to the port, to move very large forces by sea to Burma. In fact it is not too much to say that until such time as the road from Assam to Burma was completed the retention of Upper Burma by the allies was dependent on the amount of force which the Japanese decided to employ in that theatre. The task of the allies therefore was to impose the maximum delay on the enemy and make him expend resources which he might have employed elsewhere.

PART II.—REGROUPING OF FORCES CONSEQUENT ON THE FALL OF RANGOON.

13. A period of comparative quiet followed the withdrawal from Rangoon. Apparently, at this time the enemy was resting and re-fitting in the Rangoon area whilst his propaganda machine exploited to the full the fall of the city. This period of quiet was most welcome as my forces were badly in need of rest and reorganisation.

14. Having failed in my primary task of holding Rangoon, I now had to consider my secondary task which was the retention of Upper Burma. In order to achieve this it was necessary to regroup the forces.

15. *The Situation on the Irrawaddy Front* At this stage the 17 Division was reforming in the area Thonze—Tharrawaddy—Letpadan and carrying out reconnaissances with a view to the selection of the most suitable ground on which to fight the enemy in the Irrawaddy valley. In view of the situation on the Toungoo front, a position around Prome and south of that town was finally chosen as offering the best ground for future operations.

16. *The Situation on the Toungoo Front, Arrival of the Chinese Fifth Army.* To divert attention from the Irrawaddy front, 1 Burma

Division made on 11th March an attack to clear the villages of Shwegyin and Madouk. This operation, which was carried out by the 1 Burma Rifles and the 5/1 Punjab Regiment, was successful, and on its completion 1 Burma Division, less 13 Infantry Brigade, was withdrawn to the area north of Kanyutkwin.

17. In reorganising my forces it was necessary to have more strength in the Irrawaddy valley. I therefore arranged for the Chinese Fifth Army to relieve the 1 Burma Division on the Toungoo front so that this Division could be brought across into the Irrawaddy valley, and concentrated there with the 17 Division. The date on which this could take place was dependent on the moves of the Chinese Fifth Army and it was not until the third week of March that the relief of the 1 Burma Division could be effected. Up to that time the 1 Burma Division, which had been covering the concentration of the Chinese, fought a delaying action back on Toungoo. It would have been possible, had the Chinese agreed, to have handed over to them a large area south of Toungoo. They were not however willing to go south of that place and it became necessary to give up this area or to abandon the concentration of the Imperial Forces in the Irrawaddy valley. This I could not afford to do.

18. During the same period, the 17 Division, in order to conform with the gradual withdrawal of the 1 Burma Division, commenced to move back towards the Prome area. To keep touch with events on the Toungoo front, columns from Frontier Force units were stationed in the Pegu Yomas to give warning and to prevent any Japanese infiltration through this area. Other light forces were also stationed west of the Irrawaddy to intercept enemy penetration on this bank of the River. Advanced detachments consisting of tanks and lorry-borne infantry were ordered to operate southwards along the Prome road towards Rangoon to delay and harass any Japanese forces moving north. The only engagement of any note which took place was an attack by the 1 Glosters supported by tanks against forces of Japanese and traitor Burmans at Letpadan on the 19th March. This attack was successful in capturing the town and inflicting losses on the enemy.

19. *Formation of a Corps Headquarters.* The concentration of the Imperial Forces now necessitated the formation of a Corps, especially as at this stage I was nominally in command of all Chinese forces operating in Burma. I therefore requested G.H.Q. India to supply me with a Corps Commander and a skeleton Corps Headquarters. The Corps Commander, in the person of Lieut.-General W. J. Slim, M.C., arrived on the 19th March and took over Command of the Corps (1 Burcorps) but, owing to the limitations of air transport, a skeleton Corps Headquarters could not be provided from India and the staff and signals had to be found from Burma Army resources.

20. *Arrival of General Stilwell.* On the 12th March I went to Maymyo, now the centre of the Civil Government, which had been selected as, the only suitable location for my headquarters. On the 14th March General Stilwell of the American Army arrived and informed me that he had come to take over command of the Fifth and Sixth Chinese Armies.

General Stilwell had only a small staff and no signal communications of his own, so that this arrangement did not appear very satisfactory. It was, however, the Generalissimo's order and I could not interfere, but I informed G.H.Q. India by telegram of this new development.

21. *My Visit to Chungking.* At this time I decided to go to Chungking for the purpose of paying my respects to the Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek, to explain to him the military situation in Burma, and to ensure that he was satisfied with the administrative arrangements which had been made for his troops. Accordingly I left Maymyo by air on the 24th March. I was warmly received by the Chinese and had several very satisfactory talks with the Generalissimo, at the last of which he expressed the wish for unity of command of the Imperial and Chinese Forces in Burma, and asked me to accept the command of all his troops in that country. On my return to Maymyo I informed General Stilwell of the Generalissimo's wishes and he readily agreed to serve under me as Supreme Commander in Burma. I should like to take this opportunity to add that General Stilwell and his American staff could not have been more loyal or more co-operative throughout the campaign. General Stilwell had my complete confidence. He was obviously liked and trusted by the Chinese, and he understood them and spoke their language.

22. *System of Command of the Chinese Armies.* Nevertheless, I must state here that the system of command of the Chinese forces in Burma was far from satisfactory. Nominally, I commanded all the Allied Forces. General Stilwell commanded the Chinese Fifth and Sixth Armies but he had to issue all his orders through a Chinese commander, General Lo Cho-Ying. There was, however, a system of liaison officers working under the Generalissimo and it appeared that no orders of a major nature issued by myself, by General Stilwell or by General Lo could be carried out unless they had the sanction of the Generalissimo, which had to be obtained through the latter's Liaison Mission, whose head was General Lin Wei at Lashio, and who in turn had a forward liaison officer in General Hou at Maymyo. Such an arrangement was obviously quite unsuitable for modern war since quick decisions for the employment of the Chinese forces were impossible to obtain and this, together with the almost total lack of knowledge of staff duties which existed in the Chinese forces, caused considerable delay in the execution of vital movements.

23. *Concentration of 1 Burcorps.* The move of 1 Burma Division, on relief by the 200 Chinese Division, to the Irrawaddy front commenced on the night of 21st-22nd March. Owing to the difficulties of communication between the Toungoo and Irrawaddy valleys, the bulk of the 1 Burma Division was despatched by rail and road via Pynmana and Taungdwingyi. The 5 Burma Rifles proceeded by march route from Toungoo to Prome over the Yomas. On the 25th March the newly formed 1 Burcorps issued orders for the concentration of the Corps in the area Allanmyo-Prome with 1 Burma Division in the area Dayindabo - Kyankpadaung - Allanmyo - Thayetmyo, 17 Division in area Wettigan-Prome-Shwedaung-Sinde, 7 Armoured Brigade in the area of Tamagauk in Corps reserve. The

defence of the area was based on the two brigade groups in Allanmyo and Prome, the remainder of the force being mobile and prepared to act offensively. On the Irrawaddy the detachment of the Royal Marines, which had covered the demolitions at Syriam, found the crews for a river patrol.

24. *Operations resulting in the Loss of Toungoo.* On the Toungoo front the concentration of the Chinese Fifth Army was seriously delayed by the movement of the rear echelons of the Chinese Sixth Army and also by the disintegration of the railway system which was beginning to set in as a result of enemy bombing. On the 24th March, the situation on this front was as follows:—(For Chinese Order of Battle see Appendix "A").

All Imperial units had been withdrawn north of Toungoo en route to the Irrawaddy front. The 200 Division was entrenched in and around Toungoo with the divisional cavalry unit holding the river line to the south. The Fifth Army Troops were in Pyawbwe with certain units forward under command of the 200 Division. The other divisions of the Fifth Army were:—

22 Division with leading regiment arriving at Pynmana, rear formation at Lashio.

96 Division approaching the frontier.

On the 24th March, the Japanese made a surprise attack on the aerodrome north of Toungoo thus cutting off the 200 Division. The rear echelon of the 1 Burma Division, including the 23 Mountain Battery and Frontier Force Columns 1 and 4, were involved in the fighting for the aerodrome and put up a stout resistance. By the evening of the 26th March the whole of the Chinese 22 Division had been concentrated in the area Pynmana-Yedashe and the leading troops of the 96 Division were approaching Pynmana. On 28th March the 22 Division attacked south from Yedashe with the object of relieving the 200 Division at Toungoo but made little headway, and on the 1st April the 200 Division cut its way out from Toungoo, where it had been besieged for over a week, and passed through into reserve at Yezin, north of Pynmana.

25. *The Japanese establish Air Superiority.* The air situation was, as has been previously mentioned, adversely affected by the loss of the Rangoon aerodrome. At this time there were in Burma only the following aerodromes fit for operational use:—

Magwe, Akyab, Lashio, and Loiwing (in China).

There were also the following landing grounds suitable only as A.L.Gs. or for fighters:—

Namsan, Heho, Mandalay, Meiktila, Piawbwe and Shwebo.

Toungoo aerodrome had by this time been rendered untenable by enemy bombing raids.

None of the above, with the exception of Loiwing, had an efficient warning system. This was partly due to lack of essential equipment and W/T personnel and partly to hills which acted as a screen to the approach of hostile aircraft.

So far as the air was concerned, the operational advantages were now with the enemy and this was soon demonstrated in the severe reverse which was sustained by the R.A.F. at Magwe on the 21st and 22nd March when a large number of aircraft, both fighters and bombers, were destroyed on the ground. This

reverse forced the R.A.F. and the A.V.G. to withdraw from Magwe to Loiwing, 400 miles further north, and this reduced very much the effectiveness of the air force.

