

**THE FORGOTTEN  
WORLD WAR:**

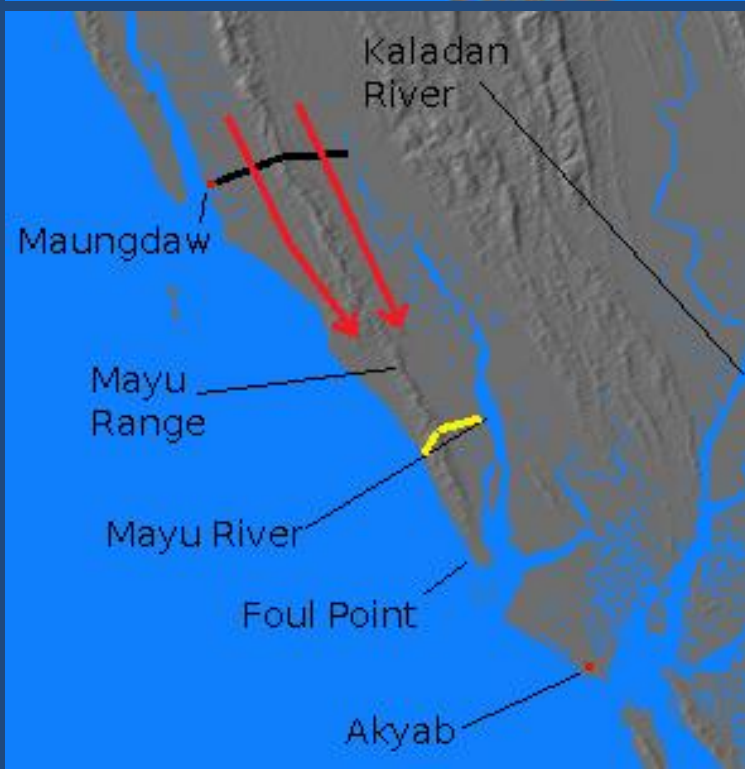
**THE CHINA –  
BURMA – INDIA  
THEATER IN  
WORLD WAR II**

**WEEK 5**



The diversionary Arakan Offensive also went forward as planned. It launched on December 12, 1942 – two months before Wingate's raid.

The 14<sup>th</sup> Indian Division was to drive down both sides of the Mayu range which was a narrow but tall and steep mountain range. Only an abandoned railroad in the north connected the two sides.



14<sup>th</sup> Division and the attack was supposed to be under the control of Slim's XV Corps, but Irwin wanted to command personally.

The troops found that most of the flat ground on either side of the range was swamp or mangrove – difficult to walk through and impossible for vehicles. Near the southern end of the point they hit the main Japanese defenses – well concealed bunkers.

The bunkers held machine guns – with interlocking fields of fire that meant to attack one troops were fired upon by others. Moreover they were mostly impervious to artillery which meant that the Japanese called fire directly upon their positions – and were unscathed while the attacking troops outside had no cover.

Irwing proved he was a veteran of the Western Front of WWI (he was) and when one attack failed, he tried again.

As each attack failed he stripped brigades away from Slim and other commanders and placed them under 14<sup>th</sup> Division.

He then stripped away Slim's new tank brigade for infantry support against Slim's advice that the ground would not support tanks and sent them in piecemeal – where they met their end one by one.

Eventually, he called for Slim to have a look and make recommendations. Slim went to the front (something Irvin never did) and recommended a halt to operations or a proper command structure and new tactics. Irvin placed Slim in charge, but stripped him of any authority other than to keep at it as before.

Slim did not do as he was told – he probably smelled a rat.

He suggested the infantry move along the ridgeline to get behind the bunkers – a tactic that was working in New Guinea. The officers said it was impossible and refused so Slim called off the attack hoping to pull back to a defensible position along the former railroad.

Irwin was furious and told Slim he was fired.

Slim returned to his headquarters north of Calcutta.

Irwin went to Dehli to make the move official.

But things had changed.

Claude Auchinleck had relieved Wavell as commander Middle East in 1941 and had recently been replaced by Bernard Montgomery. He had returned to India without an assignment and became an advisor to Wavell.



Auckinleck had spent most of his career as an officer in the India Army and knew Slim personally and had for years (Wavell did not until Burma).

Irwin arrived in Dehli and reported on the failure at Arakan. His report correctly identified the tactical and logistical reasons for the failure. The ground could not support vehicles. The bunkers could not be attacked from their front successfully, etc. He also correctly stated the command failures.

He noted that Slim had been in command and most of the troops were from XV Corps and the attack failed just as Slim had failed to stop the Japanese in Burma.

And then Wavell fired Irwin. Irwin would spend the rest of the war protecting Scotland from the Germans.

To the extent there was any success in Burma between June of 1942 and June of 1943 it was with a force that did not answer to any commander in theater – but relied upon support from those same commanders.

It was OSS Detachment 101.

This organization would eventually number 300 men from both the Army and Navy but would be in charge of over 10,000 troops they trained and equipped – mostly Kachins.

The Kachin did not need any training in jungle warfare. They were the true experts. The Japanese feared them.

(They could never avoid a Kachin ambush, never catch them but even worse the Kachin cut off the ears of dead Japanese to keep track of how many they killed. The Japanese believed spirits came from heaven to life the souls of the dead to heaven but to do that the body had to have ears – those were handles the spirits needed to carry the soul. Without ears, the soul could never go to heaven and would be condemned to eternity to the place where they died.)

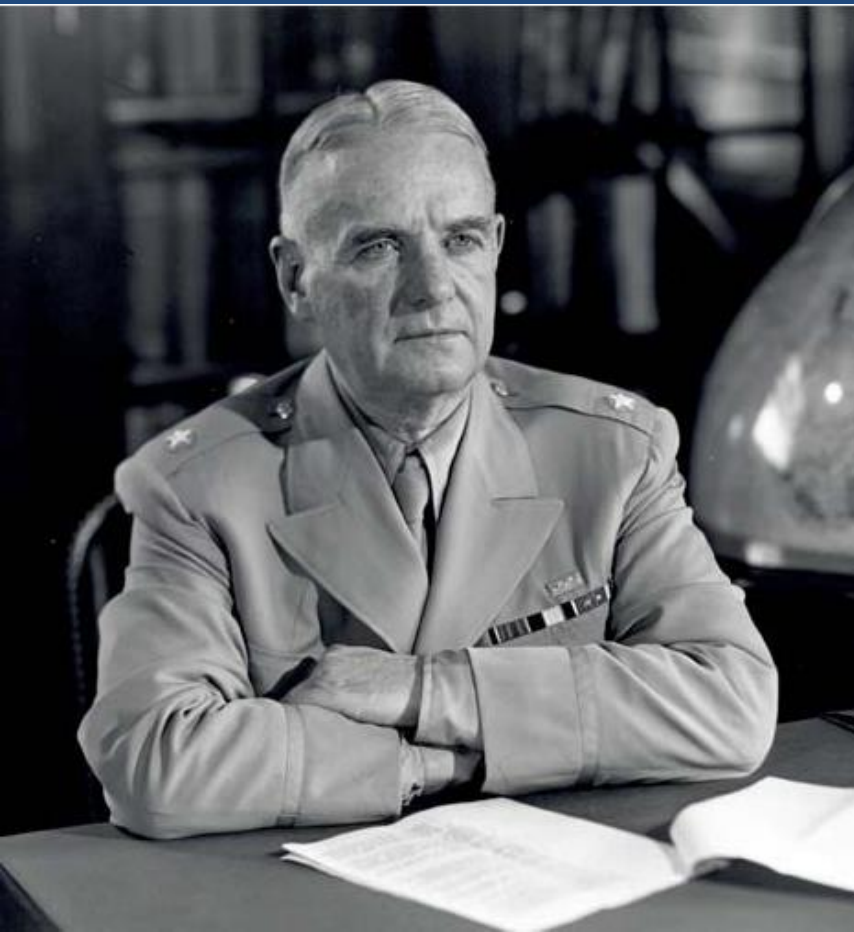


The OSS had been formed largely in response to the intelligence failure that allowed Pearl Harbor. It was headed by BGEN William Donovan.

Donovan had been a Colonel in the reserves and a successful Wall Street lawyer before the war. He had served in combat as an Infantry commander in WWI earning the Medal of Honor.

He was tasked to gather intelligence and oversee a clearing house for intelligence from other services and sources and to provide independent analysis of the information for the President and service chiefs.

Soon after, he was asked to conduct clandestine operations against the Axis powers because the British were doing so.



He took both jobs seriously. But while he was will to cooperate with local commanders and share information, neither he nor anyone working for him would be under their command.

As he was a close personal friend of Roosevelt and his people would not answer to any local commander but the OSS, Douglas MacArthur barred the OSS from operating in his theater and Donovan did not argue.

In Europe, and the Pacific the OSS did provide a valuable backstop to the Theater intelligence staffs. But the Pacific theater under Nimitz had no opportunity for clandestine operations and allied efforts in Europe were only marginally successful.



In Asia it was another matter altogether. On the Asian mainland, the OSS operations had a strategic impact on the war against the Japanese. (It would also provide valuable intelligence and insight into the future of Asia that would be ignored.)

The reason for the success is there were actually very few Asian Japanese collaborators of any note. Most of the population was hostile to the Japanese and more than willing to act against them if supported. And while the Japanese had many agents throughout Asia, most of them would become double agents. The allied intelligence agencies paid better, showed more respect and provided more supplies than the Japanese – and were not abusing the neighbors.

By the end of the war, the Thai army had turned first on the government who cooperated with the Japanese – eliminating them and replacing them with officials working against the Japanese – trained a 90,000 strong guerrilla force to operate against the Japanese and then took the Japanese prisoner. The Viet Minh in Vietnam also operated effectively against the Japanese making it all but impossible for Japanese to leave the cities and bases and expect to survive. Both groups were supported by OSS advisors.

Detachment 101 began with one man – Carl Eifler. He was stationed in Hawaii on December 7<sup>th</sup> 1941 – a recently commissioned Lieutenant. But he also had been born in Burma to Christian missionaries and spoke several different local languages.

He was ordered to Washington without explanation and arrived at the COI (Coordinator of Information) without a clue. He was then asked to recruit a team to conduct intelligence operations against the Japanese in Burma. He would decide who he wanted.

Some he chose for their languages skills. Some for their tactical skills or skills as combat engineers or with radios or as doctors or medics. The first group numbered around 20 men. Eifler arrived in late 1942. As the CO, his job was to sell his unit and its mission to the senior American commander (a pitch that failed with MacArthur).

He found Stilwell in Chongqing during the frustrating period where Stilwell was trying to get Chiang to back the coming offensive. Stilwell barely listened and told Eifler he had three months “to make something go boom” in Burma or Stilwell had no use for him.



Eifler sought to make contact with the Kachin for assistance and would ultimately meet their best guerrilla leader with the help of an Irish Catholic priest who moonlighted as a guerrilla fighter.

Through that contact he gained four jungle guides – all around 14 years of age. He then put a team together led by one of his best friends to blow up the Burma railroad. Eight agents and 4 Kachin parachuted into Burma (for all it was their first jump) and blew up several bridges and caused a land slide that took six weeks to clear.

One agent was shot by a Japanese sniper. Although the team was forced to split up, all the others made it back safely.



Eifler would die of a heart condition and be replaced by the man who led that first raid – Col. Curl. The unit ran agents in south Burma that provided a wealth of intelligence – not in the least of which was alerting the Allies to the Japanese plans in the next year. The detachment also assisted the air force in locating and evacuating downed pilots.



But the biggest success was in guerilla operations. The Kachin wanted to hunt Japanese and would regardless probably, but they were grateful for the weapons, ammunition and advanced technology like radios and mortars which made life even harder for the Japanese.

By 1944, Kachin Rangers – the OSS guerrillas – were operating in direct support of allied operations in North Burma with a lot of success. They would scout for and guide large formations around Japanese strong points, ambush patrols and attack supply convoys.

They also located hidden Japanese supply depots, aircraft hangers and headquarters and called in air strikes.

By 1945, there were over 10,000 Kachin Rangers and they would fight a conventional battle against a Japanese Division – and win.

While the OSS did not win the war in Burma, their actions probably shortened the war and certainly made it far more costly for the Japanese than would have been the case.



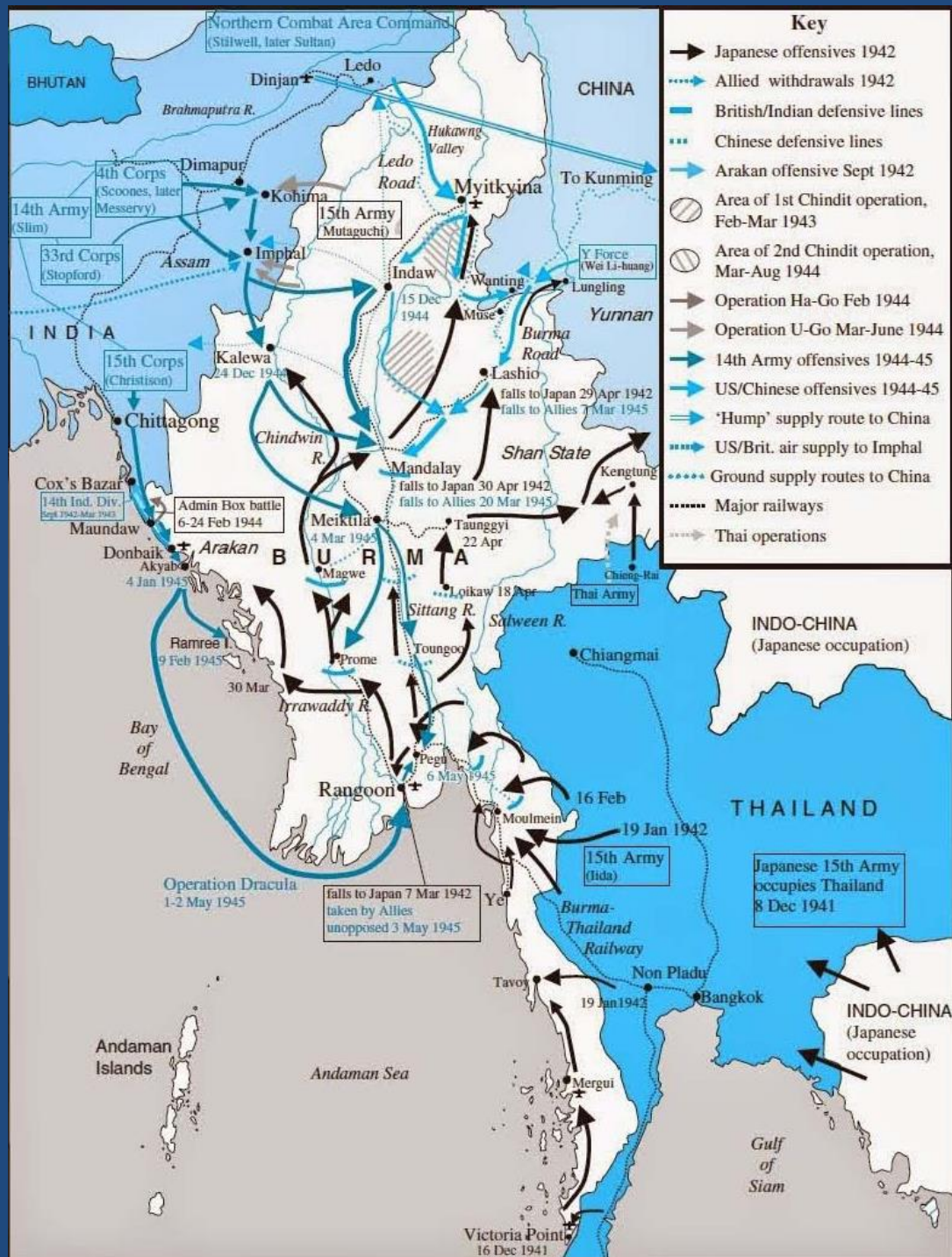
**“Watching General Stilwell change his ‘hats’  
is a lesson in strategic maneuver.”**

**Lt. Gen. William Slim, 1943.**

**“WHEN YOU GO HOME  
TELL THEM OF US AND SAY  
FOR YOUR TOMMORROW  
WE GAVE OUR TODAY.”**

**British War Memorial  
Kohima  
Manipur, India**





Northern Combat Area Command (Stilwell, later Sultan)

BHUTAN

CHINA

INDIA

INDO-CHINA (Japanese occupation)

THAILAND

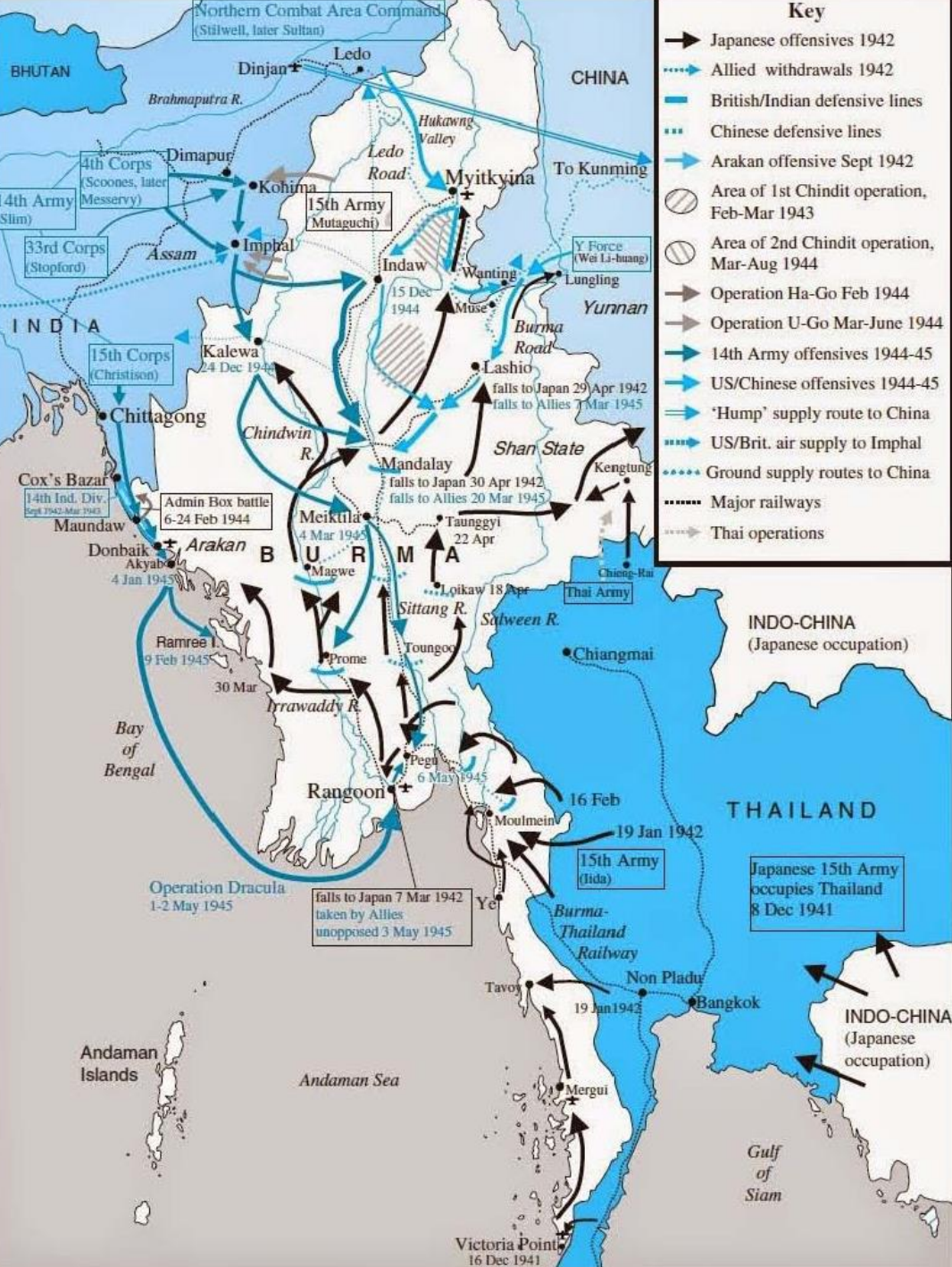
INDO-CHINA (Japanese occupation)

Andaman Islands

Andaman Sea

Gulf of Siam

Victoria Point 16 Dec 1941





The two allied ground actions during the 1943 dry season had not gone as planned. The Arakan offensive had very limited objectives and failed to achieve them. What the objective of the Chindit raid was and how successful (or not) it had been depended upon who was talking.



Wingate thought it was almost a smashing success and with more troops and better supply arrangements the Chindits could take all of Burma.

He was the only one who thought that. While there certainly were lessons learned, repeating the venture was not on anyone else's mind in the summer of 1943.

In the summer of 1942, after assuming command of the XVth Corps, William Slim and his new staff were assigned to a government office building outside of Calcutta.

They were not the only tenants. It was also the headquarters for the Eastern India Air Force (RAF) which was responsible for all air operations relevant to the defense of India (or, should it happen, offensive operations in Burma.) Slim's office was literally next door to Air Vice Marshal "Bill" Willams, the commander of the Eastern India Air Force.