The supply of aircraft now became the ruling factor in the air situation in Burma. In view of the limited amount of aircraft available at this time, that is to say the end of March and the beginning of April, for the defence of India and Ceylon, it was decided that all R.A.F. units should be withdrawn from Burma, where it was uneconomical to retain aircraft in operational conditions which rendered high losses inevitable. However, an R.A.F. organisation known as "Burwing" was retained at Lashio and Loiwing and aircraft were flown over from India from time to time; but very little could be achieved in the circumstances prevailing.

That the decision to withdraw the R.A.F. to India was right there can be no doubt, but this decision left the Japanese with almost undisputed command of the air and this had a serious effect on the civil population and the working of the utility services and a somewhat lesser effect on the morale of the troops.

26. *Effect of Bombing on Public Utility Services.* At the end of March and the beginning of April, the Japanese commenced to make heavy bombing raids on centres of communication in Central and Upper Burma, raids being made on such places as Prome, Meiktila, Mandalay, Thazi, Pynmana, Maymyo, Lashio and Taunggyi.

Except for the damage to house property, the material effect of these raids was not very great but the moral effect amongst the civil population was enormous. After a heavy raid on a town, the life of that community came practically to a standstill, the population moving into the jungle. From the military aspect, the effect on the working of the public utility services was most serious. Many railway employees and I.W.T. workers in the employment of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company left their jobs. The Police force disintegrated, the power supply broke down and the Post and Telegraph service, to whom a tribute should be paid for the manner in which a large number of personnel stuck to their jobs, was affected to a lesser degree.

The effect of bombing on public utility workers was accentuated by the presence of their families, many of whom had not at this time been evacuated and it is a point for consideration in the future, that all workers in services on which military operations depend do better, when they know that their families have been removed to a place of safety.

PART III.—THE BATTLE FOR THE OILFIELDS.

27. *Operations South of Prome* On the 26th March the Japanese commenced to operate against the positions held by 1 Burcorps in the Irrawaddy valley. Prome was bombed on the 26th March and three quarters of the town was burnt. On the 27th March four to five thousand Japanese and Burmese were reported to be on the west bank of the Irrawaddy opposite Tonbo. On the same day, at the request of the Generalissimo, I despatched from Chungking a telegram ordering offensive operations on the Irrawaddy front in order to relieve pressure on the Chinese Fifth Army, which at this time was heavily engaged. On the 28th March the Japanese advance guard on the east of the

Irrawaddy attacked the 17 Division reconnaissance unit, the 1 Glosters, at Paungde and fighting continued throughout the day. Commander 1 Burcorps decided that this was a good opportunity for offensive action. Accordingly a force consisting of one armoured regiment and two infantry battalions attacked early on the 29th March and recaptured Paungde, but during the day a strong enemy force appeared at Padigon, six miles to the north. Another enemy force in considerable strength, after surprising and overcoming a commando unit on the west bank, crossed the river from Padaung and occupied Shwedaung establishing road blocks across the main road, thus cutting off the force at Paungde.

28. During the following 48 hours fierce fighting took place and, although the tactical situation was not unfavourable to the Imperial Forces, the familiar Japanese tactics of establishing road blocks in their rear forced the 17 Division to abandon their main object of destroying the enemy in the Paungde area in order to reopen their L. of C. This brought about the withdrawal of the 17 Division to the Prome area, which was completed by the evening of the 30th March. During this fighting the enemy was actively assisted by traitor Burmans and some Japanese were found to be wearing Burmese clothes. The commando unit referred to in paragraph 27 was surprised by Japanese soldiers who had disguised themselves in this manner.

29. *Withdrawal to the Dry Zone.* On the 30th March the Commander-in-Chief in India arrived by air in Burma and on the 1st April I accompanied him by air from Mandalay to Magwe, proceeding by road to Corps Headquarters at Allanmyo. At a conference which took place here on the afternoon of the 1st April the Commander-in-Chief agreed that, in view of the difficulties of the country and the fatigue of the troops in 17 Division, a withdrawal from Prome to the Allanmyo area should commence forthwith, and that this withdrawal might have to be continued even further north into the dry zone south of Taungdwingyi, where the country was more open and more suitable for the employment of tanks. On the evening of the 1st April the enemy attacked Prome and penetrated the defences held by the 63 Infantry Brigade securing the high ground south of the town. The 17 Division was forced to withdraw on the 2nd April north and north-east of Prome. On the 3rd April the 17 Division moved back through 1 Burma Division, in position in the area Dayindabopyalo, to the area Ywataung-Kyaukpadaung-Bwetkyichaung, the 48 Infantry Brigade and the 7 Armoured Brigade, less one regiment, moving during the night of the 3rd to 4th April to Sathwa. On the 3rd April 1 Burcorps issued an Operation Instruction covering the possibility of a withdrawal to the line Minhla-Taungdwingyi and the withdrawal from Prome, which was originally intended to stop at Allanmyo, was, in view of the tired state of the troops, continued to this line, which was reached by the night of the 4th-5th April except by the 2 Burma Brigade, moving up the west bank, which did not reach Minhla till the night of the 8th-9th April.

During this period the enemy air force was very active and there was a considerable

amount of bombing and machine gunning in the forward area.

30. *Dispositions for the Defence of the Oilfields.* The dispositions of 1 Burcorps on the 9th April were on the general line Minhla, Migyaungye, Nyaungyatsan, Thadodan and Taungdwingyi. It will be noted that the stretch of front from Minhla to Taungdwingyi was over 40 miles and that in consequence there was no depth. With this in mind, I had on the 4th April requested General Tu Yu Ming, commanding Chinese Fifth Army, to send one Chinese regiment* to hold Taungdwingyi so as to enable 1 Burcorps to form a reserve. General Tu informed me that he had already ordered one battalion to Taungdwingyi. The fire power of the Chinese battalion was, however, not more than that of a company of Imperial troops. A regiment was therefore promised.

After further consideration I decided that at least one Chinese division was required to hold Taungdwingyi and accordingly I asked the Generalissimo, who arrived in Maymyo on the 6th April, to make a division available for this purpose. He promised that he would do so. In the event, however, only one Chinese battalion reached the Taungdwingyi area. The failure of the Chinese to supply a division for the defence of Taungdwingyi had the most serious consequences.

31. *Lack of Information.* I feel it is necessary to comment here on the lack of intelligence at my disposal. Owing to the hostility of the local population and to the total lack of air reconnaissance, information was most difficult to get. It appeared, however, from such identifications as were obtained that 1 Burcorps were opposed only by the Japanese 33 Division but that this Division was assisted by a considerable number of traitor Burmans. On the Chinese front only the Japanese 55 Division had been identified. The operations which took place about this time illustrate clearly the advantage which the initiative confers on a highly trained force which has the assistance of the local population in a country of great distances and poor communications. The successes which the Japanese gained cannot all be ascribed to their superior training and, at this time, superior morale.

32. *Destruction of the Oilfields.* On the 10th April it became apparent that enemy columns were moving north on tracks south-west of Taungdwingyi. On the 11th April a Corps striking force consisting of the 7 Armoured Brigade and the 48 Infantry Brigade moved south to attack the most easterly of these columns. Contact was established on the morning of the 12th April and by 0800 hours the 48 Infantry Brigade was being heavily pressed and bitter fighting took place in which the Corps striking force more than held its own. Another enemy column on the east bank of the Irrawaddy was attacked by the 1 Burma Brigade. Owing to the non-arrival of the Chinese division which had been promised for the defence of Taungdwingyi, the Commander 1 Burcorps now felt that he could not continue to hold Taungdwingyi and also cover the direct approach to the oilfields, and he represented this opinion to me. To have abandoned

* A Chinese division was organised on the basis of three regiments each consisting of three battalions

Taungdwingyi would have opened the right flank and rear of the Chinese Fifth Army, whose advanced troops were still south of Pyinmana, and it would also have uncovered the communications of the Imperial Forces through Mandalay.

On the 12th April therefore, I ordered 1 Burcorps to hold Taungdwingyi at all costs. This order was received at Headquarters 1 Burcorps on the morning of the 13th April and orders were then issued for the 48 Brigade and the 7 Hussars to come under command of the 17 Division and 7 Armoured Brigade less one regiment to come under command 1 Burma Division. Enemy pressure on the 1 Burma Division south of Magwe continued on the 13th and 14th and this caused a wide gap to be opened between the two Divisions. Moving across country the enemy pushed into this gap threatening the oilfields. Orders for the destruction of the Yenangyaung oilfields were issued on the night of the 14th April and the denial scheme was successfully carried out during the following 48 hours. It required two full daylight hours to complete the destruction ending with the blowing of the power house, which took place when the Japanese were already in the outskirts of Yenangyaung.

By the 16th April 1 Burma Division, less 2 Burma Brigade on the right bank of the Irrawaddy, had withdrawn to Kadaung Chaung, seventeen miles south of Yenangyaung. The 2 K.O.Y.L.I. who had been cut off in Myingun fought their way out and rejoined their Division.

33. *The Fight at Yenangyaung.* On the 17th April the enemy established road blocks north and south of the Pinchaung, immediately north of Yenangyaung, cutting off 1 Burma Division and some of the Corps Troops. The 2 Royal Tanks and Corps Troops fought their way out north but, by the time 1 Burma Division reached Yenangyaung on the night of the 17th April, the road blocks had been re-established. After this action the greater number of the enemy dead were found to be clad in khaki uniforms and wearing felt hats of the type used by Gurkha and Burma Rifle units.