They would spend hours discussing ways to best utilize air power in support of an army in Burma (both having written papers on the topic years earlier in staff college.) Many of their ideas had never been tried on a large scale if they had been tried at all.

They then got their staffs involved and began arranging exercises with actual troops on the ground and planes. And they and their staffs saw problems – mostly with communications – and set to solve those problems.

When XVth Corps and its staff moved to Ranchi – northwest of Calcutta, the Air Force staff moved with them.

When General Irwin was fired, Slim was promoted and assigned as commanding general of the new 14<sup>th</sup> Army. Under his command were his old XVth Corps and the Vth Corps stationed at Imphal. A third corps (XXXIIIrd) was forming as new divisions completed training and would be in reserve.

The Air Force staff remained in the same location. For the rest of the war, when Slim and 14<sup>th</sup> Army Headquarters moved, the Air Force staff moved with them. By the summer of 1943, that Air Force command was redesignated the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tactical Air Force and its primary mission was support of the Army.

The close, cohesive working relationship would spread. By the end of 1944, U.S. 10<sup>th</sup> Air Force was as much a part of the team as the RAF and both would drop their other missions if the army needed support. Even the ATC would respond with a will to supply the army when called.

In no other theater of the war, on either side, were the ground forces and air forces as closely associated. The Air Force and Army planned most everything of mutual interest – right down to the loading of the planes.



Air personnel were temporarily assigned to the Army in support roles even in training. They quickly learned what life was like if air drops failed to deliver or the combat planes missed their target.

Army personnel flew with the air force on supply missions. (At least one SGT flew so many missions that had he been in the RAF he met his quota to rotate home. Alas, he was in the Army so it did not count.)



It can be said the 1<sup>st</sup> Chindit raid was a dress rehearsal – and many problems arose and both the Army and Air Force worked to address them. When the next time came...



Work had begun on a road from Ledo, India to link up with the old Burma Road in late 1942.

Col. Charles Gleim – commander of the 330<sup>th</sup> Engineer Regiment (one of three ultimately assigned the task) described it as the most difficult civil engineering project ever undertaken.

Before the war, Col. Gleim had been project manager both for the building of the George Washington Bridge and the Holland Tunnel – neither could be said to have been “easy.”

The British engineers had considered such a road in the past and decided it was impossible.



The work was under the command of MGEN Lewis Pick.

He commanded some 9,000 American engineers – most of whom were African Americans. In addition, he had about 2,000 Chinese engineers and 10,000 Indian laborers.



It should be noted that this project was underway at the same time as the AL-CAN highway, another difficult road project in Canada and Alaska that also used African American engineers. The troops in India were separate units facing very different challenges in both terrain and climate.



The reason for American involvement in Burma was to build the road.

The U.S. had little interest in retaking Burma for the British except where doing so would make the road possible.

But for the better part of the first year of work, the American effort was entirely outside of any Japanese occupied territory, building its way over the Naga hills.



A military campaign was not necessary until the road crossed the upper Chindwin valley and into Japanese occupied territory.

Until then, a campaign was not absolutely needed.





The road went forward slowly. Conditions at the lead of construction were terrible and supplies could not move forward in the monsoon except along the portion of the road already built.

Until the road surface was complete, heavy equipment would bog down in the mud.



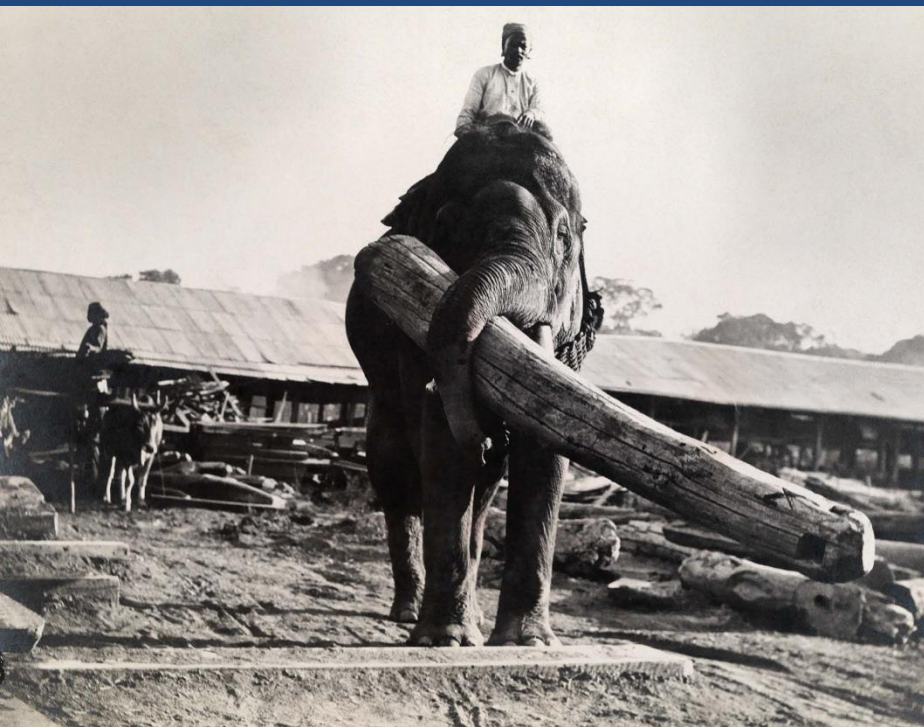
It would have made sense to suspend the work for the monsoon but that would leave thousands of men without a job in the middle of nowhere.

There was an answer – a type of all weather jungle proof all purpose heavy equipment...



Elephants were not so easy to bog down and they had been used for work in that climate for centuries. A foreman from a Burma teak plantation knew how best to use them.

He was James Williams – Elephant Bill.



He was commissioned and placed in command of the Elephant Corps – which had as many as 1800 elephants employed in heavy work including clearing the path for the Ledo Road.

It would seem that the elephants knew the difference between a good employer and a bad one...

The Japanese used elephants as well – with less success.

Elephants were essential to their effort to built the Thailand Burma railroad – a project that also employes tens of thousands of POW's and conscript labor. But there were some jobs – moving heavy timer and large rocks – that no amount of men could accomplish in a hurry no matter what threats were employed.

So the Japanese had to hire elephants. (They tried to seize them but the elephants would escape into the jungle and never be seen again.)

And the elephants had a good union. They would only work for eight hours a day regardless of what the Japanese wanted and any effort to get more work out of them failed.

The Japanese even took over from the local Mahuts – only to find the elephants did not understand Japanese and would wander off.

They also tried to use them to pack supplies – but the elephants wandered off supplies and all as often as not.



Stilwell had been unable to take to the offensive in 1943.

Chiang had refused to allow it.

Stilwell was not going to let another campaign season pass by. This time he was both confident in his Chinese divisions and certain that they would no longer be as inclined to look over their shoulders to Chiang.

He still needed to clear the way for the Ledo Road. By the end of the monsoon it would reach the Chindwin valley, as far as it could go without a land offensive to clear the way.

This time there would be such an offensive.



The Chinese troops kept coming in by air. The Nationalists learned that the troops truly would be completely re-equipped in India. The “volunteers” were not allowed to bring anything but their underwear – which was all they wore. They flew over the hump in unpressurized planes and without oxygen – almost all had never flown before.



Almost all passed out from lack of oxygen which had two surprisingly beneficial effects:

It stopped air sickness, and

Apparently it prevented the troops from freezing to death. The troops thawed out as the plane came into land eager to do well lest they be sent back the way they came.



The Chinese underwent extensive training and yet they gained more than 30 lbs on average (whereas most westerners lost weight).

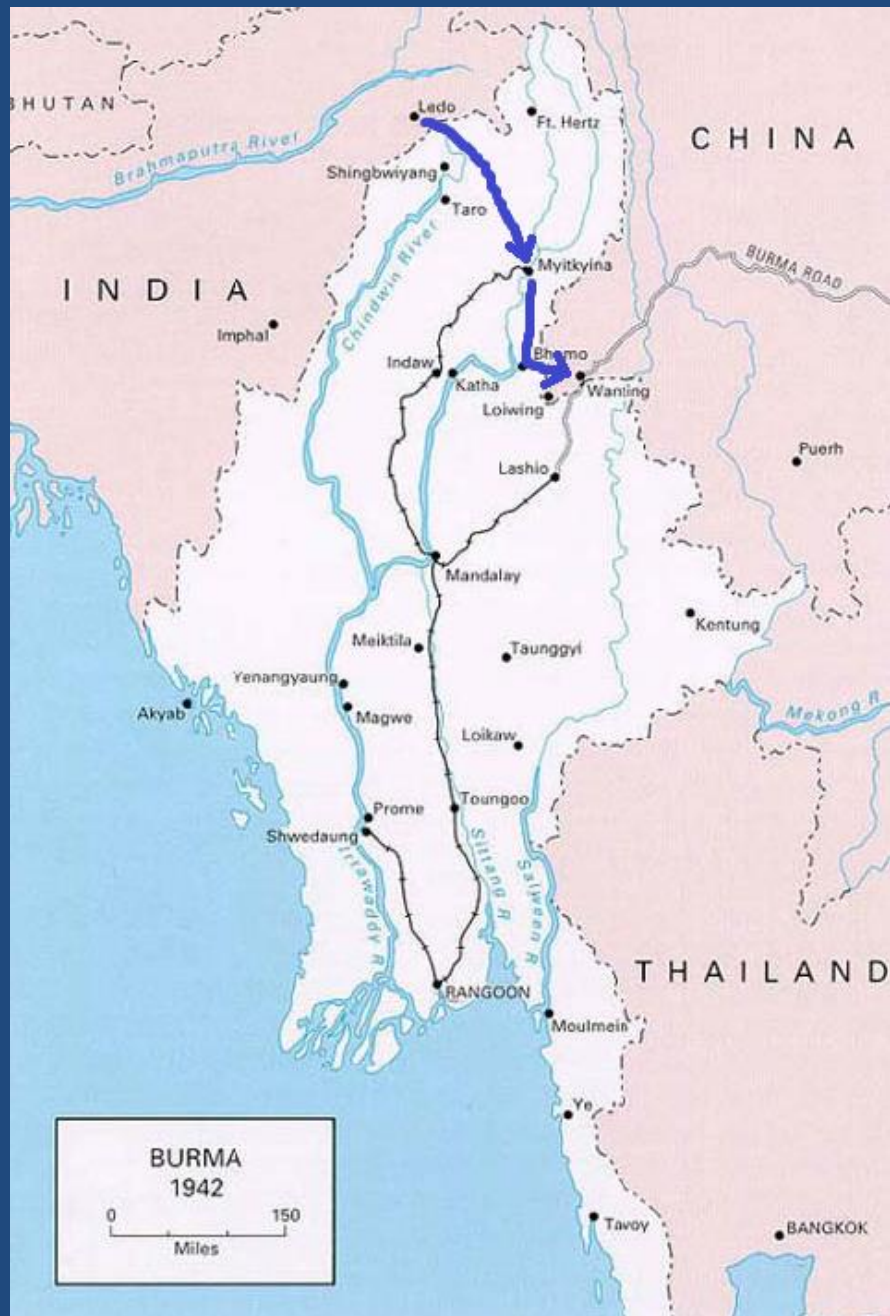
They were specifically trained to operate in the jungles – as were all troops by 1943.

By then end of the 1943 monsoon, three divisions would be ready and two were already deployed along the India-Burma border at Ledo.



The three divisions were the best trained and best equipped in the Chinese Army at that time.

Stilwell was confident of the soldiers but less of the senior officers. He felt he could count on Gen. Sun of the 38<sup>th</sup> Division but less so the others.

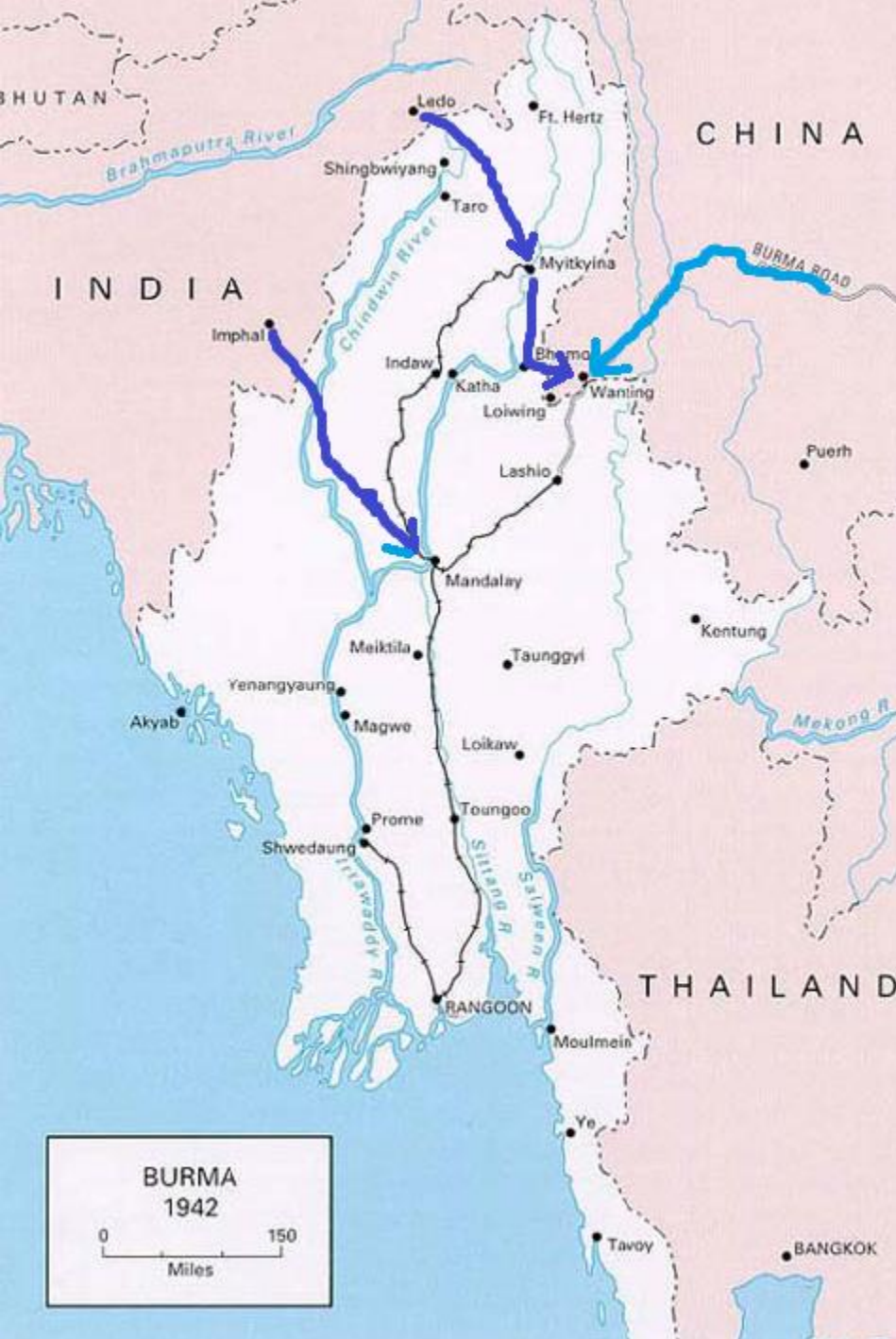


The plan he had recommended the year before had been torpedoed by Chiang's refusal to cooperate. Stilwell now felt he did not absolutely need Chiang until maybe the end. Stilwell believed he could clear the route of the Ledo road with the three divisions (and two more in training.)

He was confident his force could reach Myitkyina before the monsoon hit.

Myitkyina was a key position. It had a large airfield which would be needed for resupply but was currently a forward base for Japanese fighters.

It was also the headquarters of the Japanese 18<sup>th</sup> Division of their 15<sup>th</sup> Army.



Stilwell wanted the British to launch another offensive hoping that would keep the 18<sup>th</sup> Division busy and prevent any significant reinforcement.

Slim was interested in an offensive in 1944 and so long as the two were not mutually dependent upon each other, meaning if one stalled the other would not be stalled as well, he supported the concept.

Slim's goal was to take northern Burma as a prelude to taking the rest of the country.

But he did have reservations. There were at least five Japanese divisions in Burma and they had not been seriously depleted. Any plans, however, would have to wait...



As a result of the Casablanca and Cairo Conferences in early 1943, a new command would be called the South East Asia Command (SEAC).

Its area of responsibility included India, Burma, Malaya, Singapore and Sumatra (Indonesia). The rest of Indonesia fell under MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Command.

SEAC did not include China. First of all the Chinese had made it clear they would not work with much less for the British. They implied they would do so for the Americans but thus far had chafed whenever they were asked to actually do something.

China would remain part of the American CBI. The American's, however, would not support operations outside of China-Burma-India.

Churchill wanted to focus efforts on retaking Malaya and Singapore and perhaps Sumatra – none of which the Americans supported and thus the Americans drew their own line. If the British wanted Malaya and points south – they were free to do so but without American manpower or materiel.



The selection for the Supreme Commander of SEAC would seem an odd choice. He was younger than most if not all of the generals in theater. Of the then key players, Claire Chennault was closest in age (by his true date of birth). Chennault was seven years older than the new commander. Slim was almost a decade older and Stilwell close to twenty years older (17 to be exact).

The man was the most junior Rear Admiral in the Royal Navy (by time in service) by several years. But Lord Louis Mountbatten had two things going for him:

King George VI was his second cousin and he thought up odd ideas like the Commandos and the raid on Dieppe which Churchill loved.



The Royal Navy did not like Mountbatten. He was too young and not nearly capable enough for high rank. As a ship captain he was deemed at best average. India was a theater without any navy to speak of; in other words the perfect place to send the young admiral.



It has been said Mountbatten desired to run his theater like MacArthur – a personal fiefdom. Churchill wanted another Eisenhower, a manager rather than a ruler. The truth was Mountbatten was not about to be a ruler – the personalities in theater made that impossible and was more cheerleader than manager.

While he and his staff developed plans, they were effectively subordinate to the plans of the subordinate commanders.

Mountbatten arrived in August of 1943 and was promoted to full admiral (As he was in charge it was only fitting he outranked everyone else.)

He had grand ideas – or rather Churchill had them namely for an amphibious assault on Malaya and Sumatra with the ultimate goal of retaking Singapore. The ideas died almost immediately when he learned there were no ships in his theater to speak of. He would manage to acquire some ships by the end of 1943 only to see them recalled to Europe for Anzio and later Normandy. (He kept some landing ships by claiming they were beyond repair but not enough for any major operations.)

He quickly saw his subordinate commanders (Slim, Williams (RAF), Bissell (10<sup>th</sup> Air Force) and Stilwell) had sound ideas and plans at least for the next campaign season so he backed them up. For the most part, he did not meddle with things if he felt they were working and by the time he arrived in India what he found seemed to work.

Mountbatten was the last piece in a command shake up that effectively began with the removal of Lt. Gen. Irwin as Army Commander.

By the time Mountbatten arrived:



Field Marshal Archibald Wavell had been moved “upstairs.” He had been the original theater commander over 18 months earlier and since then he had been Chief of the Indian General Staff – head of the Indian Army and theater of operations.

He had fired Irwin over the failed Arakan campaign and was promoted to Viceroy of India.

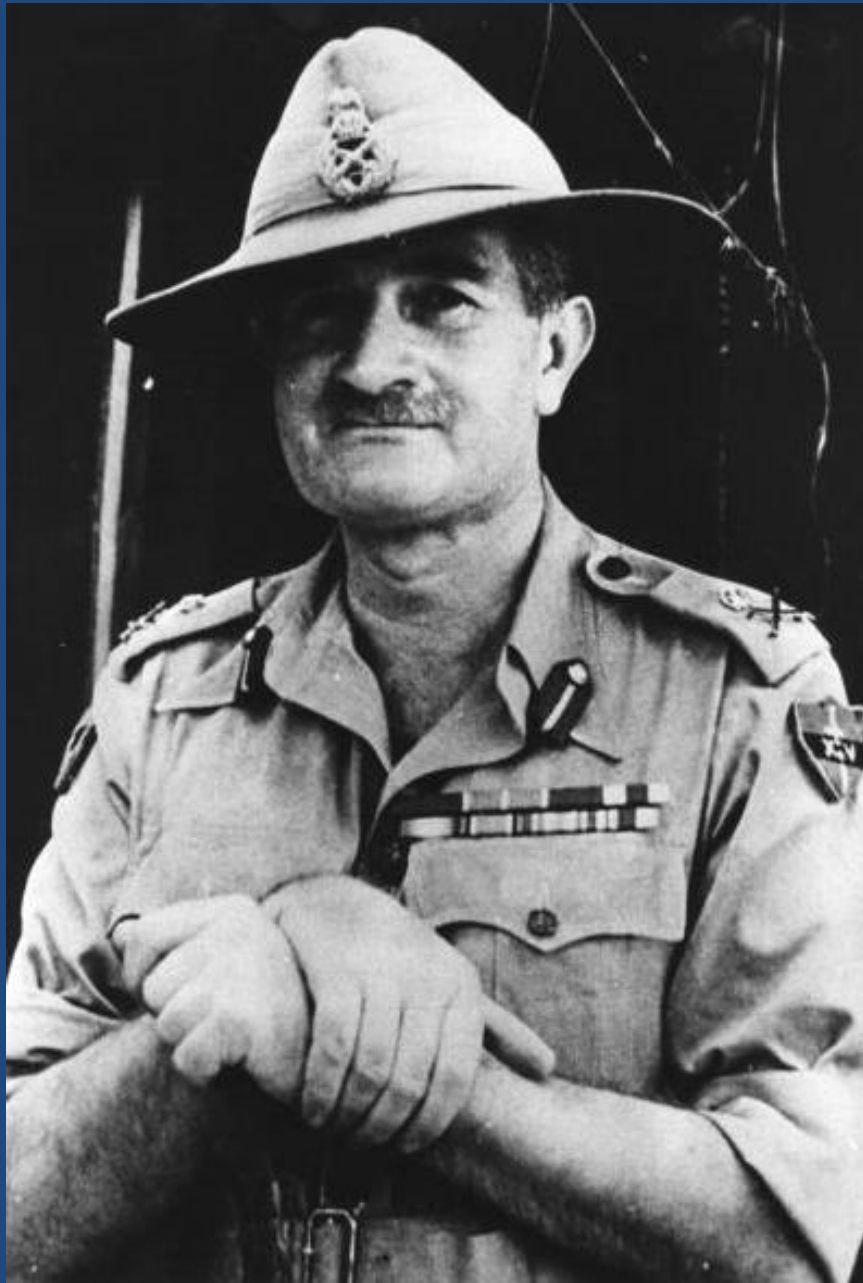
This was a non-military post. He was head of the King’s government in India and his job was to keep India in the war which meant keeping the National Congress Party under control.