34. Meanwhile the 113 Regiment of the Chinese 38 Division had been moved from Mandalay to Kyaukpadaung and placed under command 1 Burcorps. On the morning of the 18th April this Regiment and the 2 Royal Tanks attacked the enemy road block north of the Pinchaung, but the attack went wide and failed to dislodge the enemy. An attack by 1 Burma Division failed to clear the block to the south. On the evening of the 18th April information was received that an enemy column was moving north by Magwe. During this time the 17 Division and 7 Hussars holding Taungdwingyi and Natmauk were unmolested by the enemy.

35. On the 16th and 17th April, I visited Corps Headquarters and Headquarters of the Chinese Armies at Pyawbwe. At this time, and indeed previously, I impressed on General Stilwell the importance of Meiktila as a big centre of communications and I promised that, if possible, I would make the 7 Armoured Brigade available for the defence of this place. Arrangements had already been put in hand to dump at Meiktila stocks of 87 octane spirit and lubricants and a dump of supplies had already

been formed there since the 17 Division had, at this time, to be supplied through Meiktila and Pyawbwe.

At our meeting on the 17th April, General Stilwell discussed with me his plan for a counter attack south of Pyinmana and I promised to make the 7 Hussars available to assist the Chinese in this operation and orders were issued for them to be prepared to move to Pyawbwe. On the 18th April it became clear to me that the projected Chinese counter attack would not take place and, in view of the situation on the Irrawaddy front, and in the Shan States, I again visited General Stilwell's Headquarters at Pyawbwe on the 19th, having arranged to meet the Commander 1 Burcorps there. At this meeting, I stressed the importance of holding strongly the centres of communication from Chauk to Kyaukpadaung-Meiktila-Thazi. General Stilwell and I were in full agreement and it was arranged that the whole of the 38 Chinese Division should be placed under the command of 1 Burcorps.

36. We then discussed plans for offensive action. The deep penetration made by the Japanese 33 Division at Yenangyaung appeared to present a favourable opportunity for a counter stroke but, owing to the nature and extent of the country, this was beyond the capacity of 1 Burcorps alone, as considerable forces were required merely to find the enemy should he elect to move into the jungle. General Stilwell agreed to make available for a counter stroke the 200 Chinese Division and one regiment of the 22 Division in addition to the 38 Division, and arrangements were made to set in motion the moves of these formations towards Kyaukpadaung and Ywamun as soon as possible. Having made these arrangements I accompanied the Commander 1 Burcorps to his Headquarters between Meiktila and Kyaukpadaung. On arrival there I found that the attacks of the 113 Chinese Regiment and the 2 Royal Tanks had succeeded in clearing the northern bank of the Pinchaung but that 1 Burma Division had been unable to clear the Japanese from the south bank. 1 Burma Division were being attacked by an enemy column which had moved north from Magwe and columns sent out by the 17 Division from Taungdwingyi and Natmauk had not succeeded in relieving the pressure. I told the Corps Commander that 1 Burma Division must fight its way out and that, if necessary, it would have to abandon its wheeled transport. Commander 1 Burcorps issued orders to this effect on the evening of the 19th and by the morning of the 20th 1 Burma Division had succeeded in extricating itself with the loss of a great part of its M.T. On the 21st April, 113 Chinese Regiment crossed the Pinchaung and entered the outskirts of Yenangyaung where it inflicted considerable casualties on the enemy.

37. *Operations on the Chinese Front.* At this point it is necessary to turn to the events on the Chinese front east of the Pegu Yomas. After the withdrawal of the Chinese 200 Division from Toungoo on the 1st April, the situation on the Fifth Army front was as follows:—

- the 22 Division at Yedashe,
- the 96 Division in the area Pyinmana,
- the 200 Division in the area Yezin with Fifth Army Headquarters at Pyawbwe.

The position of this army was not unsatisfactory as it was holding a comparatively narrow front in great depth. There was a lull in the fighting until the 7th April when the Japanese advanced from Toungoo and attacked the 22 Division in and about Yedashe. Heavy fighting followed and 22 Division suffered severe casualties until it was relieved by the 96 Division and was withdrawn north of Pynmana on the 18th April.

38. The loss of Toungoo opened up to the enemy the road to Karenni and the Shan States via Mawchi. The Japanese were not slow to take advantage of this opportunity and, on the 5th April, began to develop pressure in this direction. At first the movement was comparatively slow but later, when enemy reinforcements arrived, the momentum rapidly increased especially as there was a failure on the part of the Chinese to carry out the demolitions which had been prepared. Unfortunately the two important bridges at Toungoo and Bawlake were not blown but the demolitions on the Toungoo-Mawchi road were gallantly blown by the Karen Levies after the Chinese had retreated. In these operations the Levies suffered considerable casualties. Karenni and the Shan States were held by the Chinese Sixth Army consisting of 55, 49 and the 93 Divisions. Owing to the great length of the front, the Sixth Army was much strung out and had only a small reserve in the Loilem area.

39. At the beginning of April, Karenni was held by one regiment of the 55 Division but, as a result of the Japanese threat to this front, the whole of the 55 Division concentrated to the south of Loikaw by the 18th April. On the 14th April, Japanese tanks were reported in the Mawchi area and, on the 19th April, an engagement took place 20 miles south of Loikaw. On the 20th April a further Japanese attack was made seven miles north of Loikaw from the direction of Mongpai and, at the same time, the encounter south of Loikaw developed into a major battle. Some days prior to this it had been decided to evacuate Kengtung and some units of the 93 Division had already moved west on the Salween, but the great distances and lack of transport made the formation of a reserve by Chinese Sixth Army very difficult. The position in the Southern Shan States was now serious and it will be seen from later paragraphs in my despatch that it was the situation there which affected the whole of my future plans.

PART IV.—PLANS IN THE EVENT OF WITHDRAWAL NORTH OF MANDALAY.

40. *Initial Appreciation.* Towards the end of March it became necessary to consider future policy as regards the defence of Upper Burma in the event of the loss of Mandalay and, under my direction, an appreciation was prepared by my staff. The principal factors which influenced me at this time were:—

(a) The need to give the Chinese Armies every possible assistance with a view to keeping China in the war, and

(b) The gaining of time to allow India to build up her defences and to complete the roads from Assam to Burma and from India to China via the Hukawng Valley.

41. Accordingly the outline plan, which was drawn up as a result of this appreciation, contemplated the following dispositions in the event of the loss of Mandalay:—

(a) *The Chinese Sixth Army (in the Shan States)*—Troops east of the River Salween to withdraw on Puerh. Troops west of the River Salween to withdraw towards Hsipaw and Lashio

(b) *Chinese Fifth Army* to withdraw astride the Mandalay-Lashio Road.

(c) *Imperial Forces*—In order to maintain touch with the Chinese, the 7 Armoured Brigade and one infantry brigade of the 17 Division to accompany the Chinese Fifth Army.

(d) The 17 Division, less one infantry brigade, to withdraw on the axis Mandalay-Shwebo-Katha covering the projected route to China via the Hukawng Valley.

(e) 1 Burma Division to cover the approaches to India through Kalewa.

The appreciation and plan were approved by the Commander-in-Chief in India during his visit to Burma on the 31st March and 1st April.

A draft directive, dated the 4th April, was issued to 1 Burcorps on the 6th April and this was subsequently confirmed in an Operation Instruction. Administrative arrangements were also put in hand to implement this plan.

42. *Rice Situation.* During the first half of April, however, it became apparent that, owing to the gradual loss of the rice producing areas in Burma, to the closing of rice mills and the difficulties of collecting sufficient grain, to the disintegration of the railways and the famine in Yunnan, it would be impossible to accumulate in Lashio or beyond, sufficient stocks of rice to feed the Chinese armies for more than a few weeks. Therefore, on the plan as it stood, a withdrawal north of Mandalay would probably mean the starvation of the Chinese armies unless supplies could be sent from China and this seemed highly improbable. I therefore decided to invite the Chinese to withdraw some of their forces via Shwebo should this become necessary, as there was a better chance of their obtaining rice in this area.

43. On the 18th April, Lieut.-General Hutton, who had been replaced as my Chief of Staff by Major-General Winterton at the beginning of the month, returned from a mission to General Headquarters, India. General Hutton had discussed with the Commander-in-Chief in India the question of Imperial Forces accompanying the Chinese in a withdrawal on China. He stated that the Commander-in-Chief was prepared to agree to a change in this part of the plan if I thought it desirable. Nevertheless, I was so impressed with the political considerations that I determined to give the Chinese the opportunity of accepting or refusing the assistance of British forces on the axis Mandalay-Lashio.

44. *Meeting with General Lin Wei*—Accordingly, I arranged for a meeting with the Generalissimo's principal liaison officer, General Lin Wei, at Maymyo on the 21st April. At this meeting I explained to General Lin Wei all the factors to be taken into consideration and I specifically offered the Chinese the 7 Armoured Brigade, which could only get their vehicles out of Burma by the Lashio road if we were

forced to leave that country. General Lin Wei agreed:—

(a) That the bulk of the Chinese Fifth Army should withdraw north via Shwebo, and

(b) That it would be better that no Imperial Forces should withdraw towards Lashio and that the tanks should be employed for the battle of Mandalay on the most suitable ground, which was north of the Irrawaddy towards Shwebo.

On the 22nd April an outline of the new plan was sent by liaison officer to the Headquarters 1 Burcorps and, on the 23rd April, Operation Instruction No. 46, the contents of which had been agreed by General Stilwell's staff at Maymyo, was issued.