Claude Auchinleck had been in India almost a year without any real job. He replaced Wavell as Chief of the Indian Army although without any immediate operations responsibility aside from maintaining civil order in India.

For the war, his job was to recruit, train and equip soldiers (and airmen) for the Indian Armed Forces.

Operational command was not his direct responsibility.



Slim, as previously noted was named as Commander 14<sup>th</sup> Army and tasked with military operations in defense of India and in Burma.



Air Marshal Richard Peirse would be named as Commander of SEAC Air Forces. He had been head of the RAF Bomber Command following the Battle of Britain but had been relieved due to poor results (he was opposed to area bombing).

He had been Air Commander of the Air Forces in the short lived ADBA command in early 1942 and since then had been commander of RAF and commonwealth Air Forces in India.

He had developed a good working relationship with the American 10<sup>th</sup> Air Force and the British Army.





Lt. Gen. George Stratermeyer was assigned as deputy commander for Air Forces SEAC (under Peirse) and Commander of American Air Forces Far East which included the 10<sup>th</sup> Air Force in India and the 14<sup>th</sup> Air Force in China. He was also responsible for providing support to the ATC in India although its command was separate.



Slim was named as Deputy Commander for SEAC. In addition Stilwell was now the Commander of the Northern Combat Area Command (NCAC) which included all troops tasked with the Ledo Road and clearing the Japanese from the region for that road and later the Burma Road.

He also was sole commander (in SEAC) of any Chinese forces and all American forces.



Claire Chennault had been promoted to Major General and named Commander of the 14<sup>th</sup> Air Force – basically a renamed version of his former China Air Task Force. He was livid with the changes.

He wanted Stilwell gone or at least not in any position of authority over him.

He felt he was the best choice for U.S. Forces Commander but would settle for Commander of the U.S. Far Eastern Air Forces. And he had made his opinions known all too well.

He was livid to learn he still answered to Stilwell and to another Air Force officer whom he could not respect (Stratermeyer like his predecessor was a bomber pilot.)

Chennault's pique would erupt into one of two serious command crises in the Far East in 1943 – both centered on Joe Stilwell.

Chennault remained convinced no army could fight against a well trained and well equipped Air Force and had convinced Chiang Kai-Shek that his air force could and would win the war all by itself.

This was what Chiang wanted to hear. With the war being fought and won by American air power, he had no reason to risk his army (or more importantly its supplies) in fighting the Japanese. After all the real enemy was not to the east but to the north – the Chinese Communists.

Stilwell believed none of it. Air power alone could do nothing. (Chennault's air force could not defend the airfields against ground attack.) The only reason the U.S. was sending supplies were for their use against the Japanese. This was a point he made clear on many occasions much to the annoyance of Chiang and to the rage of Chennault.

But there were other forces at work. Making Chiang happy would help whomever it was who saw that happen and getting rid of Stilwell for a more pliant officer – like Chennault – would make Chiang happy.



There was a power struggle of sorts in the Kumingtang. Chiang had no clear successor – it seemed to change with the breeze. Tse-ven Soong wanted it to be clarified and wanted to be #2 and heir apparent and making Chiang happy would do that.

The problem was he had sisters. Mei-ling was Chiang's wife and sister of Sun Yat-Sen's widow and their sister Ai-ling was married to the richest man in China and all three had far more influence than their brother. Ai-Ling and Mei-ling saw to it that the attempt to get rid of Stilwell enraged Chiang.

T.V. Soong was sent “to sweep the graves of his ancestors” – exile.

Chennault was told to mind his own business.

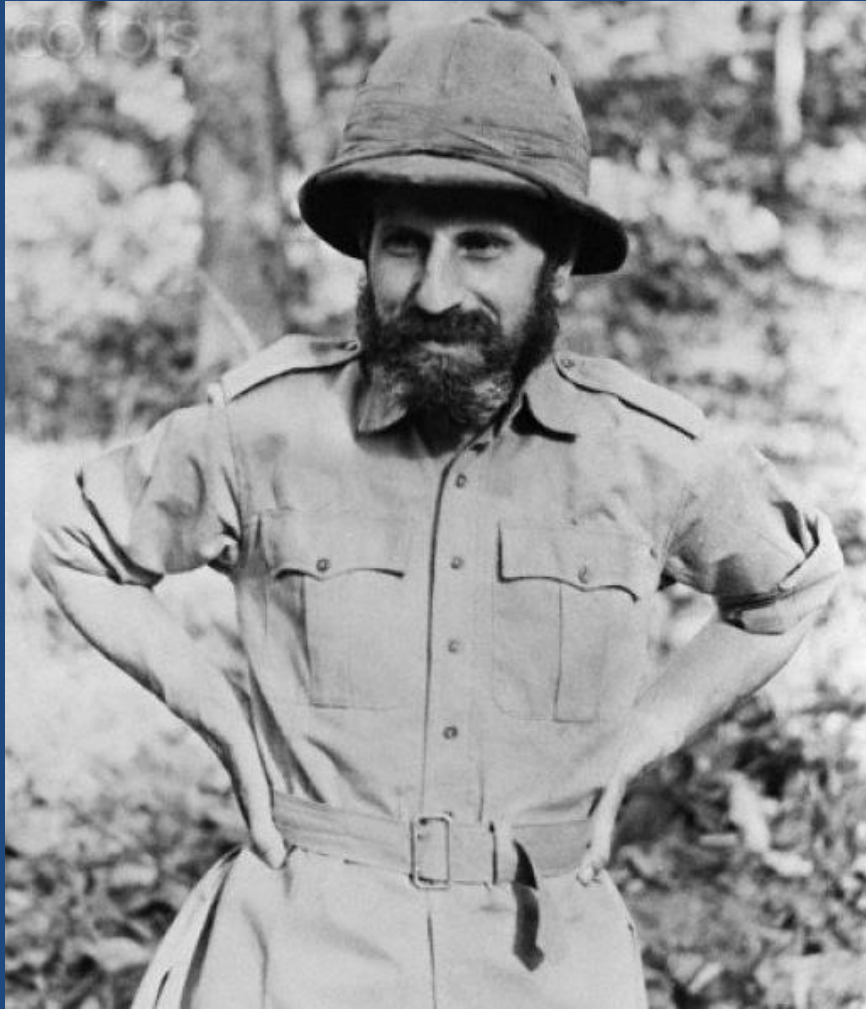


The second (and odder) command crisis was brought on by the appointment of Gen. George Giffard (India Army) as commander of 11<sup>th</sup> Army Group. In Mountbatten's (and others) mind there were now two armies in India – Slim's 14th and the New 1<sup>st</sup> (Chinese) Army under Stilwell thus an overall commander was necessary.

Stilwell absolutely refused to accept Giffard. He would claim as senior U.S. Army commander he could not answer to a Brit and as Deputy Theater Commander he could not accept orders from a subordinate.

What made it odd was his offer of a compromise.

He agreed to be under General Slim.



There was a possible third crisis brewing. Orde Wingate was being ignored for the most part. He had not been promoted (again) after what he saw as a successful operation. He had not been given command of anything more than what he had before.

He wanted to do it again this time with as much of the Army under his command as possible – if not the entire thing. At this stage in the planning he was considered for a support role – a more controlled and less ambitious screening mission.

And he had learned that he was to train Americans in his style of operations but no one was saying whether they would be his to command. Fortunately, for now, he was merely a Colonel and the brass could ignore Colonels.



Wingate went on leave – in a foul mood. He was invited to see Churchill to discuss his recent operations. Wingate was Churchill's kind of man – one who thought unconventional and made it work. His raid was a huge propaganda victory and he made an impression on Churchill.

Churchill invited him to attend the next allied summit if he could spare the time and leave immediately. Churchill then suggested Wingate bring his wife along.

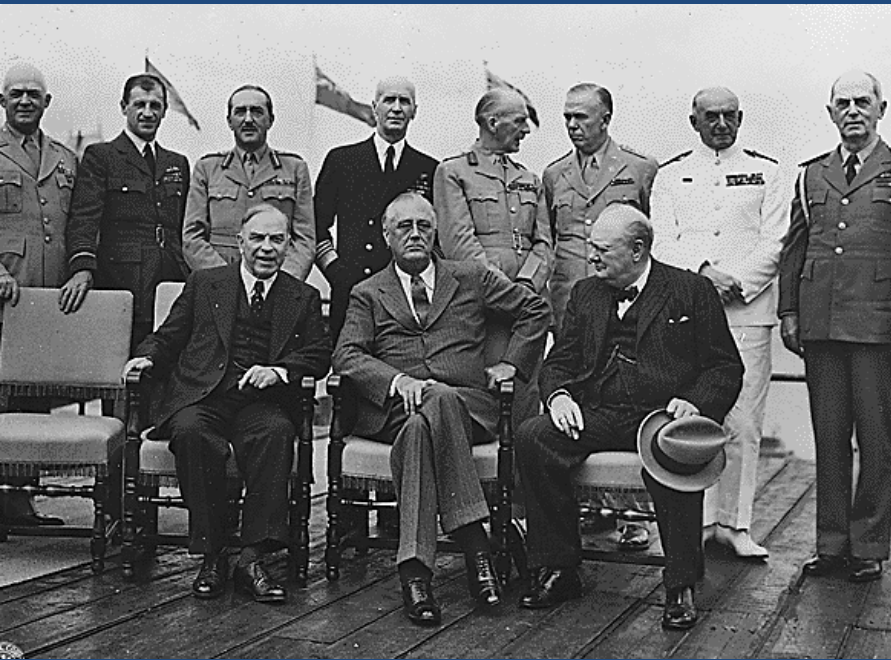
Wingate promised huge returns and few casualties if he was allowed a larger force – two things that always caught the Prime Minister's attention.

Wingate accompanied Churchill to Canada.



Aug 17 – 24, 1943

Quebec



The Quebec Conference was another of the planning meetings. It was originally conceived to bring in Stalin and the Russians but they refused as the location was inconvenient.

Much of the conference hammered out details unresolved at Casablanca to include a firm commitment to an invasion of France in 1944.

The allies further agreed that in essence the war with Japan would not have any limitations while restricting clandestine and peripheral operations in Europe (no invasion of the Balkans.)

In regards to the Far East it is notable for a few reasons. First of all, Wingate managed to get some of what he wanted – a promotion and a larger force to run around behind enemy lines. (Not as much as he wanted but more than he had when he left India.)

Second was that it largely ignored its host – the Canadians.

Prime Minister McKenzie King was giving Churchill fits. He had very good relations with the United States but not with Great Britain. The British Army (and Churchill) would have had the Canadian Army serve where needed. Churchill already had problems with Australia – only one division remained in Europe and no more were coming and the Australian Air Force was entirely in the Pacific.

The Canadians refused flat out to send troops anywhere but to Europe and even then only under Canadian Command. Churchill hoped Roosevelt would help the Canadians see reason. It was a forlorn hope. McKenzie King explained his countrymen would crucify his party at the polls if the Army was used to preserve the British Empire. Dealing with Japan in the Pacific (not Asia) or Germany was acceptable. Restoring British rule anywhere was not.

To make matters for the British worse, the Canadian now had a respectable Air Force of their own and they wanted their pilots and crews back. A significant number were serving in the RAF. The Brits balked. It turned out a third of all the RAF personnel were Canadian.

Nov 22 – 26, 1943

Cairo



The Cairo Conference was supposed to showcase part of Roosevelt's vision of the post-war world. In Roosevelt's mind, there needed to be a friendly power in the Pacific to replace the very unfriendly Japanese. That was to be China.

Churchill and the British were not keen on a power in the Pacific that was not either British or American and it was

hoped Roosevelt would come around.

The conference was a disaster. The Chinese were completely unprepared to talk about anything – presuming they might have been amenable at all. Roosevelt hoped Chiang would agree to an offensive against the Japanese. They would not – although if the Americans wanted to go at it alone, the Chinese would not stand in the way – provided Lend Lease was increased (again.)

Roosevelt began to suspect that his military advisors were right all along.

What particularly vexed Roosevelt was how Chiang vacillated. One moment he seemed to agree, the next he would say he needed far more than the allies could give to even begin to think about it and the next refuse no matter what was offered and then be somewhat agreeable again. But in the end he refused unless all his demands were met.

Roosevelt's vision of China took a serious blow but he was not yet willing to believe his ideal China and the reality were incompatible ideas.

The conference agreed on the offensive planned for Burma in 1944 and approved it. Many of the senior officers from the CBI and SEAC were present for detailed planning coordination – supplies.

One was disappointed. Still a colonel, Wingate had to wait in line to get a drink at the bar behind all the other colonels – and there was a mob of them. Wingate did not drink – not alcohol (unlike the hoard of colonels in the line ahead of him). He was thirsty and wanted a glass of water – or similar.

He saw water in a potted plant and drank it.

He contracted Typhoid and nearly died from it.

Nov 28 – Dec 1, 1943 Tehran



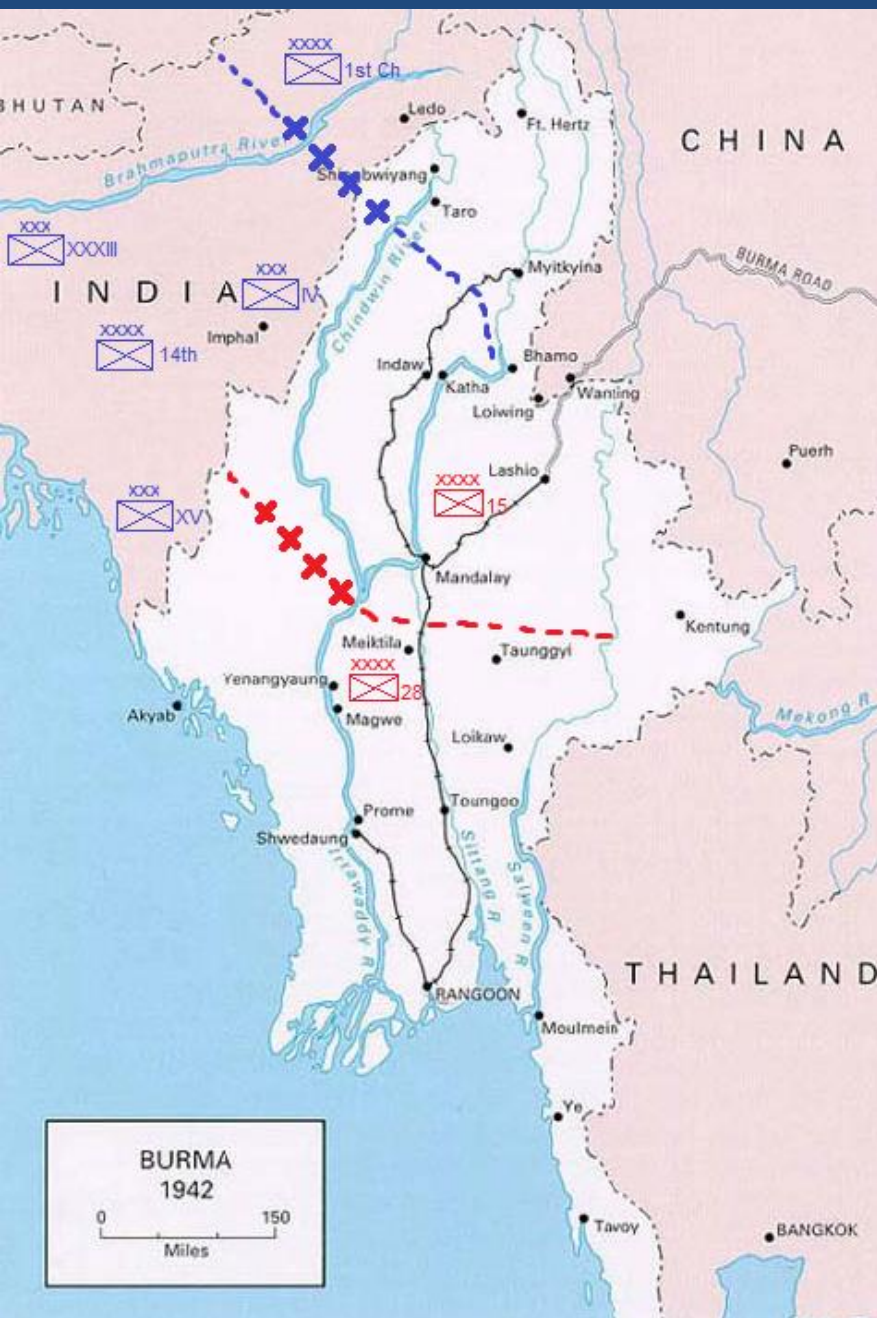
The Tehran Conference was the last of 1943. It would have an indirect effect on the war in Asia.

Stalin was everything Chiang was not.

Churchill had no use for Chiang. He would never trust Stalin. Roosevelt, however, was pleased that Stalin was not there to complain and demand more than what was already promised.

Roosevelt asked about Stalin's position on Japan. Stalin was not an ally but did not want a two front war. Once Germany was defeated the situation in the Far East could be considered. (It was almost two years before he would firmly commit to war against Japan but in 1943 Stalin's position was more to Roosevelt's liking than Chiang's.)

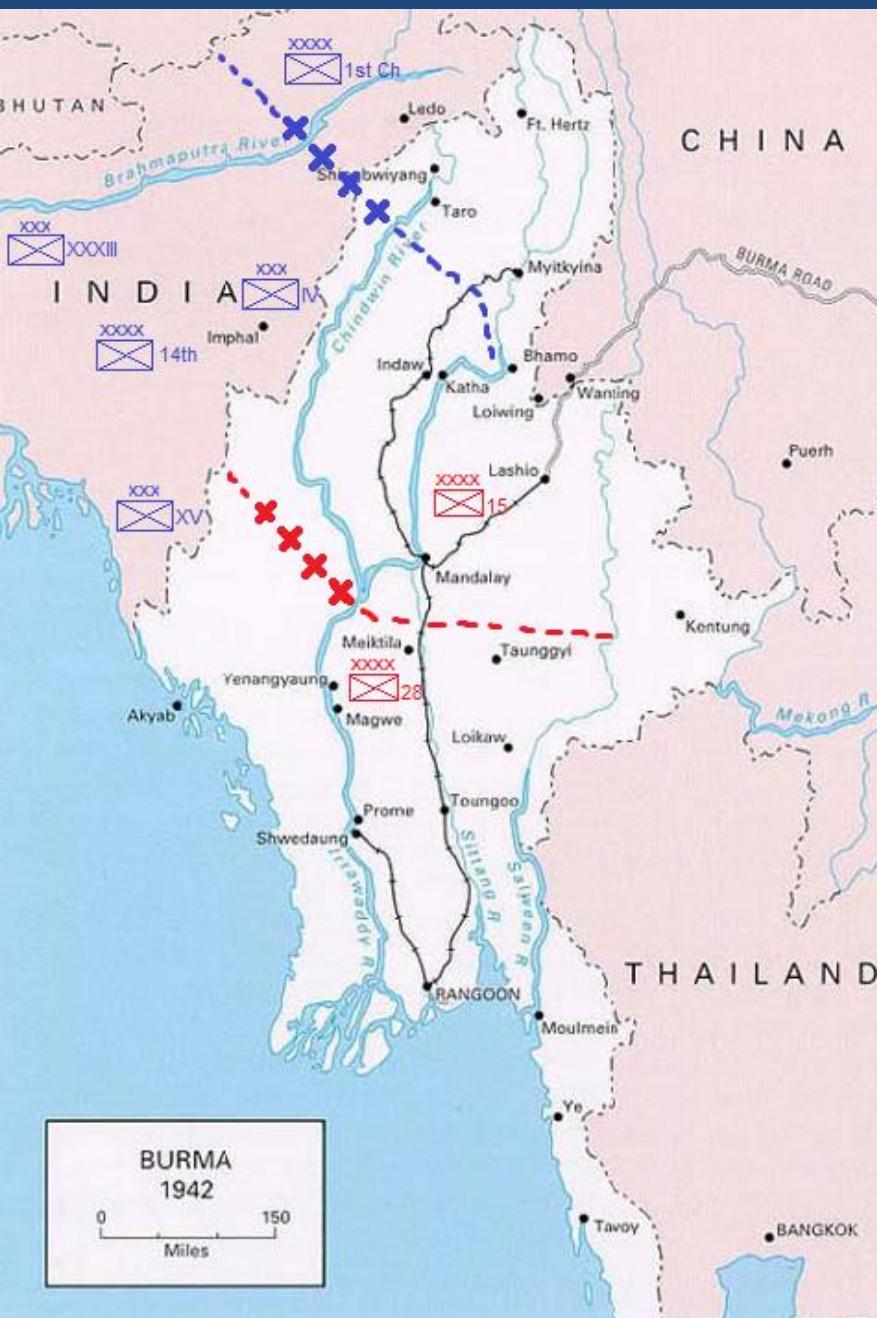
Roosevelt began to consider other options. Plans for a large ground force were shelved and he began to consider approaching the "so called" Chinese Communists.



By late 1943, the allies had a numerical advantage on the Burma-India border. In the north was Stilwell's Northern Combat Area Command with three Chinese Divisions and just before the offensive began an American independent brigade.

South was 14<sup>th</sup> Army with two Corps deployed. IV<sup>th</sup> Corps was headquartered at Imphal with the 17<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> Indian Divisions in the area. XV<sup>th</sup> Corps was headquartered at Chittagong. 7<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Indian Divisions faced the Japanese in the Arakan. The British 81<sup>st</sup> (West African) Division was moving up and the British 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> Indian Divisions were in reserve.

XXXIII<sup>rd</sup> Corps was in reserve forming.



The Japanese had two armies (roughly the size of a British or American Corps) under the Burma Area Army.

In the north was the 15<sup>th</sup> Army. The 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was at Myitkyina. The 15<sup>th</sup>, 31<sup>st</sup> and 33<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Divisions were at the Chindwin River.

South was the 28<sup>th</sup> Army. Its 55<sup>th</sup> Division faced the British in the Arakan. The rest of its divisions were then on the eastern side of the Irrawaddy River.

The allies planned a major offensive against the 15<sup>th</sup> Army aimed at clearing northern Burma and opening the way for the Ledo Road. But they were not the only side with a plan.

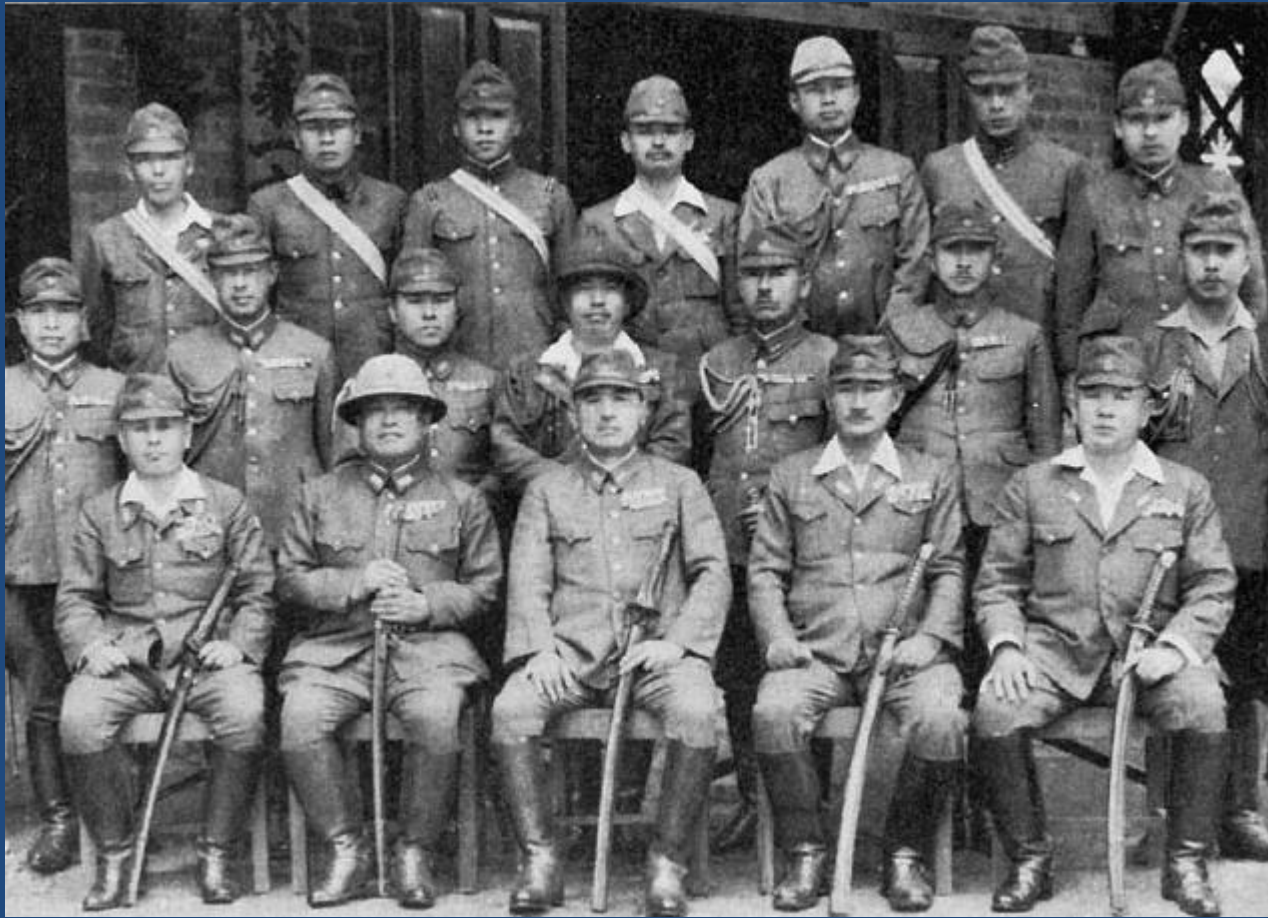


The Burma Area Army was under the command of LGEN Masakazu Kawabe. While the allies considered the Chindit raid of '43 a failure, Kawabe did not. His Army had been embarrassed first that the raid occurred and second that the Japanese failed to destroy it.

At the very least he felt the British needed to be dealt a blow to discourage any repeat and the Chindits had shown him that the Chin and Naga Hills were not impassible barriers to an army.

Initially his plan was limited to causing enough damage to the British concentrations on the border that there would be little threat from them. Things spiraled out of control quickly.





The senior officers of the Japanese 15<sup>th</sup> Army in Burma, late 1942:

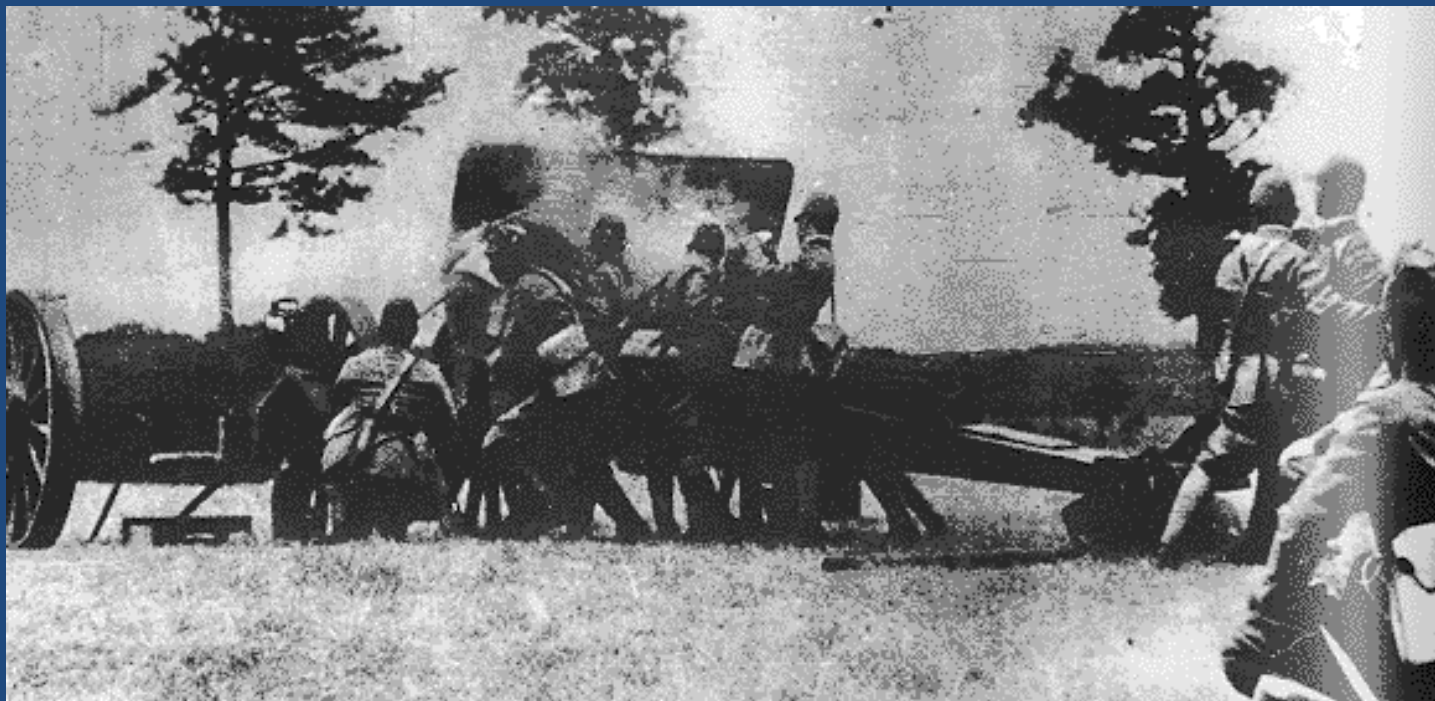
Seated L-R: Yamagida (33<sup>rd</sup> Inf. Div.), Tanaka (18<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div.), Mutaguchi (15<sup>th</sup> Army), Matsuyama (56<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div.), Sato (31<sup>st</sup> Inf. Div.). By late 1943, the 56<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div. was with the 28<sup>th</sup> Army and was replaced with the 15<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div. under Yamaguchi.

The plan was in two phases. The first would be Operation Ha-Go in the Arakan. The 55<sup>th</sup> Division would surround one of the British divisions and destroy it if possible but the main goal was diversionary – to force the British to deploy troops to the Arakan from Manipur and Imphal.

The main offensive was Operation U-Go would be against Imphal. Three of the four divisions from 15<sup>th</sup> Army would take part. Only Tanaka's 18<sup>th</sup> would be left in place to defend against the Chinese. The 15<sup>th</sup> Army would surround what was left of the British in the Imphal plain, cut off their supplies at a mountain town called Kohima and destroy the enemy and seize his supplies. Imphal was a major supply base.

If possible and without jeopardizing the destruction of the British at Imphal, the plan allowed for a move against the railroad yard at Dimapur in the Assam Valley and possibly more but the goal was not taking territory so much as breaking the British Army.

But then Kaweba spent time with his good friend and the commander of the 15<sup>th</sup> Army Renya Mutaguchi.



Renya Mutaguchi arguably started the whole thing. He had commanded the troops that opened fire on the Chinese soldiers at the Marco Polo Bridge outside of Beijing in July of 1937 – which led to the current war. Mutaguchi was a member of the more militant faction in the Army which believed Japan's manifest destiny was to conquer Asia.

He also had dreams of glory. He had a white horse which he planned to ride through the streets of a major capitol his Army had conquered. And once told of Kaweba's basic plan, he could see himself as the conqueror of India riding through the streets of Dehli.

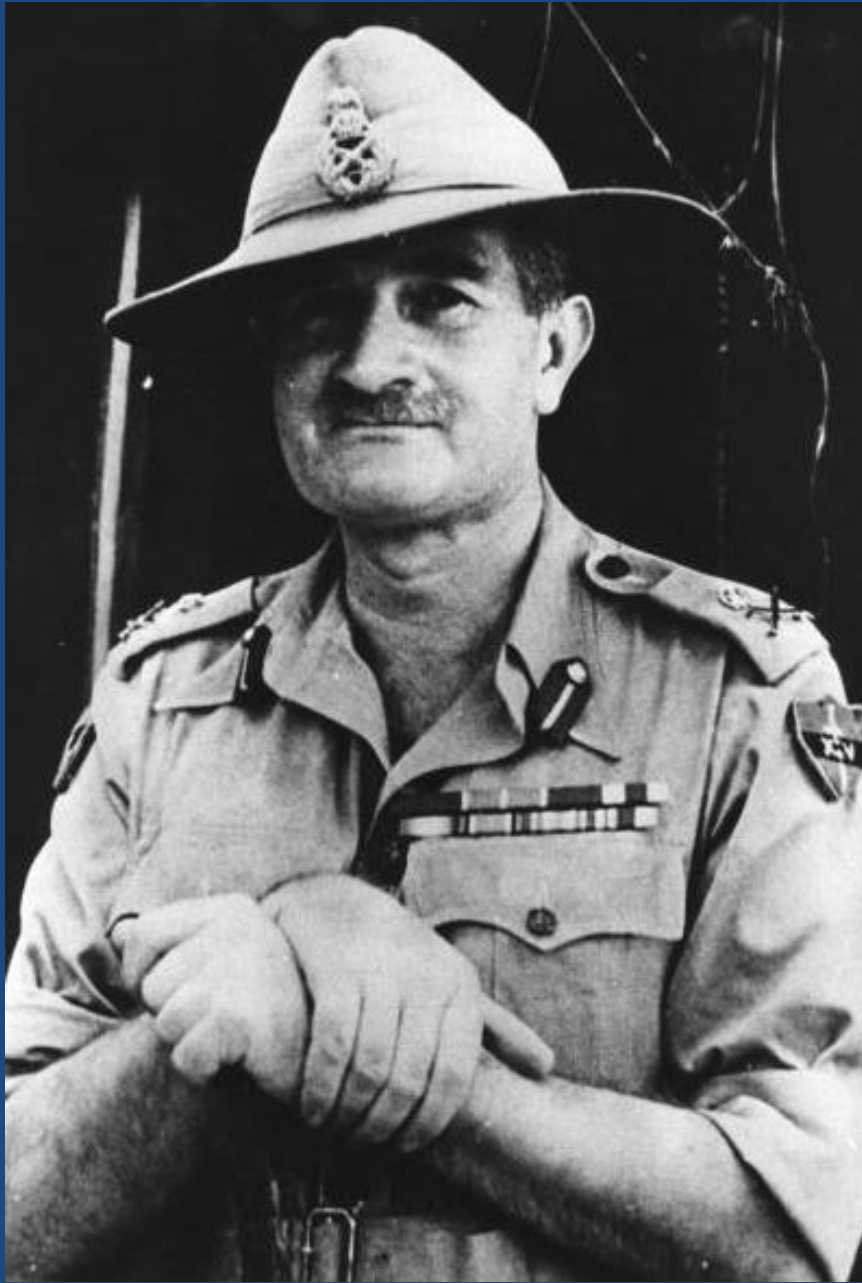
The plan was typically Japanese. It was based upon flawed if not outright useless intelligence, it grossly underestimated the size and capabilities of the enemies or their ability, it grossly overestimated the capabilities of the Japanese military and it presumed the enemy would do exactly what the plan said the enemy would do.

Unlike most Japanese plans, almost everyone in Burma and Southeast Asia not named Kawaba or Mutaguchi thought the plan was terrible including Kawabe and Mutaguchi's staffs and three of the four division commanders tapped to take part (and Tanaka who would not.)

The critics pointed out the Army could not supply a force of any size across the Chindwin for more than a week and probably less and to rely upon seizing the enemy's supplies was asking for trouble. They also noted the terrain would not allow movement nearly as quickly as the plan required. And finally, the three divisions attacking Imphal would be spread so far apart it would be impossible for them to act in concert or in support of each other.

Army Headquarters in Tokyo loved the idea.

The plan was approved.

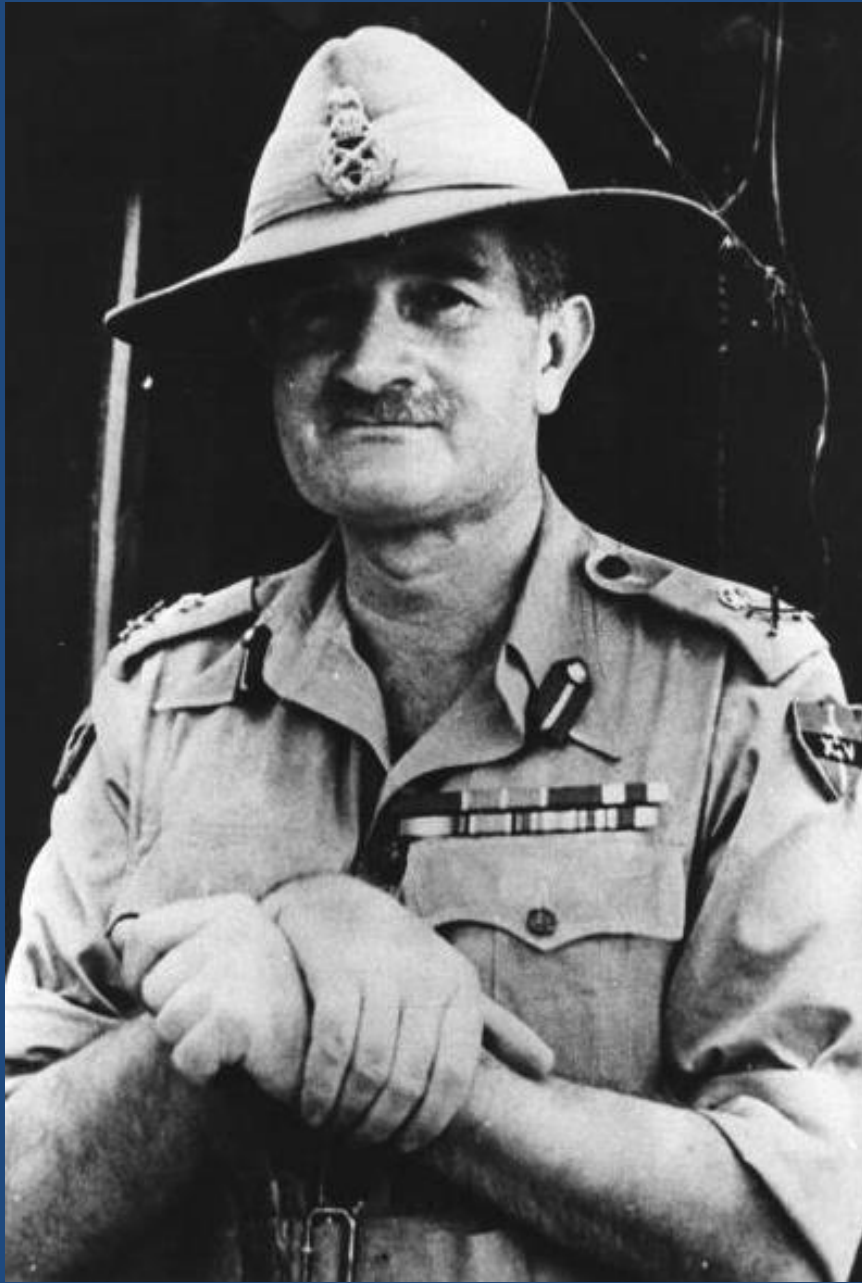


What the Japanese did not know was that in addition to their codes being broken, their headquarters were riddled with spies. Most of the menial work for the Japanese was done by Burmese (of various ethnicities) who were deemed too unintelligent to worry about.

Many understood Japanese – they were educated. And many reported everything they saw and heard to allied intelligence.

The British knew the Japanese were coming. The Allies knew the Japanese were ignoring the Chinese in the north. What they did not know at first was exactly when.

The news made General Slim's day.



Slim was prepared to go over to the offensive in Burma. He was less certain if all of his army was. They were still at least leery of the Japanese.

What he wanted to do was figure out a way to draw the Japanese into a trap on ground he had prepared and destroy as many of them as possible. Doing so would both completely destroy any myth about the Japanese and cut them down to size.

He was in a fix as he could not see a certain way to do that by invading Burma.

Then the Japanese did what he did not expect and truly appreciated. They had decided to come to him.



The SEAC command allowed Slim to make preparations for a defensive battle but as the Japanese did not appear to be threatening the planned operations in the north, they were to go forward on schedule.

The Ledo Road had been completed as far as Shingbwiang on the west bank of the upper Chindwin River. Road work continued as far as pontoon bridge in place across the river and work had begun on the far side. But while the river bank at Shingbwiang had not been well defended (the Japanese were driven off by a large Chinese patrol force), the Japanese were too close for work to continue. They needed to be cleared away.