45. *Situation North of Yenangyaung.*—Before explaining in detail the new plan for a withdrawal north of Mandalay it is necessary to return to the situation of 1 Burcorps north of Yenangyaung. On the 20th April, the day following my agreement with General Stilwell to undertake offensive operations in this area, the dispositions of 1 Burcorps were as follows:—

17 Division holding Taungdwingyi-Natmauk.

7 Armoured Brigade under orders to move to the Meiktila area.

38 Chinese Division under command 1 Burcorps with—

113 Regiment and two battalions 112 Regiment area Yenangyaung.

114 Regiment under orders to move from Mandalay to Taungtha.

1 Burma Division reorganising in the area of Mount Popa. This Division had lost, in the fighting at Yenangyaung, about 20 per cent. of its personnel, two Bofors, four 3.7 howitzers, four 25 pounders, most of its 3-in. mortars and nearly all its M.T. The Division was not in a fit condition to fight for some days.

Efforts were being made to organise as rapidly as possible the move of the 200 Chinese Division from the Meiktila-Thazi area to Kyaukpadaung and one regiment of the 22 Division to Natmauk. Owing, however, to the lack of transport and to the difficulty of co-ordinating plans with the Chinese Fifth Army, it appeared improbable that the force could be concentrated and ready for offensive action before the morning of the 22nd April at the earliest.

46. On the 21st April the seriousness of the situation in the Shan States brought about the abandonment of the projected offensive against the Japanese 33 Division in the Yenangyaung area. The 200 Chinese Division was ordered by General Stilwell to move to Kalaw and the 22 Chinese Division to concentrate in the Thazi area. In these circumstances it became a matter of supreme importance to hold securely the centres of communication south of Mandalay. Accordingly the following moves were ordered by 1 Burcorps:—

38 Chinese Division to concentrate at Kyaukpadaung.

1 Burma Division to be prepared to move to Taungtha.

17 Division to withdraw from Taungdwingyi and later from Natmauk to positions north west and west of Meiktila at Mahlaing and Zayetkon.

7 Armoured Brigade to Meiktila under command of General Lo, who now took over command of the Chinese forces on the Pyawbwe front, General Tu having moved with the 200 Division to Kalaw.

47. *The New Plan.*—The plan contained in Operation Instruction No. 46 envisaged the following dispositions north of the Irrawaddy:—

West of the River Mu.—1 Burcorps less the 7 Armoured Brigade with the 1 Burma Division astride the River Chindwin and a strong detachment covering the approach to Kalewa via the Myittha valley.

Between the River Mu and the Northern Reach of the Irrawaddy.—38 Chinese Division and the 7 Armoured Brigade.

In and South of Mandalay and holding the Crossings over the River Myitnge.—22, 28 and 96 Chinese Divisions.

It will be realised that a withdrawal from the Meiktila area would uncover the communications with Mandalay of any Chinese forces in the area Kalaw-Taunggyi and would prevent their withdrawal via Mandalay. The plan therefore was for all Chinese forces east of the railway Mandalay-Pyawbwe to move towards Lashio. The situation was very delicate at this time and it was impossible to issue a hard and fast plan for any further withdrawal since no decision could be made in the existing situation as to whether the 22, 28 and 96 Chinese Divisions would withdraw to the north or whether they would fall back on Lashio.

48. I must emphasise here that I had no intention of withdrawing north of the Irrawaddy unless forced to give up Kyaukpadaung and Meiktila and, for the defence of these areas, I had grouped my forces as follows:—

(a) Under command of General Lo (Chinese C.-in-C.).—22 Division, 96 Division and the 7 Armoured Brigade (for the defence of the area Meiktila-Thazi-Pyawbwe).

(b) Under the command of Lieut.-General Slim, 1 Burcorps—17 Division, 1 Burma Division, 38 Chinese Division.

28 Chinese Division (less one regiment not yet arrived) was preparing the defences of Mandalay.

I had to consider the dangerous bottleneck of Mandalay through which run the approaches to the Ava Bridge, the only bridge over the Irrawaddy. These approaches were very vulnerable to air attack. I was determined not to allow my forces to be pushed into the loop of the Irrawaddy below Mandalay and be forced to fight with this obstacle at their backs. In order to avoid this and also to avoid undue congestion in the approaches to the Ava Bridge, I had decided that the moment to order the withdrawal would be when my advanced forces had to leave the Meiktila area. I had also arranged earlier in the month for preparations to be put in hand for the construction of ferries over both the Irrawaddy and the Myitnge Rivers and of the approaches thereto in order to eliminate the bottleneck as far as possible.

PART V.—THE JAPANESE BREAK-THROUGH IN THE SHAN STATES AND THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE ALLIED FORCES NORTH OF MANDALAY.

49. *Decision to withdraw North of Mandalay.* The situation in the Shan States

which had become serious on the 20th April rapidly deteriorated. On the 21st April it was reported that the whole of the Chinese 55 Division had been scattered by the Japanese attack, and on the 22nd that the Japanese had captured Hopong and were advancing north towards Hsipaw and Lashio with armoured forces and motorised infantry. It was never possible to discover the exact strength of the Japanese thrust but of the weakness of the Chinese forces between them and Lashio there could be no doubt. A good deal of damage was done by panic in the rear areas, especially at Lashio, and I sent Brigadier Martin, my chief liaison officer with the Chinese forces, to attempt to restore order and confidence there, which he succeeded in doing. Under the orders of General Stilwell, 28 Chinese Division (less one regiment) was moved during this period from Mandalay to Hsipaw, but the disorganisation of the railways made this movement very slow. I therefore took steps to protect my rear by sending a detachment from the British Infantry Depot at Maymyo to hold the Gokteik Gorge on the Lashio Road. On 23rd and 24th April the Chinese 200 Division captured Taunggyi and advanced towards Hopong. On the 24th April I asked General Stilwell to come and see me at Maymyo. The situation, however, did not permit of his leaving his Headquarters and therefore on the morning of the 25th April, in company with my M.G., G.S., I went to General Stilwell's Headquarters at Kyaukse and I arranged to meet there General Slim, Commander 1 Burcorps. Here I learned that the enemy were putting heavy pressure on the Chinese 96 Division which was holding the front, that this Division was breaking up and that the Japanese were advancing from Pyinmana on Pyawbwe. One regiment in the Thazi area had been moved to the Shan States. In consequence, Meiktila was now devoid of infantry. General Stilwell was not sanguine about the operations in the Shan States and I formed the impression that Chinese resistance on the Pyawbwe front was likely to collapse altogether very soon. I therefore issued orders for the plan of withdrawal north of Mandalay to be put into operation commencing on the night of the 25th/26th April. I also ordered 1 Burcorps to take over rear guard from the Chinese on the axis Meiktila—Mandalay and to cover the withdrawal of the Chinese 22 and 96 Divisions north of Meiktila. My decision was telephoned to Army Headquarters at 1300 hours and evacuation of units and installations remaining in Maymyo was begun.

50. *Decision to dispose Imperial Forces for Defence of India.* I now considered that the situation had clarified sufficiently for me to decide on the future role of the Imperial Forces. I was of the opinion that the capture of Lashio by the Japanese was only a question of time and that there would be nothing to stop them moving on Bhamo, thus turning my communications with Myitkyina. Subsequent events proved this opinion to be correct, but it was impossible for me to disengage any forces to send to Bhamo. I also thought that the condition of the Chinese armies precluded the possibility of being able to hold Mandalay and the Irrawaddy line for very long. In these circumstances, I decided that my main object

was the defence of India, but I had two subsidiary objects:—

- (a) to maintain touch with the Chinese, and
- (b) to get as much as possible of the Imperial Force back to India so that it could be reorganised.

51. I issued to General Slim, Commander 1 Burcorps, on the 26th April, a D.O. letter embodying my plan which was to be implemented after the Mandalay—Irrawaddy line was given up. This was as follows:—

- (a) for the defence of India two infantry brigades astride the Chindwin to delay the enemy as far south as possible, and
- (b) a strong detachment in the Myittha Valley.

The above to be maintained eventually from Kalewa, as well as the detachment in (c) below.

(c) the remainder of the force to move via Ye-U on Kalewa leaving a detachment to cover this route.

(d) I determined to keep contact with the Chinese. I hoped to be able to keep the 38 Division which was fighting so well under the command of 1 Burcorps.

This plan was subsequently modified as will appear later.

52. The execution of the amended plan of withdrawal to the Mandalay—Irrawaddy line was most expeditiously put into effect by 1 Burcorps, the 17 Division, with the 7 Armoured Brigade under command taking over rear guard on the axis Meiktila—Mandalay. On the 26th April the 7 Armoured Brigade attacked and dispersed an enemy column eight miles south of Meiktila and the withdrawal of the rear parties of the 63 Infantry Brigade and 7 Armoured Brigade from this area was delayed until midnight 26th/27th April in order to cover the 22 and 96 Chinese Divisions and the Fifth Army Troops, which had been ordered back from the Kalaw area.

On the 26th April I moved my Headquarters to Shwebo and preparations were put in hand for making the Ye-U—Kalewa road fit for M.T. as far as possible and for stocking the road with supplies and water. Major-General Wakely, Commander L. of C. Area, was placed in charge of all work on the road.

53. On the 27th April reliable information was received that a large Japanese force was in the Nagape area (west of Magwe) date uncertain, but probably between the 15th and 20th April, and that this force was moving north via Myittha Valley with the intention of cutting the Assam road at Kalemmyo. In view of this information I visited Headquarters 1 Burcorps on 28th April and made there the following alterations to the plan for a further withdrawal when the Mandalay—Irrawaddy position had to be abandoned:—

The force moving up the Myittha Valley had already been increased to include the whole of the 2 Burma Brigade, which was on the right bank of the Irrawaddy. I confirmed this and in addition arranged for one infantry brigade of the 1 Burma Division to be sent by river to Kalewa and thence to Kalemmyo. As a result of these alterations, the force astride the Chindwin would consist of one infantry brigade of the 1 Burma Division and one brigade of the

17 Division, leaving only the 17 Division, less one infantry brigade, 7 Armoured Brigade and Corps and Army Troops to withdraw via Ye-U on Kalewa.