This was Stilwell's mission...

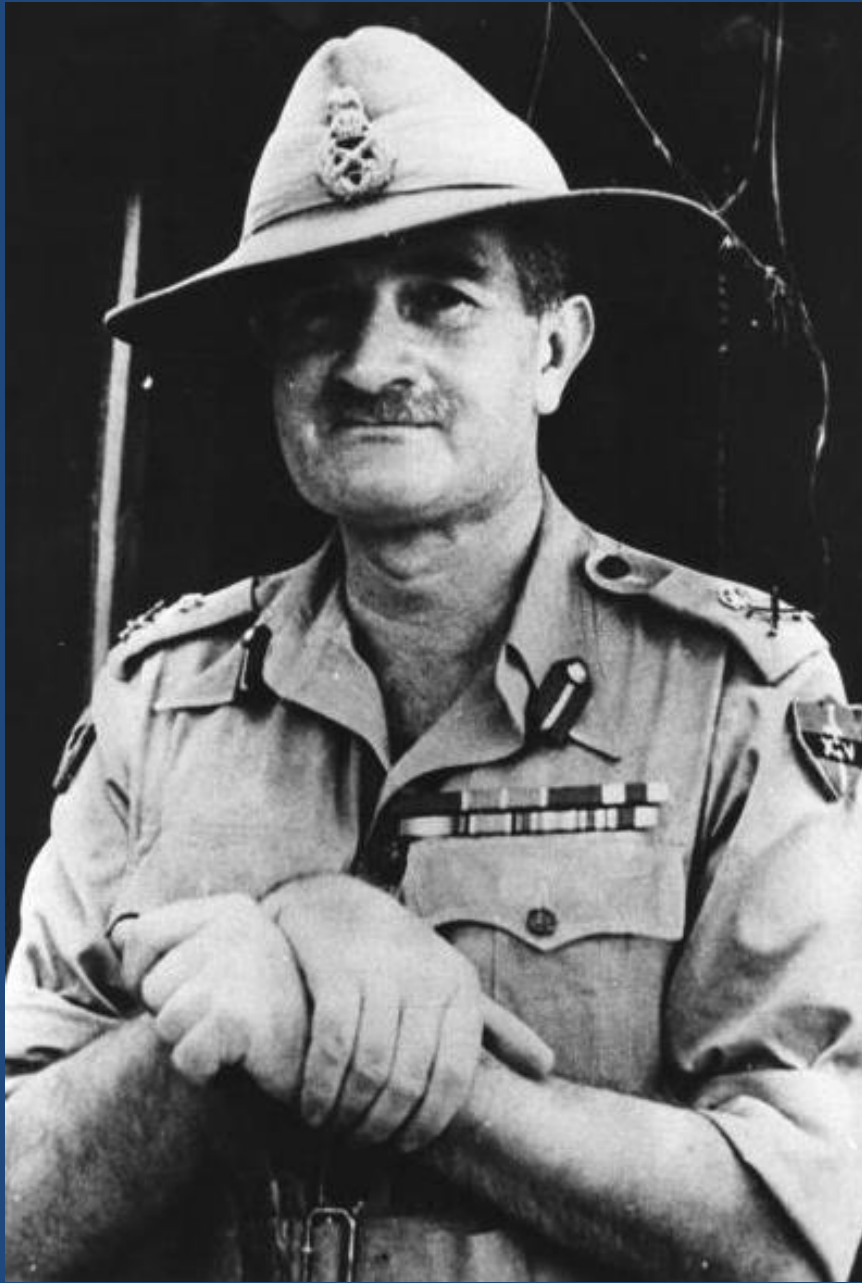
The shock of 1942 was over. The shock had been the ability of the Japanese to maneuver through the jungle and over the steep “hills” without a road for supplies. The Chinese, British and Americans had spent the time training to do the same thing – and by 1944 they had reached a point where they made the Japanese look like amateurs.

That was the effect of the close cooperation that had developed between the ground and air forces. Air power allowed the allies to go over the enemy rather than through them and made it almost impossible for the Japanese to truly cut off an allied force from its supplies.

And by 1944 the allies had air superiority at least over Northern Burma and the Arakan. Japanese fighters still showed up but if the Allies had fighters in the area, the Japanese would fail in their mission and probably fail to get back to base.

For the American advance, the road was important in so far as the advance allowed it to be built. For much of the 1944 campaign, the advance was at the speed of the road construction which was over two miles per day on a bad day (and occasionally almost as fast as the army could walk.)





The British Army to a man was trained to deal with the Japanese tactics. Among the things Slim learned on the 1942 retreat was there was no true rear area in the jungle meaning everyone had to be ready and able to fight off a Japanese attack.

It had annoyed some at first. Clerks, radio operators, mechanics and supply personnel, cooks and the like often had never been trained to fight and initially felt it beneath them – after all they were smart enough to avoid the infantry.

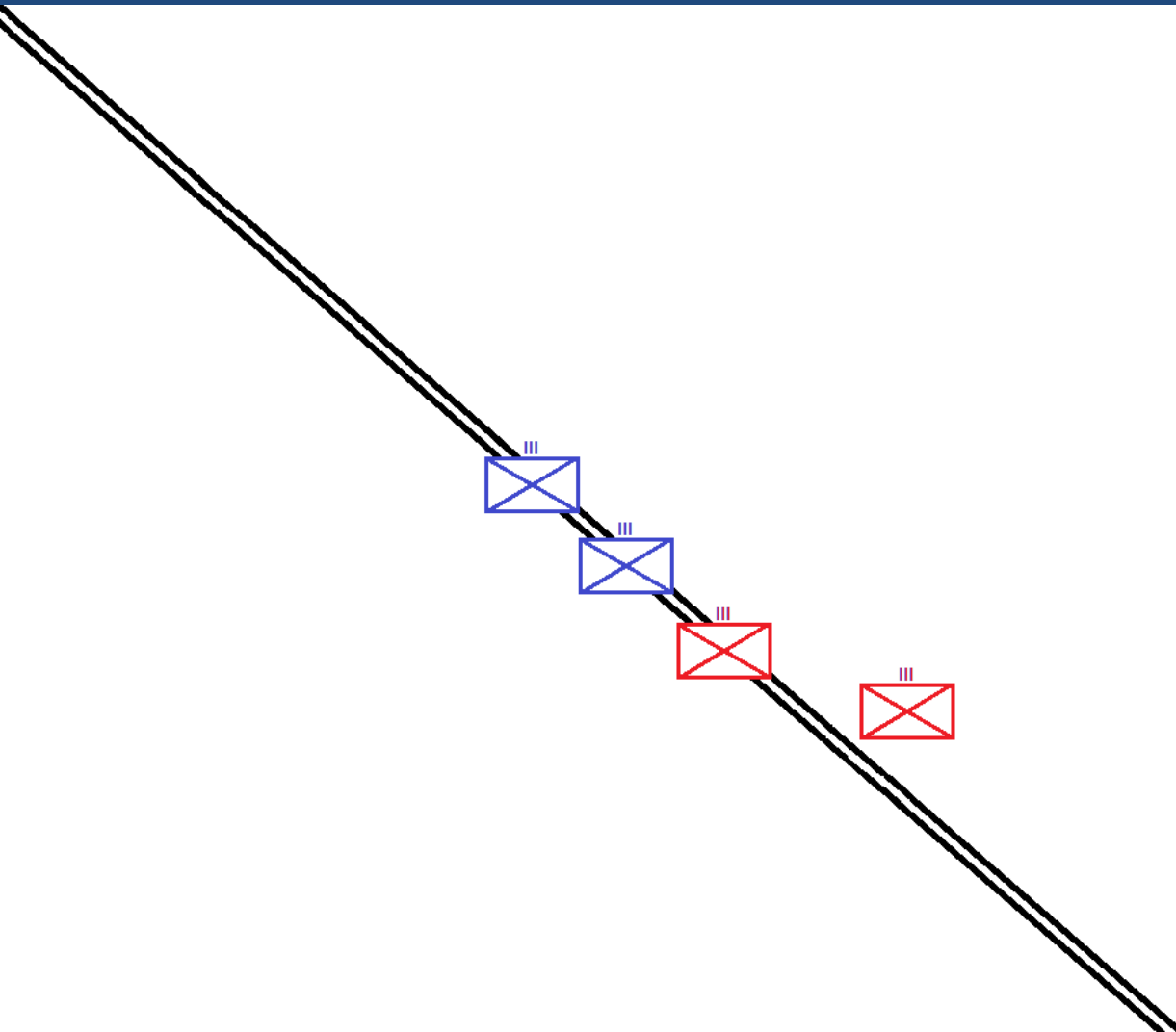
It became a contest. By 1944, many in the rear echelon still felt they were better than infantry but that was because they could do their assigned jobs and fight as well as the infantry if needed.

# 1942

## Enemy Contact

The black line is the line of advance and main supply route.

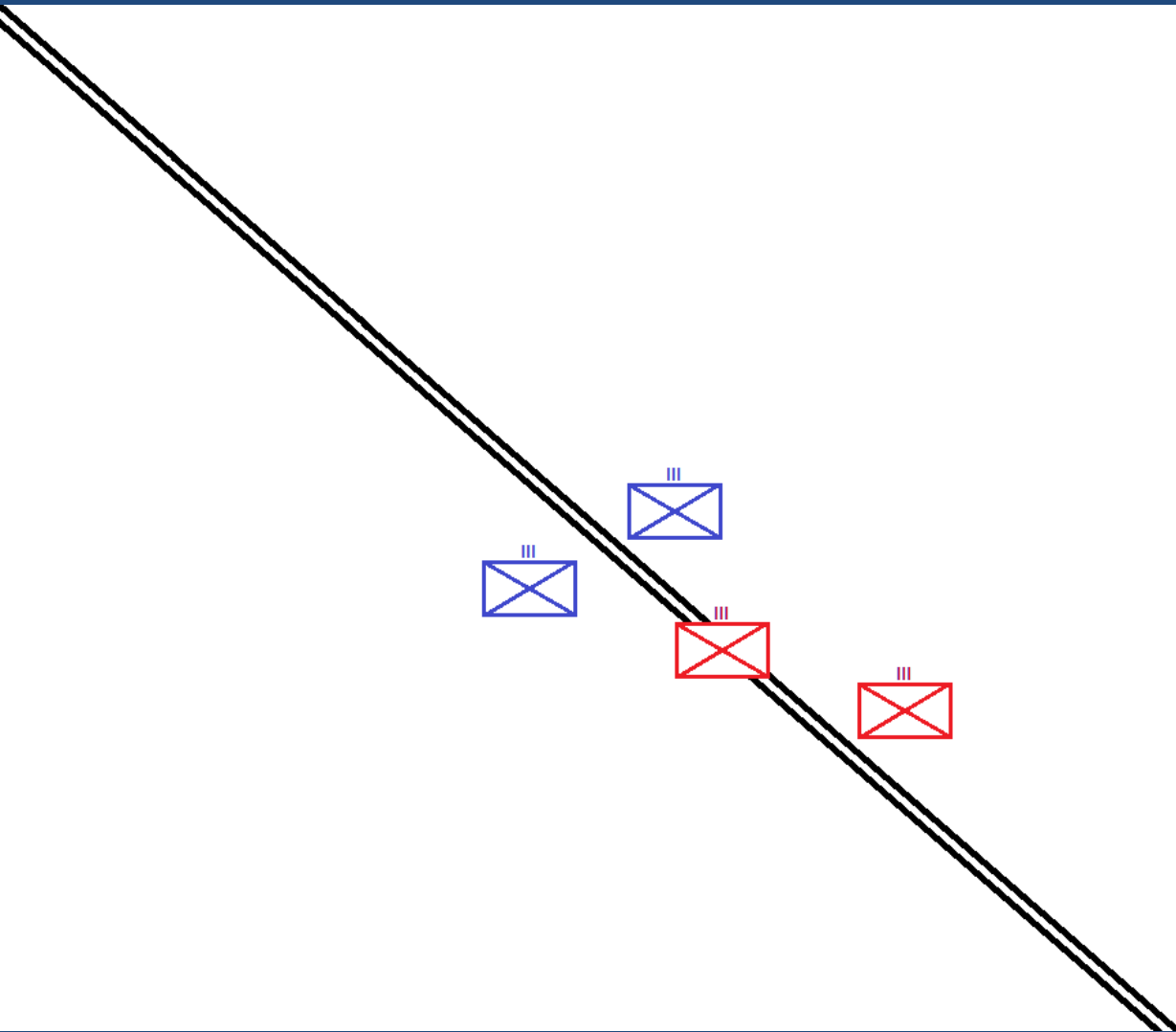
Red are Japanese units, blue are British India Army units.



1942

## Deployment

Blue Force deploys to either stop enemy advance or clear enemy from Blue Force line of advance.

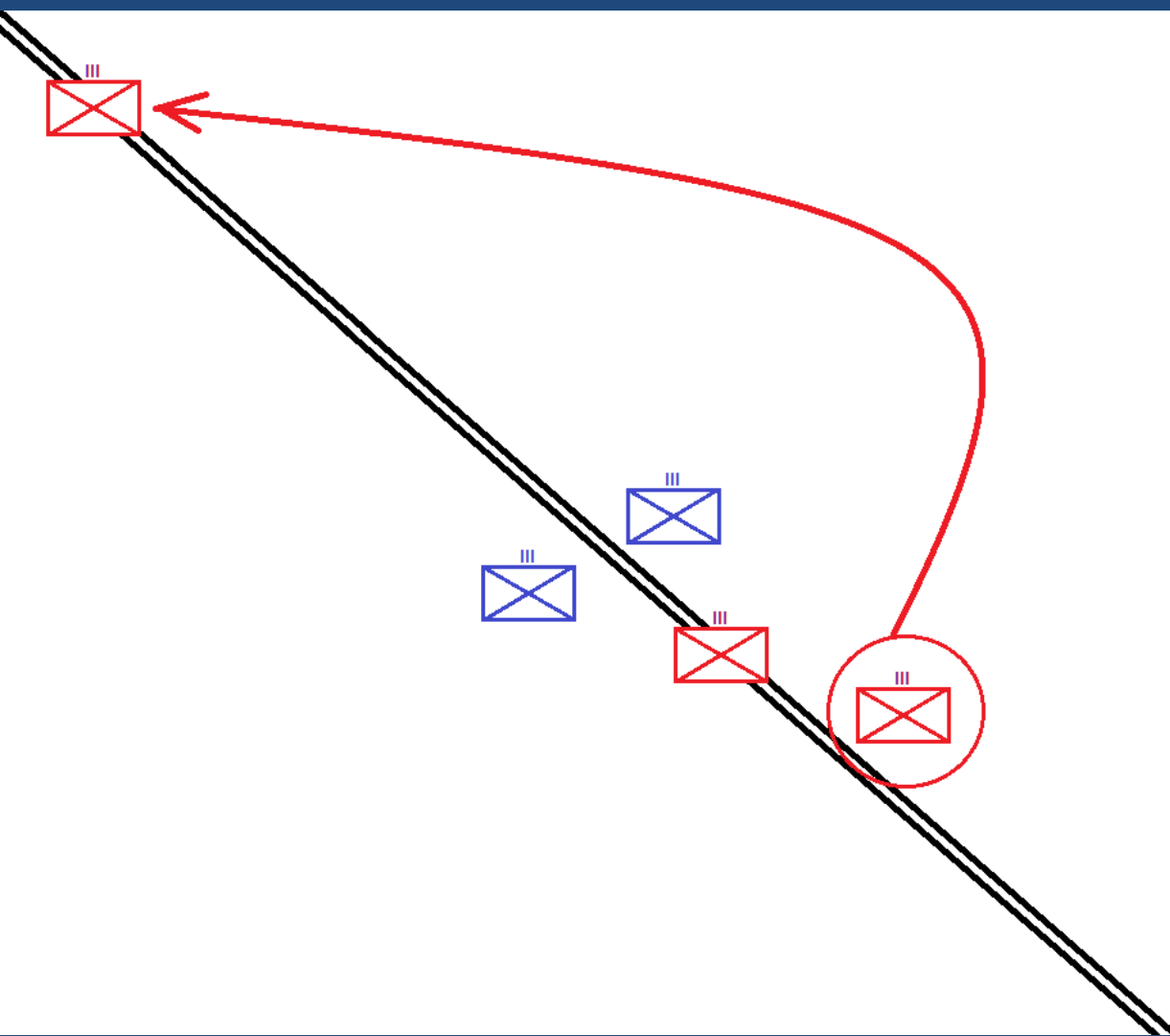


1942

## THE HOOK

Red Force sends a force around the flank to take up a blocking position in the enemy rear.

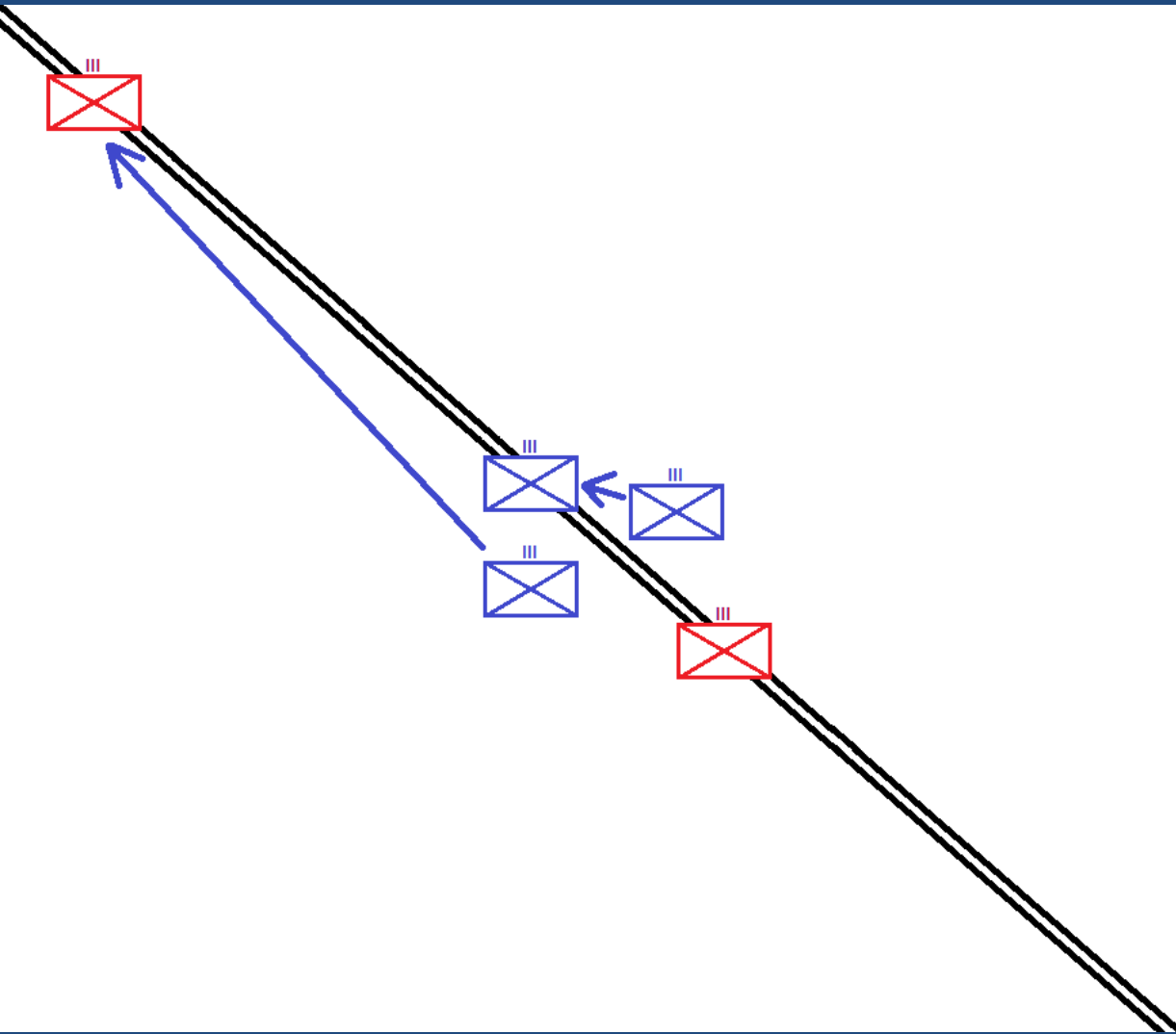
It was effective in 1942 because the hook went over mountains and/or through jungle deemed impassible by the British thus the road block appearing in the rear was often a surprise and always a major problem.