The amended plan was confirmed in Operation Instruction No. 47 issued the following day.

54. *Events leading up to the Abandonment of the Mandalay-Irrawaddy Line.* At this time I was in close touch with General Stilwell and all plans were agreed with him. At a meeting at Shwebo, on the morning of the 29th April, General Stilwell informed me that the Chinese Fifth Army would, when Mandalay was given up, move to the north of Katha and that it would probably move thence to Bhamo. He was, however, uncertain on this point and was awaiting the Generalissimo's instructions. The capture of Lashio by the Japanese appeared imminent and this might force the withdrawal of the Chinese Fifth Army to India. General Stilwell also stated that exhaustion made it impossible for the Chinese 96 Division to take part in any fighting south of Mandalay and he therefore proposed to move this Division by train to Myitkyina as soon as possible. This left only the 22 Division to hold the crossings over the Myitnge River and therefore only a delaying action could be fought on this line. The 22 Division would have to continue its withdrawal up the left bank of the Irrawaddy eventually crossing by ferry at Singu. The weakness of the Chinese forces and the wide extent of the front made it clear to me that the Mandalay-Irrawaddy position could not be held for very long. General Stilwell asked that the 38 Division should revert to his command to cover the withdrawal to the north of the Fifth Army. I felt obliged to agree to this request.

55. India had already been asked to move supplies to Kalewa and, on the 29th April, Lieut.-Colonel Reynolds of the Q.M.G. Staff arrived by air at Shwebo. Lieut.-Colonel Reynolds was given details of the latest plan and strengths and these he telegraphed to Delhi. It was known that the condition of the road Tamu-Kalewa would not permit of traffic once the rains began, and the movement of stores south of Tamu would have to be via the Rivers Yu and Chindwin. The maintenance capacity of this route was not known in any detail at Burma Army Headquarters and therefore it was not known what force could be maintained south of Tamu.

Lieut.-Colonel Reynolds left Shwebo by air on the 1st May. On the 3rd May I received a telegram from the Commander-in-Chief in India to the effect that, while supplies had been sent to Kalewa, it was not possible to maintain south of Tamu and that therefore I was to clear my force north of Tamu as rapidly as the tactical situation permitted.

56. At this time, it was estimated that the stocking of the road from Ye-U to Kalewa would take seven days and therefore I was anxious to hold on to the Mandalay-Irrawaddy position for this period. I felt, however, that the possibilities of doing so were slight and I urged my Administrative Staff to accelerate their arrangements as much as possible. The shortage of transport at the disposal of the army made it necessary to withdraw lorries from all possible sources including the 7

Armoured Brigade and 1 Burcorps. During the next few days drastic steps were taken in this respect, units being made to dump kit and stores which did not affect their immediate fighting value.

57. Meanwhile, the withdrawal to the Irrawaddy proceeded according to plan. The Japanese 55 Division followed up rapidly the rear guard in the axis Meiktila-Mandalay. On the evening of the 28th April, tanks with the rear party made contact with enemy motorised infantry south of Kyaukse. On the 29th April, 48 Infantry Brigade supported by tanks and artillery fought a most successful action all day in the Kyaukse area, inflicting about 500 casualties on the enemy with small loss to themselves. The enemy pressed strongly, ferrying up infantry in M.T. They failed, however, to make any progress.

58. By the evening of 28th April, 1 Burma Division had completed its crossing of the Irrawaddy at the Sameikkon Ferry between Myingyan and Myinmu, and by the evening of the 30th April the whole of the Imperial Force had withdrawn north of the Irrawaddy. The 17 Division, which had crossed the river at the Ava Bridge, was moving as rapidly as possible to its positions west of the River Mu. The 38 Chinese Division, which had crossed by ferry, had taken up its positions east of the River Mu. 1 Burma Division was moving to Monywa with the intention of embarking the 13 Infantry Brigade for Kalewa and the 1 Burma Brigade for the defence of the right bank of the Chindwin. The demolition of two bays of the Ava Bridge was, with the full agreement of the Chinese, successfully carried out at 23.50 hours on the 30th April.

59. Earlier on this day, a report had been received that the Japanese had occupied Lashio. This constituted a direct threat to Bhamo and Myitkyina as had been foreseen. A number of casualties and evacuees were on their way by river to Katha for evacuation by train to Myitkyina and thence by air to India. It was impossible for me to spare any forces and indeed, in view of the chaotic conditions of the railways, to move any forces to Northern Burma. I therefore issued by telegram to Colonel Upton, the Commander of the Northern Burma Sub-Area, instructions as to the policy to be adopted for the defence of and evacuation from Myitkyina, Bhamo and Katha.

60. Reports were also received on the 30th April that Japanese columns were at Hsipaw and Maymyo and I had to consider the possibility of a small enemy force moving through Mogok to the Irrawaddy at Thabeikkyin and Male. On the evening of the 30th April, therefore, I established observation posts on the east bank of the Irrawaddy and moved one squadron of tanks and one company of motorised infantry to the north of Shwebo.

61. *The Battle of Monywa.* At about 19.00 hours on the 30th April, a Japanese force attacked from the right bank of the Chindwin, subsequently crossing the river and occupying the town. There was in Monywa at this time only a detachment of about 150 men of 1 Glosters, finding guards, and at Alon, north-west of Monywa, there was the Headquarters of 1 Burcorps with a protective detachment and a Frontier Force column. The troops at Monywa, who were taken by surprise, put up

a stout resistance, and the Commander 1 Burcorps put in an immediate counter-attack with the few troops at his disposal. Information of the attack on Monywa was received at Army Headquarters at 22.00 hours and orders were immediately issued for one squadron of tanks to move via Ondaw on Monywa, and during the night of 1st/2nd May the squadron of tanks which I had moved north of Shwebo for the protection of the left flank was also ordered to move on Monywa via Ye-U.

62. The situation created by the Japanese occupation of Monywa was serious since it cut off all the Imperial Forces west of the River Mu from the direct approach to Ye-U through Monywa and also prevented the move of any forces up or across the Chindwin. Further, there was no regular formation of Imperial Forces in position to oppose an enemy advance direct on Ye-U. The Commander 1 Burcorps at once ordered the 16 Infantry Brigade to move with all speed via Shwebo to cover the approaches to Ye-U from the south. The situation in Monywa, however, improved due to the prompt action of Commander 1 Burcorps and the courage and tenacity of the troops and by the morning of the 1st May the town was again temporarily in our hands.

63. Meanwhile, at 2045 hours on 30th April, orders were issued by 1 Burcorps for 1 Burma Division to advance on Monywa as quickly as possible. 63 Infantry Brigade was due to arrive by train at Chaungu early on 1st May and this Brigade and 48 Infantry Brigade at Myinmu were placed under command 1 Burma Division. Later, however, 48 Infantry Brigade was ordered to move via Shwebo on Ye-U.

Orders were also issued, in pursuance of the original plan, for 13 Infantry Brigade to cross to the west bank of the River Chindwin but this move did not prove possible and had to be abandoned.

64. Early on 1st May the enemy crossed the River Chindwin south of Monywa and, assisted by local guides, attacked H.Q. 1 Burma Division, capturing a wireless set. This somewhat disorganised the chain of command. The enemy also re-occupied Monywa. During the day 1 Burma Division, with 63 Infantry Brigade and one squadron 2 R. Tanks under command, advanced to the south-east outskirts of Monywa with a view to attacking on the morning of 2nd May. One squadron 7 Hussars moved via Ye-U to the north of Alon.

65. My Headquarters, Headquarters 1 Burcorps and Headquarters 17 Division moved to Ye-U on 1st May. Before leaving Shwebo I had arranged for General Stilwell to meet me at Ye-U at 1800 hours that evening in order to co-ordinate plans for the withdrawal from the Mandalay-Irrawaddy position. At this meeting, at which Commander 1 Burcorps was present, General Stilwell agreed that a withdrawal could no longer be delayed and the code words to put this into effect were issued at 1845 hours. General Stilwell also agreed that the situation at Monywa demanded the withdrawal of 7 Armoured Brigade from its position in support of 38 Chinese Division east of the River Mu and orders were therefore issued for 7 Armoured Brigade to move forthwith on the axis Ye-U—Monywa. General Stilwell informed me that he intended to withdraw the

Chinese Fifth Army to the Katha area but was uncertain of his further plans. Preparations were, however, in hand for a possible withdrawal to India.

I did not see General Stilwell again until his arrival at Dinjan at the end of May and, owing to the failure of his wireless, did not have any further communication with him.

66. On 2nd May, 7 Armoured Brigade, which had arrived south of Ye-U during the night of 1st/2nd May, attacked Monywa from the north assisted by improvised forces of infantry from 1 Glosters and F.F. Columns. 1 Burma Division attacking from the south-east cleared the outskirts of Monywa, but the attack was not pressed home since 1 Burma Division succeeded in moving round Monywa via Ettaw and in reaching the Ye-U road south of Budaln.

PART VI.—THE WITHDRAWAL TO INDIA.