1942

## RETREAT - REPOSITION

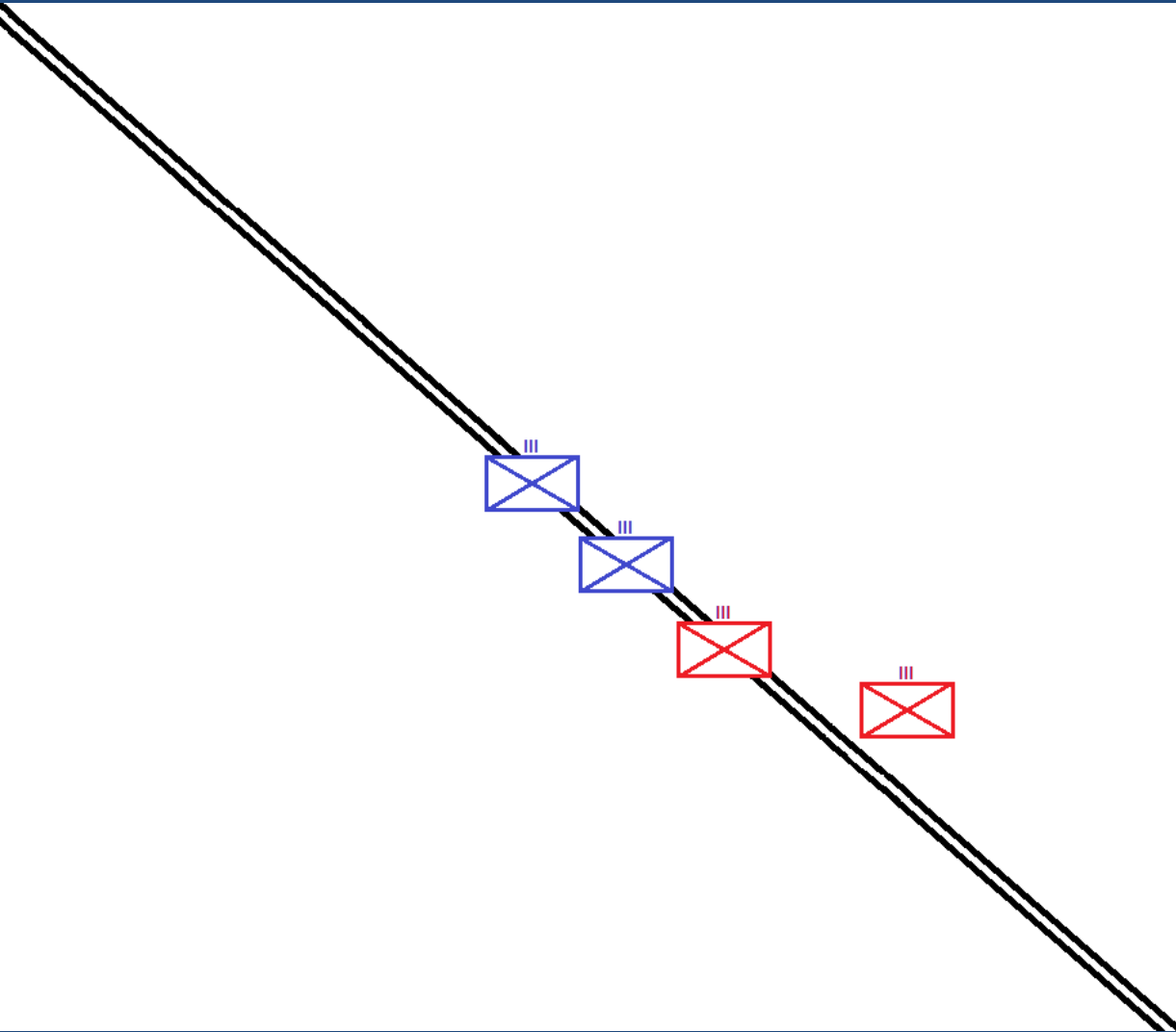
Blue Force (British) cannot move over hills or through jungles without roads and must clear its line of supply invariably requiring the entire force to pull back with part of the force attacking the road block in the rear and the other keeping the rest of the Japanese at bay – if possible.



1944

## Enemy Contact

The black line is the line of advance and main supply route.



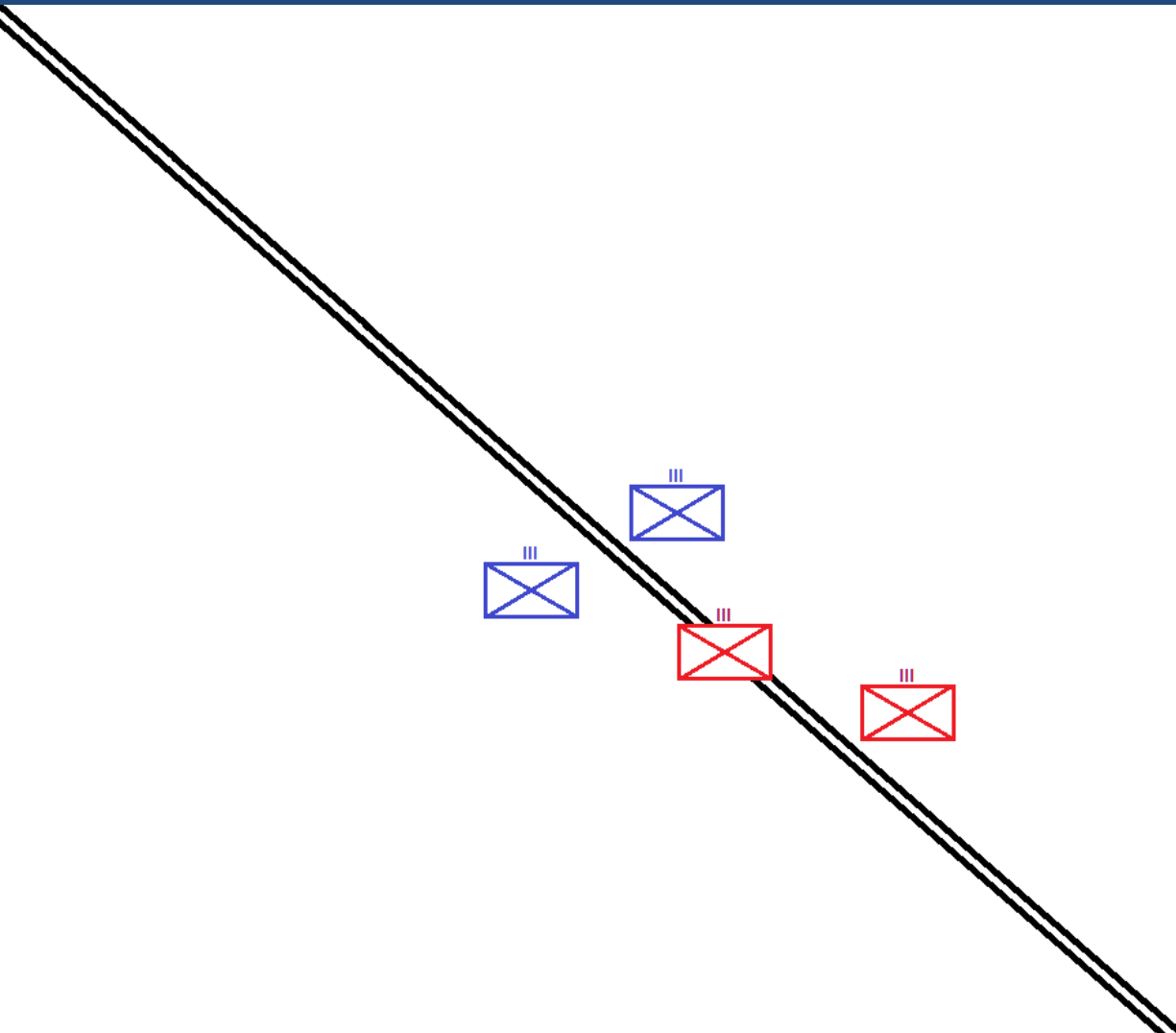
1944

## Deployment

Blue Force deploys to either stop enemy advance or clear enemy from Blue Force line of advance.

You never know.

The Japanese might not try anything sneaky.



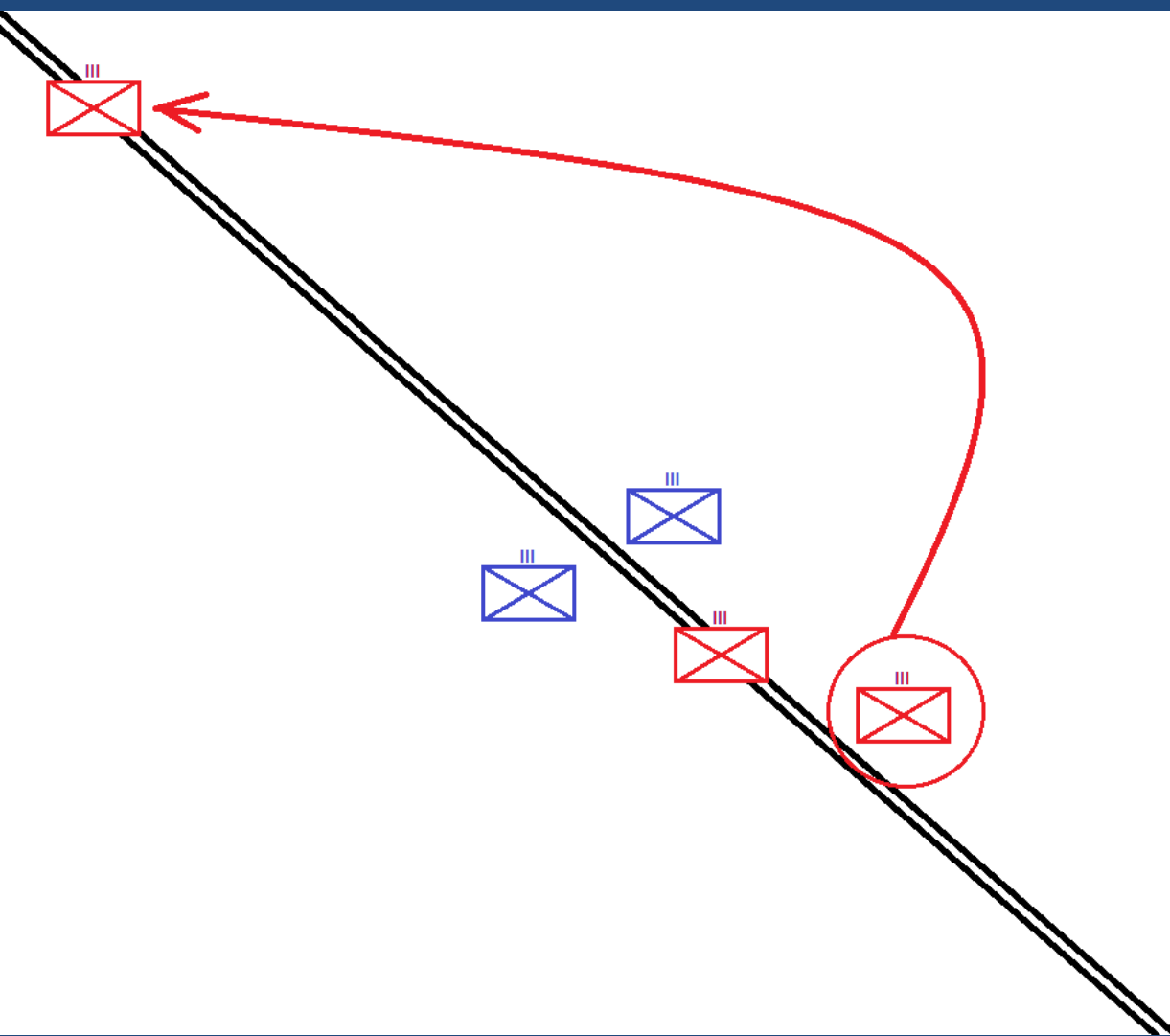
1944

## THE HOOK

But the Japanese are predicable so the Blue Force prepares to deal with the Hook.

There are three options.

Which option depends upon the location and what Blue Force was doing before contact.

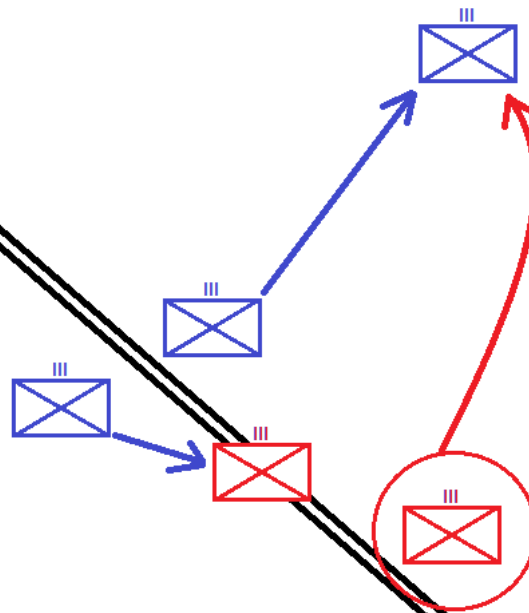




1944

## BLOCK THE HOOK

This requires aggressive patrolling – which was now part of what the allied armies did almost as routine. And it required a quick reaction time – something the Chinese seldom managed. The idea was to catch the hooking force on the march and ambush it.

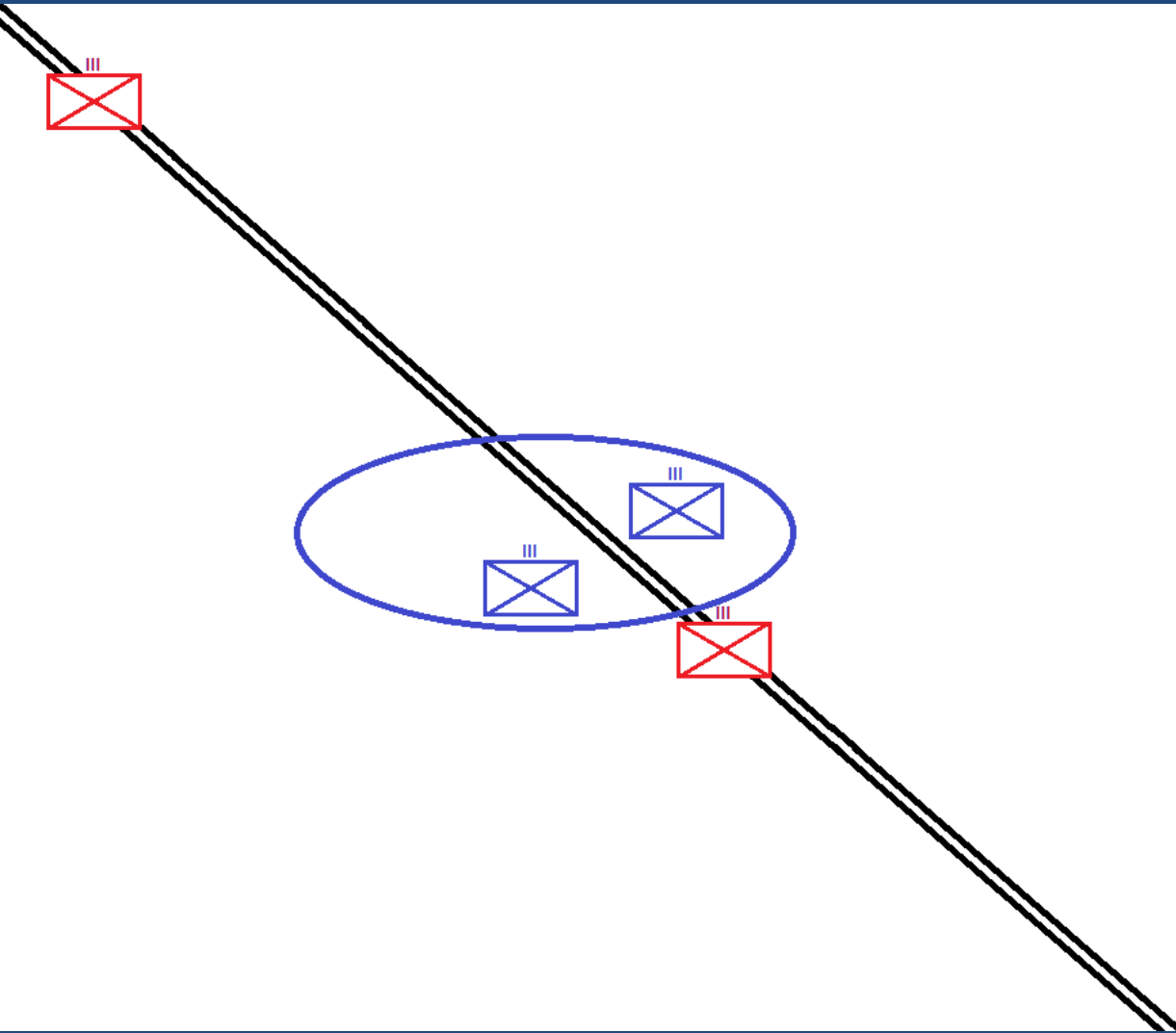


1944

## FORTRESS

Blue Force ignores its blocked supply lines and digs in. It will be resupplied by air drop if there is not enough ground or troops to build and defend an airfield.

Follow up reserve units will deal with the Japanese in the rear.



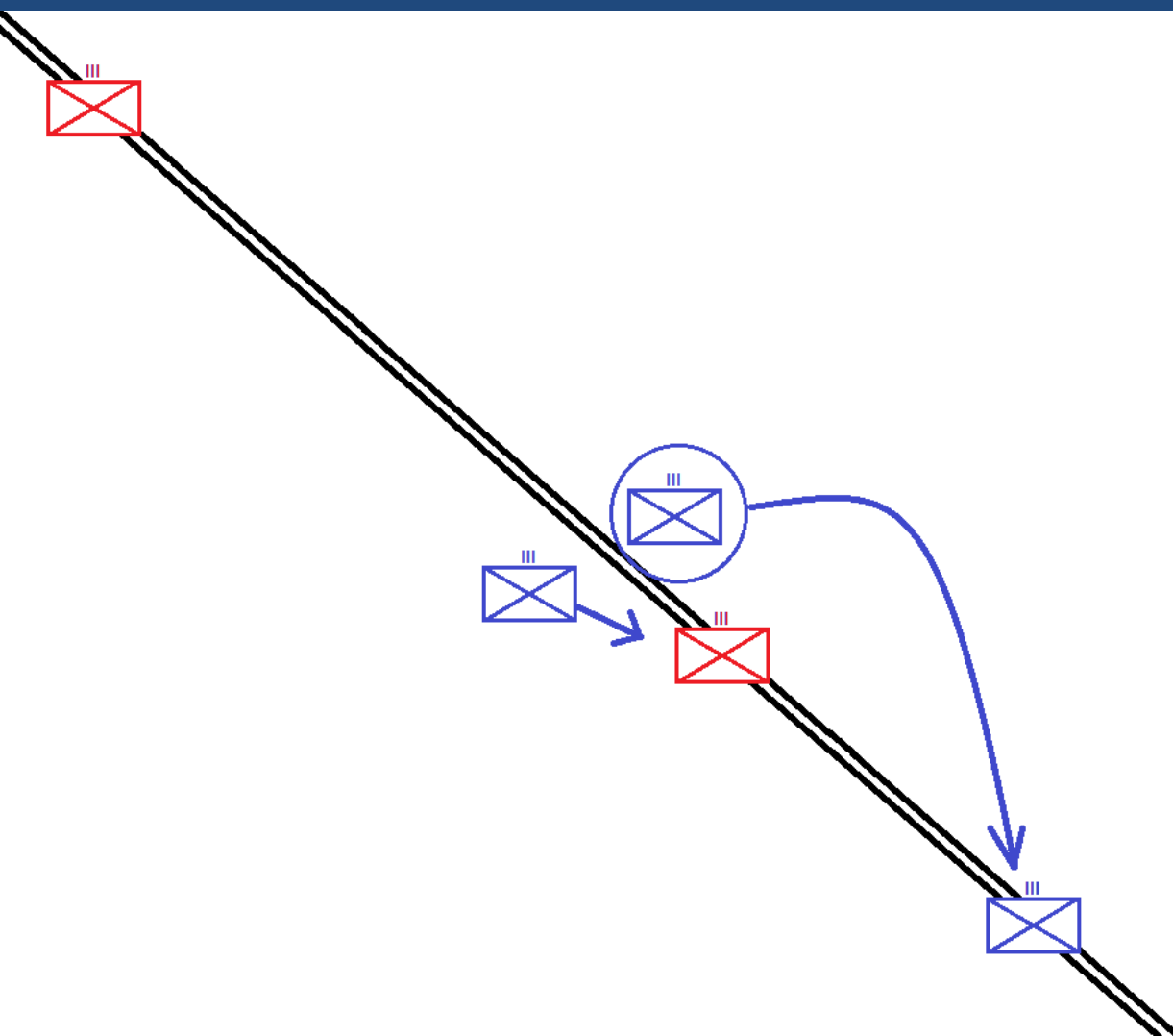
1944

## COUNTER HOOK

Blue Force ignores the road block leaving that for follow on units – or to let it starve to death.

One unit hooks around the Japanese and blocks their line of reinforcement and supply.

The other either attacks (as shown) or also hooks around the flank and continues moving. This presupposes resupply by air drop.





Stilwell's Chinese were now the best trained Chinese in the war. But their mission was set to their strengths. They were not truly afraid of the Japanese anymore but they were methodical.

And American. When they encountered a strong point they dug in and waited for their artillery and tanks to come up before grinding the Japanese into the mud. As their mission was to advance just ahead of the road construction, this was adequate.

But Stilwell still needed a fast, highly mobile force to counter the Japanese and cut off the strong points.

This was the mission of the 5307<sup>th</sup> Independent Brigade.



The 5307<sup>th</sup> Composite Unit (Provisional) is hardly an inspiring name for a combat unit. It would become known by another name: “Merrill’s Marauders.”

The Brigade was under the command of BGEN Frank Merrill who had served under Stilwell since the war began. (He was assigned to MacArthur’s staff in the Philippines but was on an assignment in Rangoon when the war broke out and was stuck.)



His unit was formed to provide a capability similar to Wingate’s Chindits although it would be used in closer and more direct support of conventional forces – the Chinese.

It was made up entirely of volunteers and had trained under Wingate.

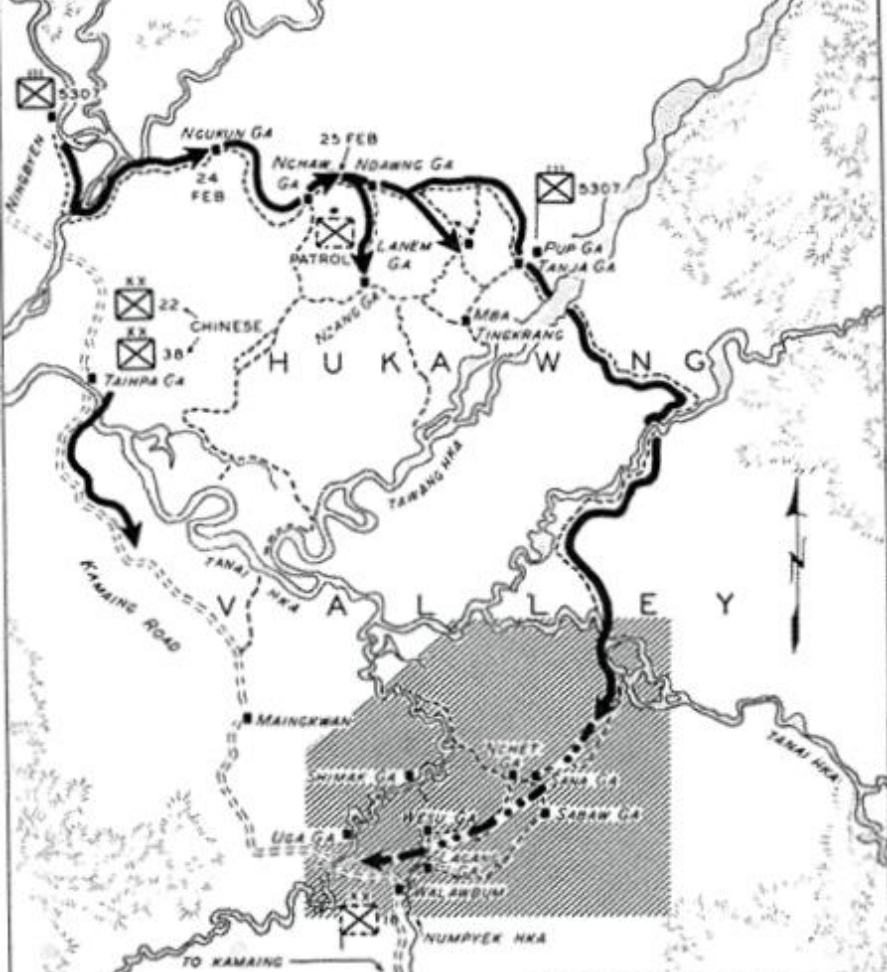


The men came mostly from overseas rear areas – Panama, the Caribbean, Fiji, Espirito Santo etc. They were only told that the missions would be combat and hazardous and training as tough as the Army could offer and it was only for 90 days after which they would be sent back to the States.

They were not told where or exactly when.

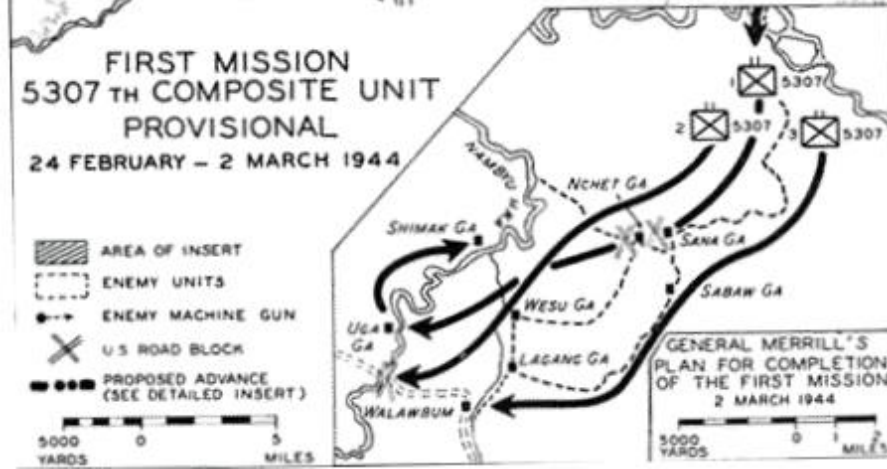
In order to get enough volunteers, the Army also looked into the stockades (jails). They did not look for hardened criminals, only the more minor disciplinary offenses: insubordination, brawling, disrespect, minor AWOLs, etc.

(True felons need not apply.)



The men trained under Wingate alongside the next group of Chindits. Wingate would think they were part of his force. That was never the intention. It was purely his assumption.

The men would provide the “hook” in support of the Chinese advance along the route of the Ledo Road, ambushing Japanese supplies and reinforcements and blocking the same forcing the forward Japanese units of the 18<sup>th</sup> Division to either withdraw or be annihilated by the slower but (mostly) relentless advancing Chinese.



The first mission aimed at the forward Japanese headquarters at Walawbum – and effectively drove the Japanese back towards the Irrawaddy.

The offensive started on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 1944.



Each hook was planned to dislodge a different Japanese strong point in front of the advancing Chinese Divisions. The idea was that the Marauder's would be in the Japanese rear and ready for the fight as the Chinese arrived at the objective – but not so soon as to allow the Japanese to react with enough time to then turn on the Chinese.

To effect this, the Marauders could not rely on roads or vehicles. They had mules and their backs and could not carry more than what their mules and backs could manage.



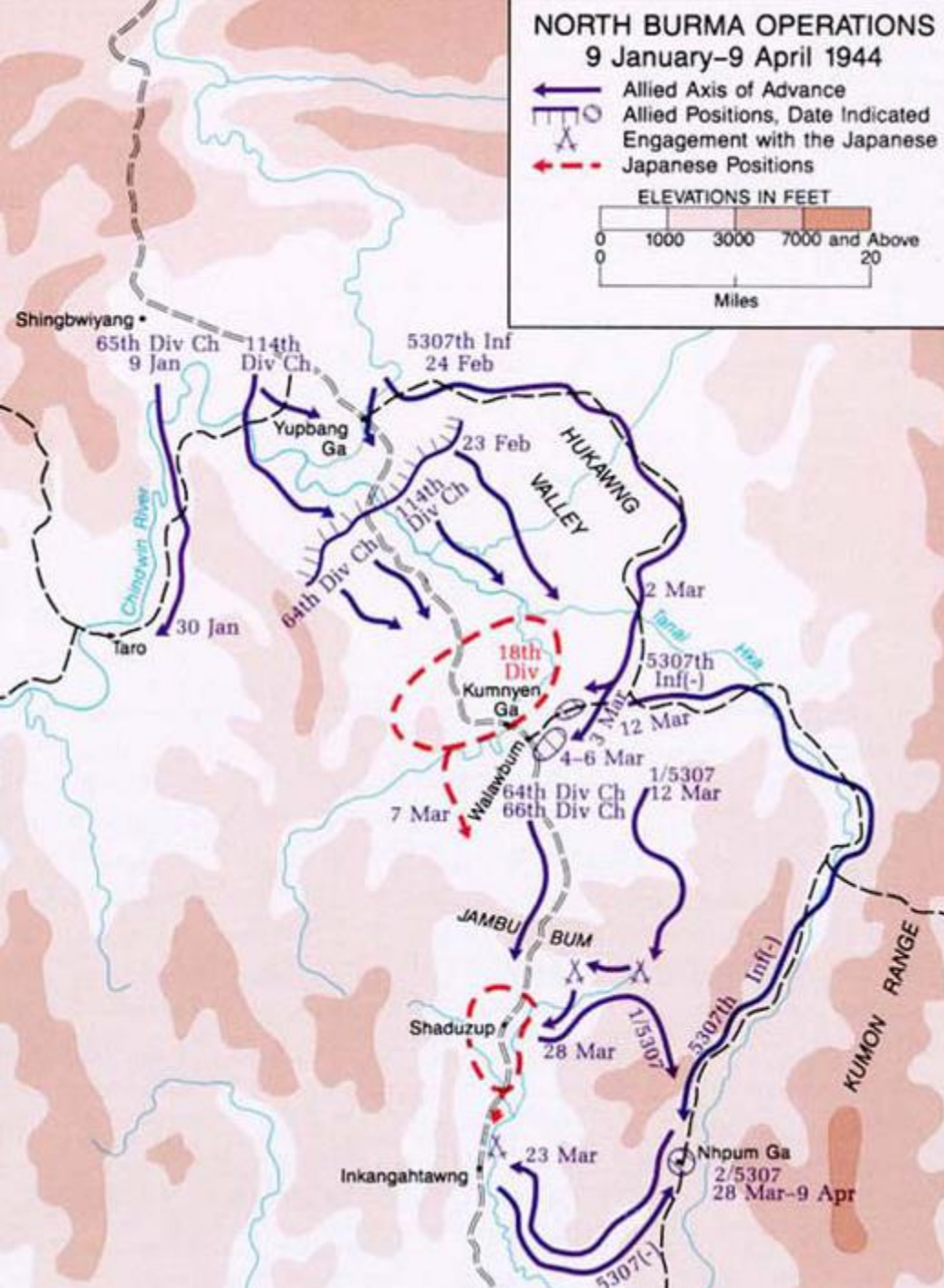


They were entire dependent upon air resupply. The march routes were planned based upon air reconnaissance of locations (abandoned fields mostly) best suited for an air drop but it was up to the Marauders to determine if the drop zone was secure – it wouldn't do to drop supplies to the Japanese.



Like the Chindits the year before, the Marauders learned quickly how necessary the drops were. They could carry not more than a few days of supplies – usually no more than three (not including ammunition). If a drop was missed for some reason, life was hell until the next drop arrived.

But for the first part of the overall mission they were successful.

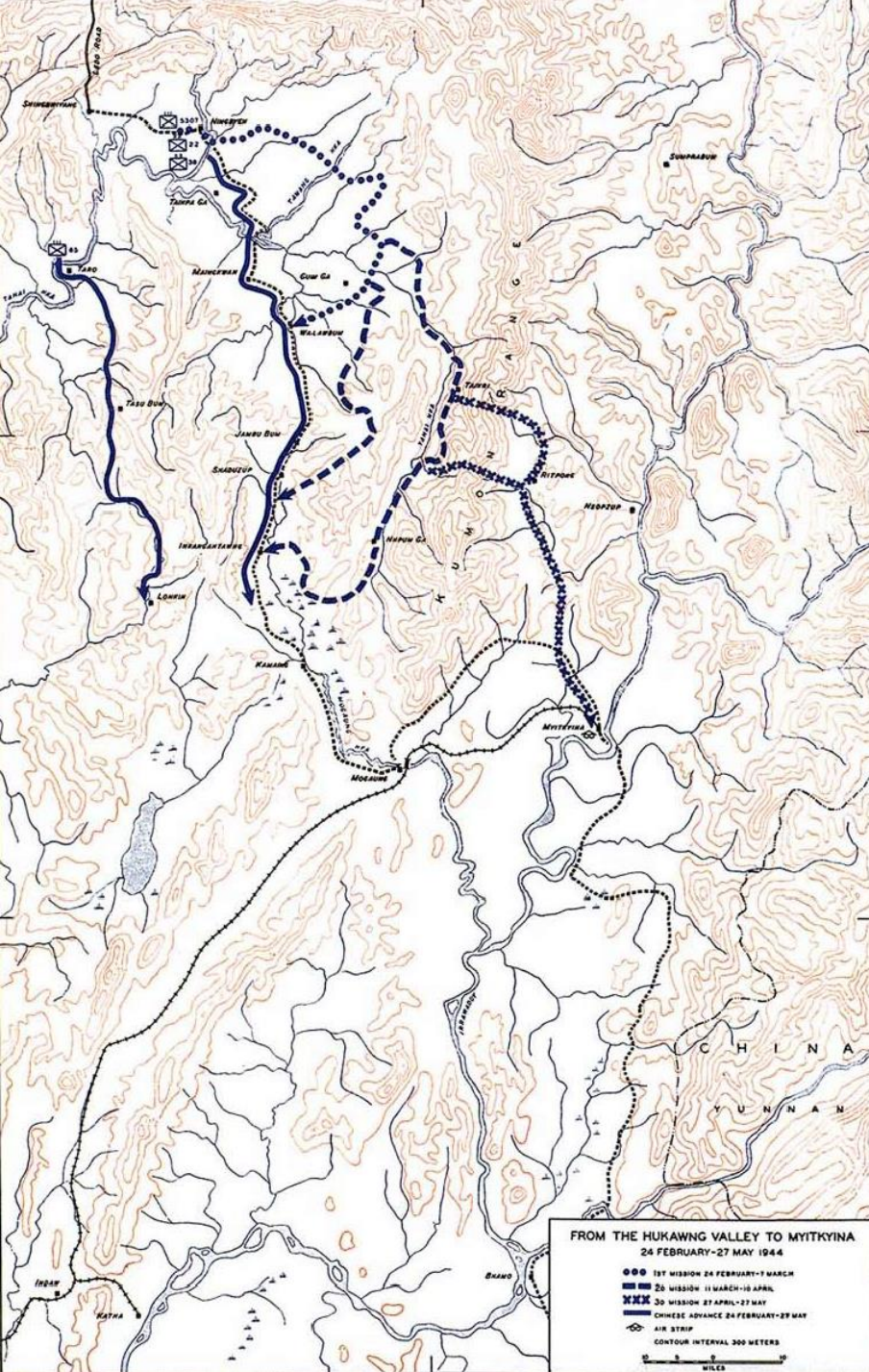


The force consisted of three battalions with about 2,300 men.

By March 28<sup>th</sup>, Shaduzup had been taken – approximately half way to the objective for the campaign: Myitkyina. The Marauders moved to the village of Nhpum Ga to rest and resupply and await evacuation.

While they had crossed the line of departure on Feb 24<sup>th</sup>, they actually started off in mid January at Ledo where they walked to Shingbwiwang – over a hundred miles.

By April, the toll was beginning to tell as more and more fell ill to any of the number of ailments one might expect in the jungles.



As far as the Marauders were concerned they were done. They were nearing 90 days in the field, they were sick and their commander had been evacuated for a heart attack.

Stilwell wanted Myitkyina before the monsoon set to begin in mid May (it would be two weeks early). Despite being with the Chinese often at the front of their march and despite the Chinese own efforts, Stilwell did not think the Chinese would be anywhere close before the monsoon broke.

So he sent the Marauders. And they would take the hard way – over the 6,600 foot Kumon range led by a 14 year old Kachin guide who would be suffering from snake bite.

With the Marauders on their mountain hike were two regiments of Chinese troops. They departed Nhpum Ga on April 9<sup>th</sup> and arrived in the Myitkyina area after the monsoon broke around May 16<sup>th</sup>. The Marauders had lost over half their number – mostly to disease and most were evacuated or would be as they carried their sick and wounded with them.

On May 17<sup>th</sup>, they attacked Myitkyina airfield taking the Japanese by surprise and took the field. But the Marauders were spent as a force and no prodding from Stilwell would change that.

The Chinese were not much better yet were given the task of taking the town – 18<sup>th</sup> Japanese Division Headquarters. The Chinese had fought well but they were never trained in urban warfare and wound up spending more time shooting at each other than the Japanese. The attack failed.

The airfield remained in allied hands which meant supplies and replacements could be flown in and the sick and wounded flown out. But the battle for Myitkyina became a siege.

On February 5<sup>th</sup>, 1944 the second Chindit raid began when the 16<sup>th</sup> Brigade left Ledo on foot.

The second raid would involve more than twice as many troops as the one the year before but only the 16<sup>th</sup> Brigade would be similar. The rest of the Chindits would fly in.

It was not an airborne operation. Few of the soldiers had any parachute training. The initial force would land by glider (with American pilots). The gliders would carry men and heavy equipment – artillery, anti-aircraft guns and small bulldozers. The bulldozers would be used to prepare air strips which would allow C-47's to land and bring in men and supplies and evacuate the wounded and sick.

The airfields would be defensive positions – fortresses in Wingate's mind – from which the troops would fan out to harass the enemy. The initial landing sites were named Piccadilly and Broadway – the latter because Wingate thought the Marauders would be a part of his operation.

Last minute air reconnaissance showed Piccadilly strewn with logs and Wingate was convinced the operation had been compromised.



Wingate was convinced his men would be flying into an ambush. Intelligence officers believed the logs were part of a teak logging operation as the field had been used to cure logs in the past.

Wingate stated he would not be responsible so Slim gave the order. On March 5<sup>th</sup>, the airlift began.



At first it seemed to have proven Wingate's fears. The gliders landed at night and there were accidents, equipment was feared lost and a soldier panicked and fired at nothing convincing the leadership that the Japanese were waiting.

But it was cleared up and the lost bulldozer turned up and began clearing the airfield.



The airdrop went unnoticed by the Japanese. Three of the four divisions that might have reacted were well to the west preparing to attack Imphal. The fourth – the 18<sup>th</sup> – already had its hands full with Stilwell's force.



Over the next five days, the 77<sup>th</sup> and 111<sup>th</sup> Brigades landed at Broadway. (Wingate wanted to divert them to another location but it was both on the wrong side of the Irrawaddy and the pilots had not been briefed.)

The Chindits then fortified their initial base and battalions set out to establish similar bases and begin operating against the Japanese.



The fortresses were better defended than had been possible the year before. Wingate was convinced his force could stay put and operate as he believed the fortresses were all but impenetrable.

He was wrong. When the Japanese did get around to it they proved almost impossible to defend and had to be abandoned.



Wingate would not live to learn this. On March 24<sup>th</sup> he flew for his main base in India off in a B-25 after meeting General Slim at Imphal. The plane crashed into a mountain.

There was an issue about a successor as Wingate had told all three of his commanders they would be it. The senior one got the job.





The operations continued after Wingate's death and they were more effective than they had been the year before.

All three brigade commanders were expecting the operation to end in the middle May. Experience had taught that troops under such conditions would lose most effectiveness after 90 days – mostly from disease and infection.



But they were now under Stilwell and he needed troops after the Chinese failed to take the town of Mitkyina. He ordered the brigades to move against Mitkyina and Mognung (another Japanese strong point).

The 16<sup>th</sup> Brigade was shot and had maybe 100 men who were fit.

The 16<sup>th</sup> had begun a month earlier and had walked in. The two air landed brigades were not as debilitated but they were down to a battalion or less in strength. The two remaining “Brigades” complained but went forward having to abandon two well prepared “fortresses,” both of which had withstood determined attack.

They established a new fortress near the objective at Mogung but did not have time to prepare defenses and lacked the heavy weapons. They held it for about three weeks.

Mogung finally fell to a combined assault . The remnants of the 77<sup>th</sup> Brigade took the objective while its defenders were mostly engaged with a Chinese Division on the other side. The Brigade was spent and its commander feared Stilwell was not done with them so he shut down his radios and his force retreated.

Stilwell met Calvert (the commander) at Kamaing. Stilwell was furious and probably was considering a court martial.



“Your communications were insubordinate and insulting!” Stilwell accused – the first words spoken.

“You should see the ones my Signals Major refused to send,” was the reply.

Stilwell laughed. He had similar censors for his messages on his staff.

The last brigade was ordered to support operations at Myitkyina. Admiral Mountbatten himself ordered a medical inspection before the brigade would be engaged.



Of the 2,200 present for the examinations, only 119 were deemed fit to serve. The Chindits were evacuated and Stilwell still had not taken the town of Myitkyina. It would hold until August 3<sup>rd</sup>.