67. *The Race for Kalewa.*—The operations had now developed into a race with the enemy for the possession of Kalewa. A warning was sent to General Wakely at Kalewa to establish local protection and to block the river approaches. As a result of this, a boom was constructed across the Chindwin to the south of Shwegyin and the detachment of Royal Marines, which had done such good work on the Irrawaddy, was despatched with Breda guns to cover this obstruction. G.H.Q. India were also requested to order air attacks on enemy craft moving up the Chindwin. I learned later that such attacks were made on the 3rd or 4th May and I have no doubt that they imposed considerable delay on the enemy's advance up the river. There was also the possibility that the enemy might land at some point short of Kalewa and cut in on the Ye-U—Kalewa road. The most likely point for this to happen was at Maukkadaw from which place a chaung gave easy access to the road at Pyingyaing. A detachment of the Bush Warfare School, reinforced by British infantry from the depot at Maymyo, was therefore sent to Maukkadaw. This detachment was later reinforced by two companies of Gurkhas. At this time I assumed that the 1 Indian Infantry Brigade was moving from Palel to Kalewa and I requested G.H.Q. India to hasten this movement, as I still had reason to believe that a Japanese force was advancing on Kalemyo via the Myittha Valley. I learned on 5th May that 1 Indian Infantry Brigade would not move into Burma, as it was not considered possible to maintain it in Kalewa, in addition to the troops from Burma that would also be in that area.

68. *Co-ordination with the Chinese Rear Guard.*—On the morning of the 3rd May, I received a visit at my Headquarters at Kaduma from General Li Jen Sun, commanding 38 Chinese Division. This Division was ordered to act as rear guard to the Chinese Fifth Army. General Sun felt that his task was difficult and he was anxious that the movements of his Division should be closely co-ordinated with those of 1 Burcorps. I had already issued orders about this but as a result of General Sun's visit I again impressed on the Commander 1 Burcorps that he must not withdraw from the Ye-U area until the Chinese 38 Division had passed to the north of Shwebo. In view of the excellent manner in which General Sun had always co-operated with the forces under my

command I should have liked to take his Division with me to India but in the circumstances this was impossible.

69. *Description of Route.*—The problem now facing my force cannot be appreciated without some knowledge of the road conditions between Ye-U and Kalewa. This road was nothing more than a sandy track running from Ye-U via Kaduma, Pyingyaing and Thetkegyin to Shwegyin, eight miles south of Kalewa. It had been the intention to continue the road from Thetkegyin to a point opposite Kalewa but, owing to the difficulties of the last part of this route, which required a lot of rock blasting, this had not been possible and it was the lack of this last twelve miles of road, over which there was nothing more than a footpath, which caused the abandonment of the major portion of the M.T. and all tanks. The track from Ye-U passed through innumerable chaungs or nullahs, some of which were dry and sandy and some of which were wet. Between Pyingyaing and Thetkegyin there was a difficult hill section with many rickety bridges constructed only of brushwood or bamboo. Anyone seeing this track for the first time would find it difficult to imagine how a fully mechanised force could possibly move over it. The casualties to M.T. were heavy and the difficulties were much accentuated by the need to return empty lorries from Shwegyin in order to ferry back more troops and wounded. As the operations progressed, the road was organised into sections for two-way and one-way traffic and the work of the Field Engineering units very much improved conditions in the later stages of the withdrawal to Shwegyin.

70. From Shwegyin all troops, motor vehicles and guns had to be transported to Kalewa by steamer. There were six steamers, the capacity of each being 600 to 700 men but only two lorries and two Jeeps. A special flat had to be constructed for taking vehicles, but owing to difficulties of embarkation from the beach at Shwegyin, full use could not be made of this method of transport. As a result of the low vehicle capacity of the ships, the transport problem, when units reached Kalewa, was acute. There was barely enough transport to carry essential unit equipment and ammunition and to evacuate the wounded. Fortunately the establishment of a system of staging camps stocked with supplies eliminated the necessity for units to carry rations. The track to a point opposite Kalewa was quite passable for infantry and pack animals and, in the early stages of the withdrawal, all refugees moved by this route, crossing the Chindwin to Kalewa in country boats.

71. As will have been seen from previous paragraphs, the withdrawal to Kalewa was forced on me before the stocking of the Ye-U road was finished. Nevertheless, the heroic efforts of the Administrative Staff and the drastic action which was taken to make transport available, enabled the distribution of stocks to be completed after the withdrawal had commenced. Supplies were back-loaded to the fullest possible extent and, although the force was placed on half rations on the 4th May, there was never any real shortage of supplies.

72. The road northwards from Kalemmyo to Tamu was no more than a dirt track through the jungle and once the rains set in, which

might take place at any time about the 15th May, this track would become impassable to M.T. I felt, therefore, that my operations were now as much a race with the weather as with the Japanese and as much a fight against nature as against the enemy.

Nevertheless, I had other problems to consider. There was a large number of refugees on the road west of Ye-U and I was not prepared to abandon them either to the enemy or to possible molestation by the local population. There was also the problem of clearing from Shwegyin a large number of Army Troops and followers before the fighting formations, and I therefore ordered the Commander 1 Burcorps to delay at this stage the withdrawal of his rear guard. Fortunately, the enemy did not follow up closely on the road from Ye-U and, following a brush between the 7 Armoured Brigade and some enemy tanks north of Budalin on the 5th May, there was no further contact for some days.

73. On the 4th May, Commander 1 Burcorps proposed to withdraw one infantry brigade by the route Pyingyaing-Indaw-Pantha for the protection of his left flank.

As this would reduce the shipping problem at Shwegyin I agreed to the proposal and arranged for necessary supplies to be moved by steamer to Pantha.

A few days later, Commander 1 Burcorps also arranged that when the 48 Infantry Brigade, forming the rear guard, reached Shwegyin it would proceed thence by steamer to Sittaung. This plan eased the transport problem on the road from Kalewa to Tamu.

74. *The Fight at Shwegyin.* The threat of enemy air attack on river craft reduced the capacity of the steamer service between Shwegyin and Kalewa during the hours of daylight. The crews were nervous and guards were placed on all ships to prevent any attempt at voluntary evacuation. Fortunately, however, the steamer service was singularly free from air attack. Except for bombing raids on the boom on the 5th May, and at Shwegyin on the evening of 7th May, no air attacks of any importance took place.

On the morning of the 10th May an enemy force of approximately one battalion with mortars, attacked the covering force at Shwegyin. It subsequently transpired that this force had moved upstream in landing craft as soon as the detachment at Maukkadaw had withdrawn and had landed at Kywe just south of Shwegyin. There was fighting all day but, in spite of this, embarkation continued. During the late afternoon, the rear guard, the 48 Infantry Brigade, counter attacked, driving off the Japanese. Contact was then lost. Commander 1 Burcorps now decided that ferrying by steamer from Shwegyin was no longer practicable. There remained in Shwegyin at this time:—

Advance Headquarters 17 Division, 48 Infantry Brigade, 1/9 R. Jats, majority of the 7 Armoured Brigade, animal transport of 1 Burma and 17 Divisions.

Commander 1 Burcorps ordered all remaining guns, tanks and motor vehicles to be destroyed and personnel to move by the track to the ferry opposite Kalewa. The 48 Infantry Brigade, with under command 1/9 Jats and 2 D.W.R., finding guards on the ships, were embarked in

steamers and proceeded upstream for Sittaung. The Headquarters 17 Division, 7 Armoured Brigade, the embarkation and administrative staff from Shwegyin and the animal transport were ferried across to Kalewa, which was at this time held by the 63 Infantry Brigade.

75. *The Transport Problem.* By the 9th May, staging camps on the route to Tamu had been established at Kalewa, Imbaung, Yezagyo, Khampat and Witok and the Army and Corps Troops were steadily marching from camp to camp as were the thousands of refugees which were now across the Chindwin.

Transport was the great problem. Fortunately the Commander 4 Corps who was now in command in Assam was able to place at my disposal a G.P.T. company which proved of inestimable value. I must also mention here the excellent work done by the 7 Armoured Brigade, whose high morale and great fighting capacity I have frequently stressed. During the withdrawal it was necessary to take from the 7 Armoured Brigade nearly all their vehicles for use in the general pool both east and west of the Chindwin, and after their tanks and remaining vehicles had been abandoned at Shwegyin, this Brigade continued to find drivers not only for the vehicles brought across the Chindwin but also to supplement the drivers of G.P.T. companies working north and south of Tamu. Six to seven hundred men were employed in this way. No praise is too high for the work done by this formation.

76. *Final Stages of the Withdrawal* While the withdrawal of the main body had been in progress the 2 Burma Brigade was still moving up the Myittha Valley and on the 4th May orders had been issued by wireless for it to reach Kalemmyo by the 14th May. The G.P.T. company placed at my disposal by the Commander of 4 Corps enabled this move to be accelerated and the Brigade was moved north by M.T. from Manipur River, crossing on the 13th May.

77. The withdrawal now continued without incident. Tactically, the principal anxiety of the Commander 1 Burcorps was that the enemy, moving up the Chindwin, which was parallel to the road Kalemmyo-Tamu, might cut in and get astride his line of withdrawal. Even a small enemy force could have imposed a serious delay at this stage. Fortunately this threat did not develop.

78. On the 11th May, Lieut.-General N. M. S. Irwin, Commanding 4 Corps came to see me at my Headquarters near Tamu. I had already been informed that my army would withdraw through his covering force on the Lokchao River north of Tamu. I discussed with General Irwin his plans for the movement of my force to the Imphal area, which had received the approval of the Commander-in-Chief in India.

79. On the 14th May, Headquarters 1 Burcorps moved to Tamu and the next day I moved my Headquarters out of Burma to Kangpokpi, thirty miles north of Imphal. All troops of the Burma Army arriving in India now came under command of 4 Corps.

The withdrawal of 1 Burcorps, which was skilfully conducted, proceeded according to plan and by the 17th May all formations were successfully concentrated in the Tamu area.

At 1800 hours on the 20th May I placed the rear guard of 1 Burcorps under command of 4 Corps and my task came to an end.