# NORTHERN FRONT

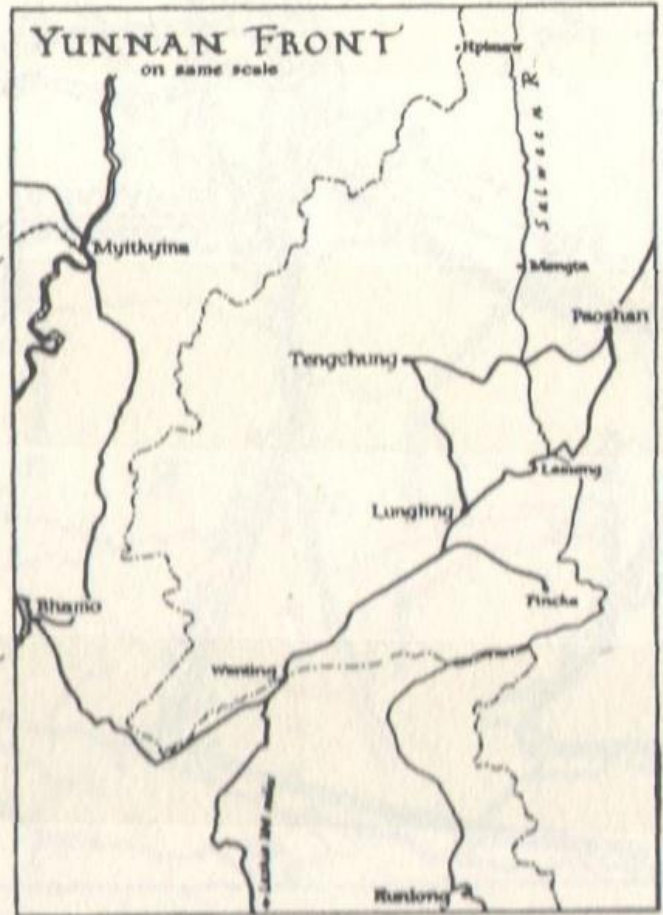
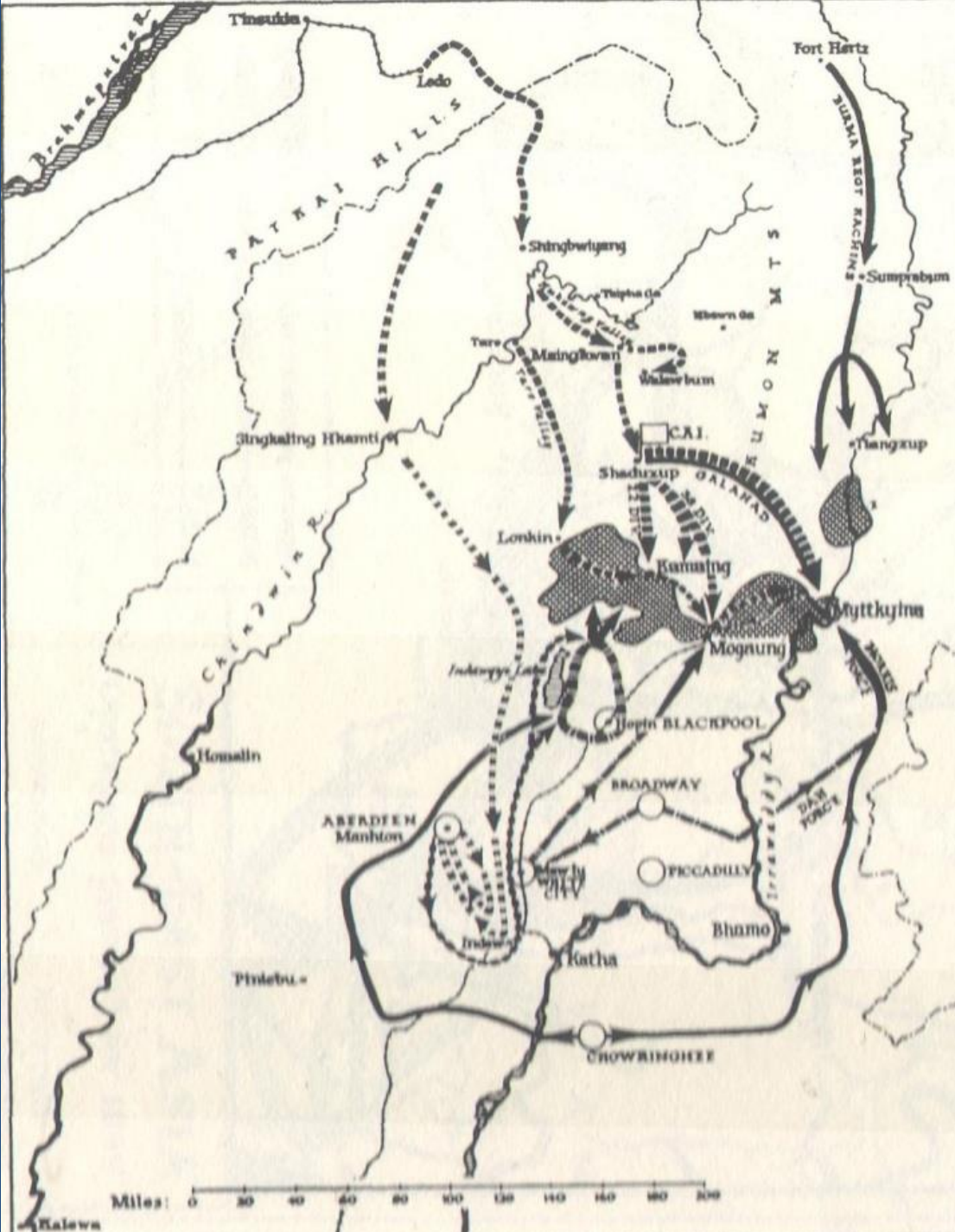
## CHINDITS

16 Bde marched in      77 Bde flown in  
 14 Bde flown in      111 Bde flown in

## CHINESE - AMERICANS

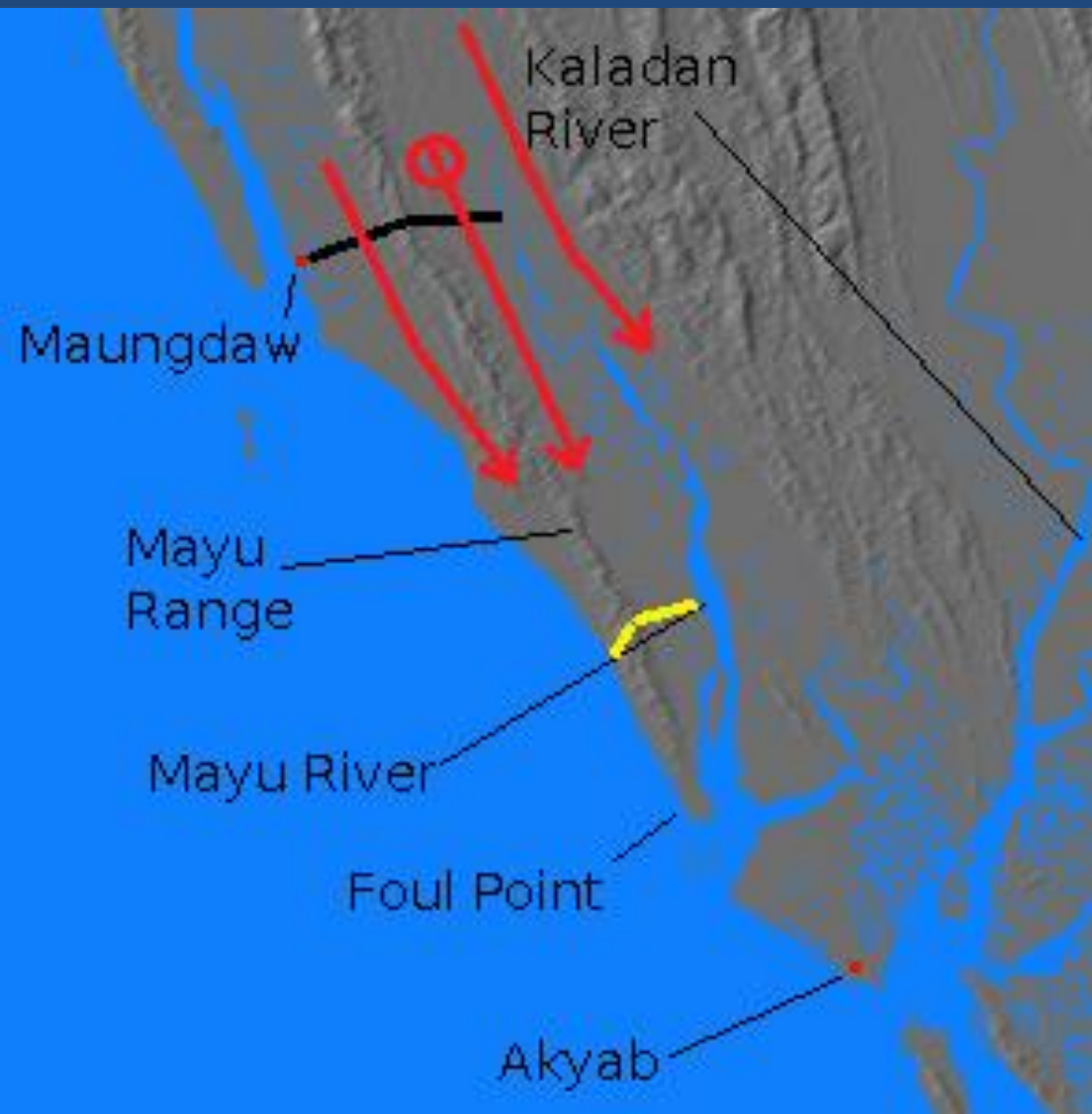
C.A.I. **5 IND. DIV.**  
(under Comd. C.A.I.)

Japanese forces



Miles: 0 20 40 60 80 100 120 140 160 180 200

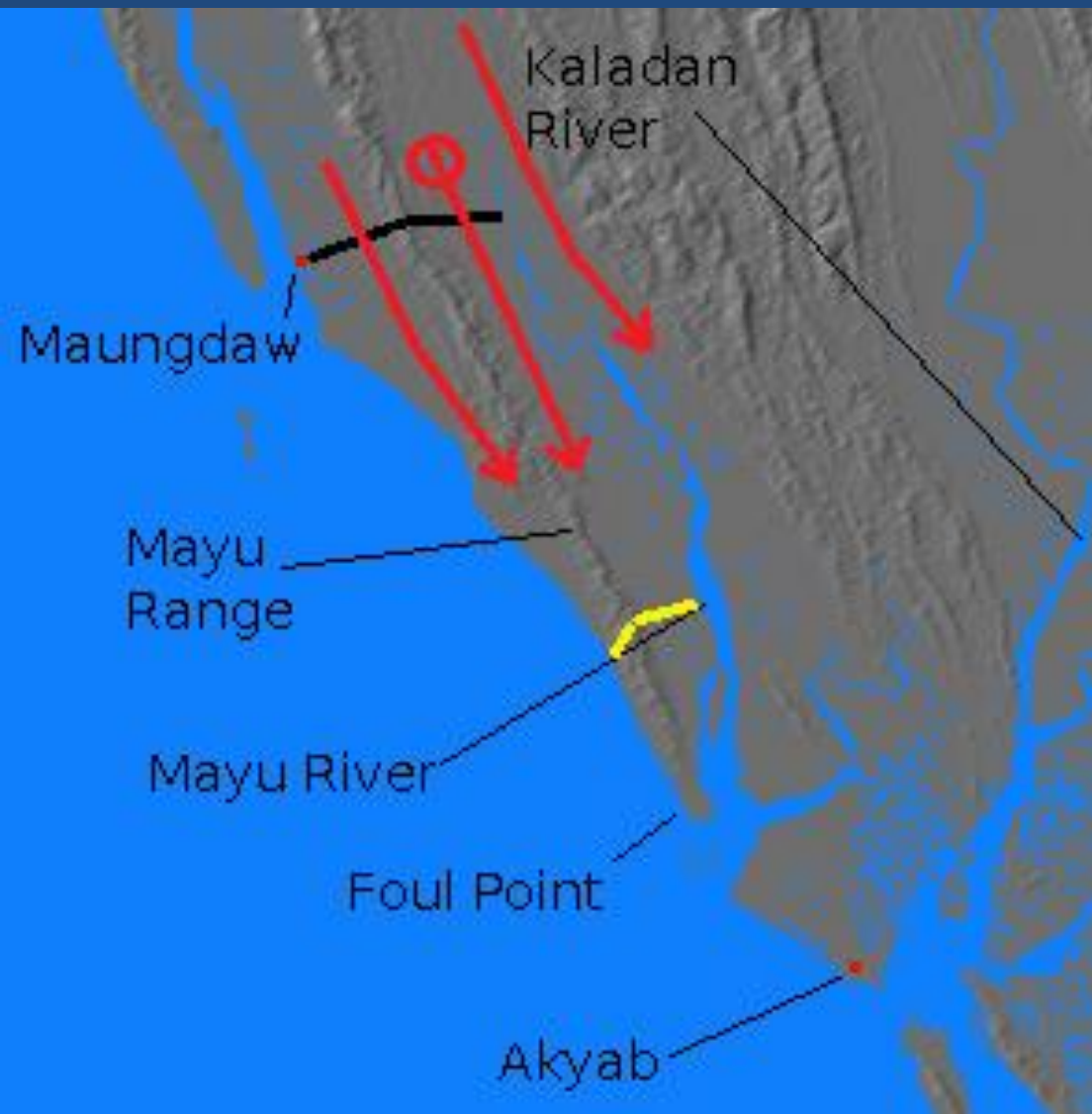
Kalawa



At the end of January, the British XV<sup>th</sup> Corps was preparing for a renewed assault on the Arakan. This time three divisions would be employed.

5<sup>th</sup> Indian would drive along the coast. 7<sup>th</sup> Indian would advance on the other side of the Mayu range and the British 81<sup>st</sup> (West African) would advance on the opposite bank of the Mayu river to cut the Japanese supply. There were two additional divisions in reserve.

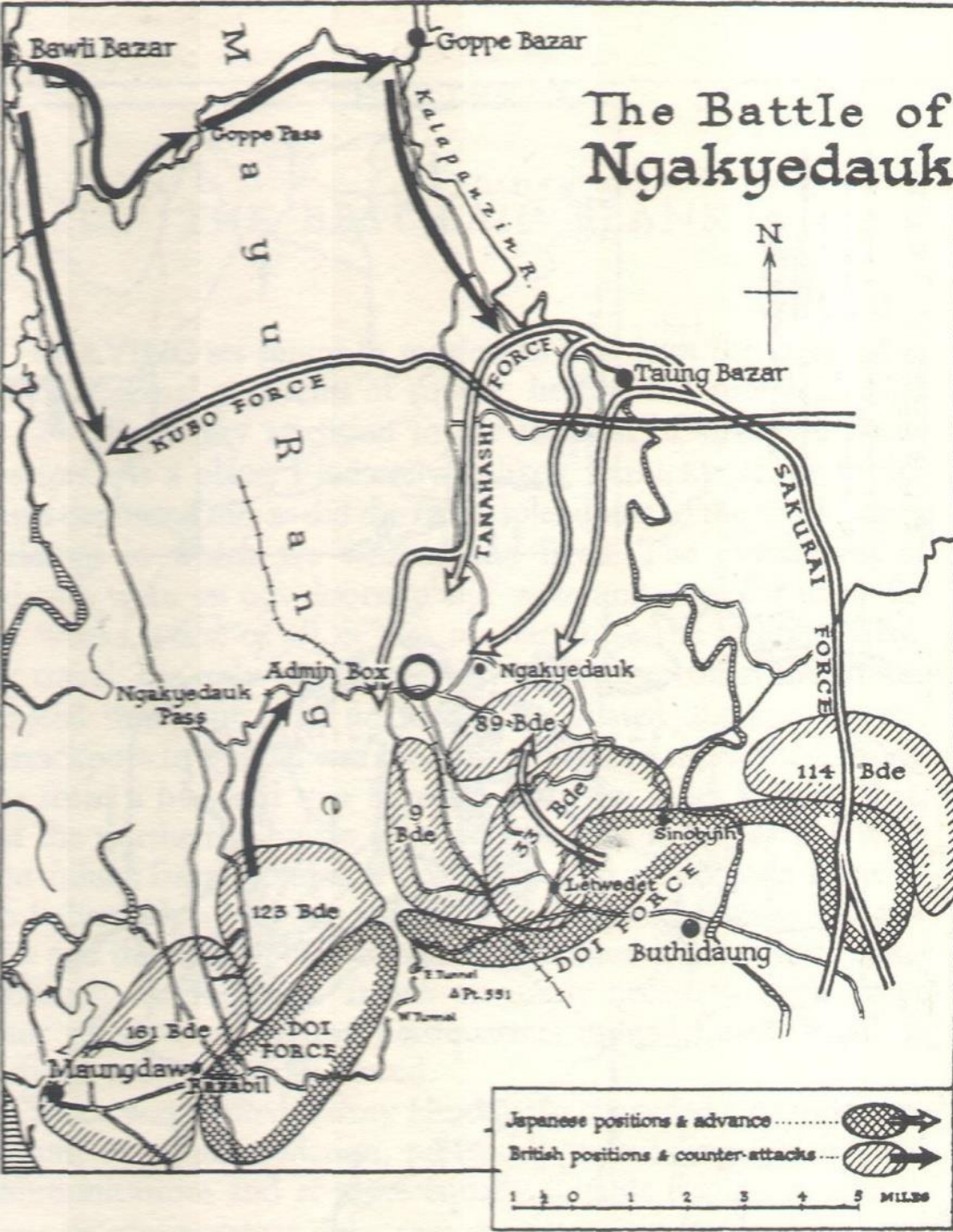
The first stage was establishing each division's forward supply dump – or as the British politely call it – The Admin Box.



The British in XV<sup>th</sup> Corps knew the Japanese were planning a major attack in the Arakan – which was why the 81<sup>st</sup> was involved. They did not know where or when.

The best guess would be after the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> had broken through the forward defensive line – the abandoned rail line at Maungdaw.

That being said, the divisions were ordered that if attacked and cut off they were to establish a strong defensive perimeter and hold until relieved by the rest of the Corps. They would be supplied by air.



The Japanese 55<sup>th</sup> Division began its attack against the 7<sup>th</sup> Division on the east side of the Mayu Range sooner than expected. First contact was on February 5<sup>th</sup> and the Japanese took the 7<sup>th</sup> Division forward command post but not before it had been completely evacuated.

Delaying action allowed almost all the 7<sup>th</sup> Division artillery, most of its troops and two companies of tanks time to fall back upon their Admin Box – which was already fortified.

The Japanese took the high ground on the 6<sup>th</sup> after a hard fight (a delaying action). It was their true last success.



The Japanese launched what they thought would be their final assault on the 7<sup>th</sup>. It managed to break through a weak point in the perimeter and the Japanese seized the hospital.



Had they not wasted time killing the staff and patients they might have avoided extermination – but they wasted time and were mostly wiped out.

That was it. The 7<sup>th</sup> would stand fast and kill every Japanese it could.



Its tanks would be used to crush any breakthrough – literally.

The Japanese attacks would be day and night and the 7<sup>th</sup> looked forward to exacting more revenge.



The air resupply began immediately.

The Japanese Air Force had no real success shooting down resupply flights. They were met by the allied fighters and shot down. 65 Japanese planes were lost . Only two allied fighters were shot down. Moreover, to sustain operations they moved into bases in Burma giving the allied air forces targets. As the battle progressed, the Japanese were driven from the skies aside from the odd harassment raid.

At one point in the battle a supply officer asked a Sikh sergeant about supplies. The reply was his men could fight without water for three days and without food for a week or more. The sergeant was asked about ammunition. Ammo was nice but a good supply of bayonets was all they needed to keep killing Japanese.

A machine gun squad found the perfect killing zone. Beyond the perimeter was a ditch. The squad was on night patrol and in the ditch when they saw Japanese gathered further down. They killed most of a platoon. The next night in the same place they killed another platoon. It was after almost two companies had been wiped out before the Japanese accepted that maybe that was not a good place to assemble for an attack.



The 7<sup>th</sup> Division never truly was short of supplies. It suffered casualties but not as many as in the past – except for its mules. There were no trenches or foxholes for the mules.

The XV<sup>th</sup> Corps was organizing a relief force with troops from the 5<sup>th</sup> Division and the 26<sup>th</sup> Division – the latter led by a tank Brigade.

However it was not the 7<sup>th</sup> Division that was desperate for relief but the Japanese 55<sup>th</sup> Division. They had only brought enough food for about six days and it ran out. Attacks went in without a shot being fired – the ammunition was reserved for snipers and machine guns.



The Indian Division had plenty to shoot back.



The relief forces broke through on February 23<sup>rd</sup>. The Japanese would continue to try until the 26<sup>th</sup> when it was made clear to the Division Commander that further attacks were impossible – there was almost nothing left of the attacking force.



A regiment had been left behind to hold the defensive positions. When the fighting stopped, the British would find over 5,000 Japanese dead in the immediate area and more would be found over time.

Of over 10,000 Japanese engaged, fewer than 1,000 would be fit for duty ever. The 7<sup>th</sup> suffered 3,500 casualties although many were illness.

That was Operation Ha-Go. Kaweba had planned to destroy the British forces in the Arakan and force them to send support from Imphal.

Not one soldier was sent from Imphal. Of the two XV<sup>th</sup> reserve divisions, only one saw any action.

The 7<sup>th</sup> Division had suffered losses but was still eager to fight.

Moreover the results proved Slim's training had worked. Everyone fit to carry a rifle had fought at the Admin Box and the Japanese had been destroyed. Air resupply worked and the Japanese were easy to kill – and as the mop-up would show easy to hunt.

The Japanese had brought a battalion of troops from the Indian National Army. Most of the soldiers were Indian troops captured in 1942 in Malaya, at Singapore and in Burma. It was not engaged and most of the battalion left without orders. (The few who did not wait until the shooting stopped and promptly surrendered to the 7<sup>th</sup> Division. While they would not be trusted completely, they proved far more eager working for the Allies than they had for the Japanese.)