PART VII—ADMINISTRATION

80. I have already mentioned the administrative situation as it was affected by the fall of Rangoon. The back loading of supplies and stores to Central and Upper Burma had been put in hand by General Hutton in January, and as a result reserves were available in the Mandalay area when Rangoon was lost. In the final stages of the evacuation, however, supplies and stores were, in view of the Japanese threat to the Rangoon-Mandalay railway, back loaded up the Irrawaddy Valley. The results of back loading on this line with the railway ending at Prome were twofold:—

(a) A large number of locomotives and a good deal of rolling stock were inevitably lost.

(b) Supplies and stores had to be transferred to ships and flats on the Irrawaddy and considerable stocks were accumulated in the Prome area.

81. *Administrative Appreciation.* At the end of March a review of the stock situation in Burma was prepared by my administrative staff. The conclusions reached in this review were:—

(a) *Supplies.* The stocks of imported supplies together with present stocks plus future purchases of indigenous supplies were sufficient to feed the army for six months from 1st April. There was, however, the important proviso that the estimate must be reduced if:—

(i) Sources of indigenous supplies could not be held.

(ii) There was a further loss of stocks through enemy action.

The importance of this proviso was soon demonstrated. Large quantities of supplies were lost when the enemy captured Prome and there were further losses in the bombing and subsequent fires in Mandalay.

On the Toungoo front, the withdrawal to the north of that town surrendered to the Japanese some of the best rice growing areas in Burma. It will be seen that no great reliance could be placed on future purchases of indigenous supplies. The collection of these supplies became more and more difficult as the civil organisation disintegrated under enemy air attack.

(b) *Petrol and Oil.* Excellent work had been done by the administrative staff and the oilfield engineers in initiating the production of spirit and the manufacture of drums. Stocks held amounted to 1,000,000 gallons of petrol and 89,000 gallons of lubricants. By the 28th March production was at the rate of 1,100,000 gallons of spirit per month which was likely to rise to 1,600,000 gallons by the 16th April and 2,000,000 gallons by the first week in May. Requirements were estimated at 1,300,000 gallons a month. Provided the oilfields could be held the petrol and oil situation was satisfactory.

(c) *Medical.* There were sufficient stocks for six months except in the case of a few items which could be flown in.

(d) *Ammunition.* There was a serious shortage but sufficient of the more common types to last up to the rains when expenditure was likely to be on a reduced scale.

(e) *Ordnance Stores.* There was a shortage of clothing and equipment but there was a reasonable stock of small arms.

82. With no supplies coming into the country from outside, the administrative problem resolved itself into the back loading of supplies in conformity with the projected plan of operations. As the army withdrew to the north it was to a large extent carrying its base with it and in common with most administrative situations the problem was largely one of transportation.

83. *I.W.T.* On the Irrawaddy a system of short hauls had to be adopted, owing to the time required for the turn round of steamers, of which owing to the lack of crews there were too few in commission. The desertion of crews began soon after the evacuation of Rangoon and it was accentuated by the bombing of Mandalay and other places on the river and by the need to take some steamers into the forward area where they were more exposed to air attack. The tales spread by crews returning from the front led to wholesale desertions. Some I.W.T. personnel were flown in from India and, further to help the situation and to set an example, I released twenty junior Staff Officers who volunteered for work on ships in any capacity. The greatest credit is due to Mr. Morton of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company and his staff who, by their devotion to duty and cheerfulness, succeeded in keeping a large fleet of steamers at work right up to the end when, in order that they should not fall into enemy hands, vessels were sunk at Mandalay and Thabeikkyin and later at Sittaung.

84. The railway situation was very similar to that on the Irrawaddy in that the dominating factor was the disintegration of the operating personnel. The desertions of railway operating personnel became so serious that in April I called in the late Manager of the Burma Railways, Sir John Rowland, who was at this time at Lashio in charge of the construction of the Yunman-Burma Railway. Sir John Rowland undertook to do all in his power to keep the railway personnel at their posts. The main plank in his platform was the evacuation of families of railway workmen. In this, I am sure, he was right, but the strain of evacuating 10,000 women and children by train at a time when every wagon was required for the movement of stores or military personnel was almost more than the administrative machine could bear. Nevertheless, although their capacity was reduced the railways kept going as long as was humanly possible, due largely to the efforts of Lieut-Colonel C. P. Brewitt and his staff.

85. *Effect of Destruction of Oilfields.* On the 16th April, the oilfields were destroyed. This at once set a limit to the length of the campaign. The collection and distribution of rice alone was dependent almost entirely on motor transport and without rice the armies could not be fed. The stocks of petrol held in the middle of April were estimated to be sufficient for two months, but they were widely distributed and the shortage of P.O.L. was felt before the Imperial Forces reached India.

It is interesting to note that the effect of the destruction of the oilfields was never fully appreciated by the Chinese who proposed to send more troops into Burma after the destruction had taken place.

86. *Medical.* The problem of evacuating to India the sick and wounded was a source of constant anxiety. After the loss of Rangoon, casualties were evacuated by air from Shwebo and later from Myitkyina. During April, however, when such evacuation was easy, sufficient aircraft were not available with the result that there was an accumulation of sick and wounded in the hospitals in Burma.

When the withdrawal north of Mandalay commenced, I decided that the sick and wounded must be evacuated at all costs. Consequently, hospital equipment and medical stores were abandoned in order to save the patients.

At the end of April when the Japanese captured Lashio a considerable number of sick and wounded were on the Irrawaddy en route to Myitkyina. It was impossible to make any change in this plan but I understand that the majority of these men reached India safely.

The remainder of the sick and wounded were evacuated to India by motor transport. There can be no doubt that many of the wounded travelling in lorries over the bumpy tracks to Shwegyin and Tamu endured great suffering. It was better, however, that they should endure this rather than be left behind and the fact that 2,300 men were evacuated in this way, with very little transport available, is evidence of the efficiency and tireless devotion of the Medical Directorate.

87. *Changes of Plan* As will have been seen from preceding paragraphs, changes of plan were almost inevitable in the circumstances prevailing. That I should have been able to change a plan, for which administrative arrangements had already been made, was, under the difficult transport conditions prevailing, a high tribute to the staff.

88. *Administration of the Chinese Armies.* This Report would not be complete without some account of the administration of the Chinese armies operating in Burma.

The Chinese have no administrative services as understood in a modern army. Until the arrival of the Chinese Expeditionary Force in Burma the Chinese had never operated outside their own country where they depend for rations upon local purchase and for transport upon local requisitions of vehicles and animals. Casualties are handed over to voluntary organisations or left in the villages to be cared for by the inhabitants. These facts were not fully realised until the arrival of the Chinese Armies in Burma and this resulted in the administration of the Chinese forces being unsatisfactory throughout the campaign. The position was aggravated by the serious shortage of administrative units available in the Army in Burma. These were inadequate at the outbreak of war and the position grew worse when reinforcements arrived without services due to shipping difficulties. As a result, the administrative organisation which could be placed at the disposal of the Chinese was inadequate.

The gap was to some extent filled by the Staff of the Chinese Liaison Mission who.

though not intended for this purpose, acted as administrative staff officers to the formations to which they were attached.

The big problem was the provision of supplies, more particularly rice. The collection and distribution of rice down to Chinese divisions was my responsibility and this task absorbed no less than 300 lorries in the Shan States alone. Forward of the divisional dumps, distribution was a Chinese responsibility. It will be appreciated that demands on the transport and petrol at my disposal were considerable.

The lack of administration was particularly noticeable on the medical side. The Chinese arrived with no medical stores or units. Later certain voluntary organisations such as Dr. Seagrave's Medical Mission appeared and a Burma Army C.C.S. and one staging section together with medical stores were made available by me for the Chinese armies. A certain number of Chinese sick and wounded were also admitted to British hospitals.

The gratitude of the Chinese for the attention given to their wounded in these hospitals was most marked. Nevertheless, the medical organisation was quite inadequate to deal with the large numbers of Chinese casualties incurred in the later stages of the campaign.

The ordnance situation was also unsatisfactory in that reserves of ammunition, clothing and equipment were practically non-existent. Here I was unable to help as the types of stores required were not common to both armies.

On the other hand, in the later stages of the campaign I was able to make available to the Chinese a considerable quantity of engineer stores and explosives.

To sum up, the administration of the Chinese forces worked reasonably well only so long as operations were not too fluid.

PART VIII. MISCELLANEOUS.

89. *Commandos and Levies.*

(a) *Commandos.* In Burma, the Bush Warfare School, so called for purposes of deception, trained selected officers and other ranks to form the nucleus of guerrilla units in China where they came under control of 204 Mission. Training was given in demolitions in order to fit the personnel for operations on the enemy's lines of communication.

Three commandos consisting entirely of British personnel were already operating in the Southern Shan States when I arrived and they remained there working in co-operation with the Chinese. These commandos undertook one or two operations on the Thai frontier but circumstances were such as to prevent their being any real threat to the enemy's lines of communication. I was therefore anxious to move these commandos to the Irrawaddy front but owing to the difficulties of collecting them from their scattered and dispersed positions I was unable to achieve this.

At the beginning of April, Colonel Wingate, who had had considerable experience in raising and organising units for deep penetration in Abyssinia, arrived at Maymyo. In order to form such units in Burma, Colonel Wingate required British personnel of high morale. Since the army was at this time cut off from India, the only source of

supply was the already depleted British battalions. Moreover, the success of deep penetration units depends to a large extent on their operating in a friendly country. This condition did not exist south and east of the Irrawaddy. Colonel Wingate therefore returned to India in order to raise deep penetration units there for possible operations later in the Chin country.

(b) *Levies.* The proposal to form Levies was first made in January when the army was still in Moulmein. Later, Mr. (now Lieut.-Colonel) Stevenson of the Burma Frontier Service who had been organising Levies in the Northern Shan States was deputed to do the same work in the Southern Shan States and Karenni and he was finally made responsible for all Levies in Burma.

Karen Levies were formed in the Mawchi area and were reinforced by a number of Karens specially released from the Burma Rifles. I have already mentioned the excellent work carried out by these Levies. To organise Levies in the Chin Hills I selected Lieut.-Colonel Haswell of the Burma Rifles but he had barely sufficient time to complete his organisation before the army withdrew from Burma. The Chin Levy Organisation has now been taken over by India and I see no reason why it should not have considerable success.

90. *Refugees.* The refugee problem in Burma was of a special character. Of the 14 million inhabitants of this country about one million were Indians and it was they who provided the reliable business element and who staffed most of the public utility undertakings. In these circumstances, the Indians were not popular with the Burmese and they realised that they depended for their security on the British "Raj." When this failed they felt they must get out or be murdered. In this they were probably right.

The Indian exodus from Burma had a two-fold result. It created a big refugee problem and, at the same time, it robbed the country of the very people who should have kept going the civil organisation.

The principal effect on military operations was the strain placed on the transport agencies, which were themselves beginning to break down. The strain was most severely felt in the period immediately following the fall of Rangoon when it was still hoped that the situation might be stabilised some distance south of Mandalay.

To my mind there can be no doubt that the needs of an army must come before those of refugees but, in Burma, the position was not straightforward since failure to evacuate the refugees would have caused a breakdown in all the utility services. Everything possible was therefore done by my staff in allotting transportation facilities to refugees. The exodus of the Indian population made labour, both skilled and unskilled, almost impossible to obtain. This was a hard blow in view of the shortage of technical units and the complete lack of military labour.

The civil organisation in charge of refugee evacuation in Burma did remarkably well and I should like particularly to mention Mr. Vorley, who was in charge of the evacuation from the Mandalay area, and Mr. Hughes,

I.C.S., my Chief Civil Adviser. In the withdrawal to India, the feeding arrangements for the thousands of refugees who came out through Kalewa and Tamu worked extremely well and very few demands were made on the army for rations. The refugees themselves were no bother and the majority of them, more particularly the women, displayed a courage and heroism under most trying conditions which were worthy of the best traditions of India.

91. *Indigenous Units.* I cannot close my report without making some mention of the behaviour of the indigenous units. Political considerations arising out of the separation of Burma from India brought about the enlistment of Burmese into the Burma Army. Prior to this, only Karens, Chins and Kachins had been enlisted. That this former policy was right was amply demonstrated by the fighting in Burma. The Burmese proved thoroughly unreliable and deserted wholesale and thus they began the disintegration which later affected all indigenous units except the Signals. As the campaign progressed, the Karens and Kachins also began to desert. This, I think, was largely because they felt they were being cut off from their families. This feeling affected the Karens first since many had their homes in Lower Burma. The Chins on the other hand, did not desert to the same extent, which is almost certainly due to the fact that the final withdrawal was through their country.

As a result of the distrust and suspicion engendered by desertions, often in the face of the enemy, only two battalions of the Burma Rifles remained in the Burma Division at the end of the campaign. One of these was composed of Chins and the other was wholly Indian.

I must pay a tribute to the Burma Army Signals which had a large proportion of Karens and some Burmese personnel. This unit did magnificent work and was completely reliable.

PART IX—CONCLUSIONS.

92. It may be thought that after 3 years of war it is a little late still to be learning lessons from our enemies. The old proverb, however, should be a safeguard against this feeling, and after an unsuccessful campaign one must of necessity examine the causes of failure.

I do not propose further to comment on the events which led up to the loss of Rangoon since it was already too late to save that city when I arrived in Burma. I have stated earlier and I wish to emphasise again that in the absence of a road to India the loss of Rangoon virtually decided the issue of the campaign. Thereafter my task was to impose on the enemy the maximum delay possible with the means remaining at my disposal.

93. *Training and Equipment.* From what I had learned of the nature of the fighting since the beginning of the campaign and from my personal experience of the operations in Burma, I was impressed by the apparent ease with which the Japanese were able to outflank our forces by moving through thick jungle country, whereas our troops were tied to the roads.

The reason for this was that the Japanese were organised, equipped and trained for the type of country over which they fought whereas our troops were not. The Japanese also had the help of local guides and the assistance of

many friends amongst the local population. In fact they had all the advantages which accrue from having a plan and from preparations made over a long period in time of peace.

The Imperial Forces were almost completely mechanised down to unit transport which made movement off the few roads almost impossible.

As the campaign progressed units supplemented their motor transport by the local purchase and requisition of bullock carts. This form of transport, however, is too slow and cumbersome for tactical use in the jungle where pack transport or porters are really required.

The technique of jungle fighting, as understood by the Japanese, was virtually non-existent in my force. Success in this type of fighting depends largely on the ability of parties to find their way through the jungle and to keep touch with one another. It demands a knowledge of all types of signalling by visual and by sound and also requires a high scale of low powered wireless sets with infantry battalions. It demands also training to eliminate the sense of loneliness which so often saps the morale of those who are not used to it.

Quite apart from jungle fighting, however, the infantry were not sufficiently well trained in modern tactics which require above all else the ability to manoeuvre in small parties under the fire of their own weapons. Towards the end of the campaign, however, some formations had learned how to take the Japanese on at their own game.

There had been no training with tanks prior to the arrival of the 7 Armoured Brigade and it was not unnatural therefore that the armoured units did not receive the support from the infantry which they needed. The infantry, on the other hand, came more and more to rely on the tanks to get them out of a tight corner.

The country on the whole was unsuitable for the employment of armoured fighting vehicles. In the thick jungle country they were necessarily confined to the roads and tracks and even in the open country of the dry zone the small bunds surrounding paddy fields caused the tanks to slow down in order to avoid breaking their suspension. Nevertheless, the tanks did invaluable work and the reliability of the American M3 or "Honey" was quite remarkable.

94. *Power of the Offensive.* It did not need the Burma campaign to prove the power of the offensive under modern conditions, more particularly in its effect on the civil population. Burma was singularly dependent on her poor communications particularly railways and I.W.T. As has been explained at some length these soon began to break down and I wish to draw attention once again to the vulnerability in this respect of eastern countries where the ignorance and gullibility of the population renders them even more susceptible to the lying tongue of rumour than their western brothers.

This campaign was fought by comparatively small forces over a very large area and therefore militarily the offensive, coupled with air superiority and the help of the local population, enabled the Japanese to concentrate superior forces at the decisive point, since the defence had necessarily to be more dispersed.

The right method of defence was, I am convinced; to hold defended localities well stocked with reserves of supplies and ammunition

covering approaches and centres of communication and to have behind these defended localities hard-hitting mobile forces available to counter-attack the enemy should he attempt to surround the defence. When this method was tried in the battle south of Prome it was already too late, for by that time supplies were too scarce to be risked in any large quantity in the forward area and the fear of being cut off was already too deeply implanted in the minds of the soldiers.

95. *Morale.* Properly to appreciate the achievements of the Burma Army, it is necessary to know something of its experiences before my arrival. At the battle of the Sittang the 17 Division was cut off and had to swim the river. The equivalent of a brigade was lost and the remainder arrived on the west bank practically naked, with no equipment and with only some of their personal weapons. It is a high tribute to the Commanders in this formation that the Division was reformed and re-equipped and with the addition of the 63 Infantry Brigade fought gallantly for another three months before withdrawing into India. The 1 Burma Division suffered constantly from the disintegration of its indigenous units but it in turn reorganised to include battalions brought in from outside, and remained a fighting formation to the end. This clearly illustrates the influence which a few really good Commanders can exercise.

Practically every formation in these two Divisions had at one time or another been surrounded by the enemy and had fought its way out. This had a cumulative effect.

Further, the 17 Division fought for five months without rest and practically without reinforcement and for only one period of three days did it have another formation between it and the enemy. This was a big strain.

The loss of air superiority also had a moral effect out of all proportion to the damage done by enemy air attacks.

One of the biggest factors which influenced morale was the sense of being cut off from the outside world. This had an influence on the soldier which I did not appreciate until the closing stages of the campaign for, when the troops knew that they were no longer cut off from outside assistance, they fought with renewed vigour and gallantry.

The value of long training as a formation and the confidence resulting therefrom was well exemplified by the 7 Armoured Brigade which retained its cheerful outlook and fighting capacity throughout.

96. *Air.* I have already commented at some length on the air situation and I do not propose to say more except to record once again that the lack of aircraft in India, as in Malaya, was one of the causes of failure.

97. *Unity of Command.* There was no real unity of command of the Allied Forces in Burma, although I had been nominally appointed the Commander of the Chinese Armies. Consequently full use could not be made of the forces available and I feel most strongly that, allied as we are to different nations, unity of command must be achieved in each separate theatre of war.

Appendix "A"

ORDER OF BATTLE—CHINESE ARMIES IN BURMA

Chinese Fifth Army :—

| | | |
|--------------|---|--|
| 22 Division | } | Employed on Toungoo front South of Mandalay. |
| 96 Division | | |
| 200 Division | | |

Chinese Sixth Army :—

| | | | | | |
|-------------|-----|-----|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|
| 55 Division | ... | ... | Loilem—Loikaw—Karenni | } | Southern Shan States. |
| 49 Division | ... | ... | Mongpan area | | |
| 93 Division | ... | ... | Kengtung area | | |

Chinese 66 Army :—

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----|--|
| 38 Division | ... | Originally allotted for defence of Mandalay, but subsequently placed under command 1 Burcorps. |
| 28 Division (two regiments only) | ... | Relieved 38 Division at Mandalay, subsequently moved back to Hsipaw. |

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