

THE PACIFIC WAR



PRINCIPALS OF WAR

OBJECTIVE	A clear and attainable objective to be gained through employment of combat power.
SIMPLICITY	Plans should be simple, not based on achieving perfection.
ECONOMY OF FORCE	Or the concept of how not to put 100 lbs of stuff in a 10 lb bag.
MASS	Concentration of combat power on a critical point.
UNITY OF COMMAND	There should be one chain of command focused on one objective. Multiplicity leads to disaster.
CONCENTRATION OF EFFORT	Multiple thrust work best if they are coordinated and intended to achieve a singular objective.
LOGISTICS	An army that is well supplied can fight. An army that is not supplied has already been defeated.

“There is only one principle of war and that’s this: hit the other fellow! As quickly as you can, as hard as you can, where it hurts the most and when he ain’t lookin’.”

Gen. William Slim

UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS

ALASKA

CANADA

UNITED STATES

Pacific Ocean Area (POA) included Central, South, Southeast and Northern Pacific Areas.

NORTH PACIFIC AREA
XXXXX
CENTRAL PACIFIC AREA

XXXXX
POA
NIMITZ

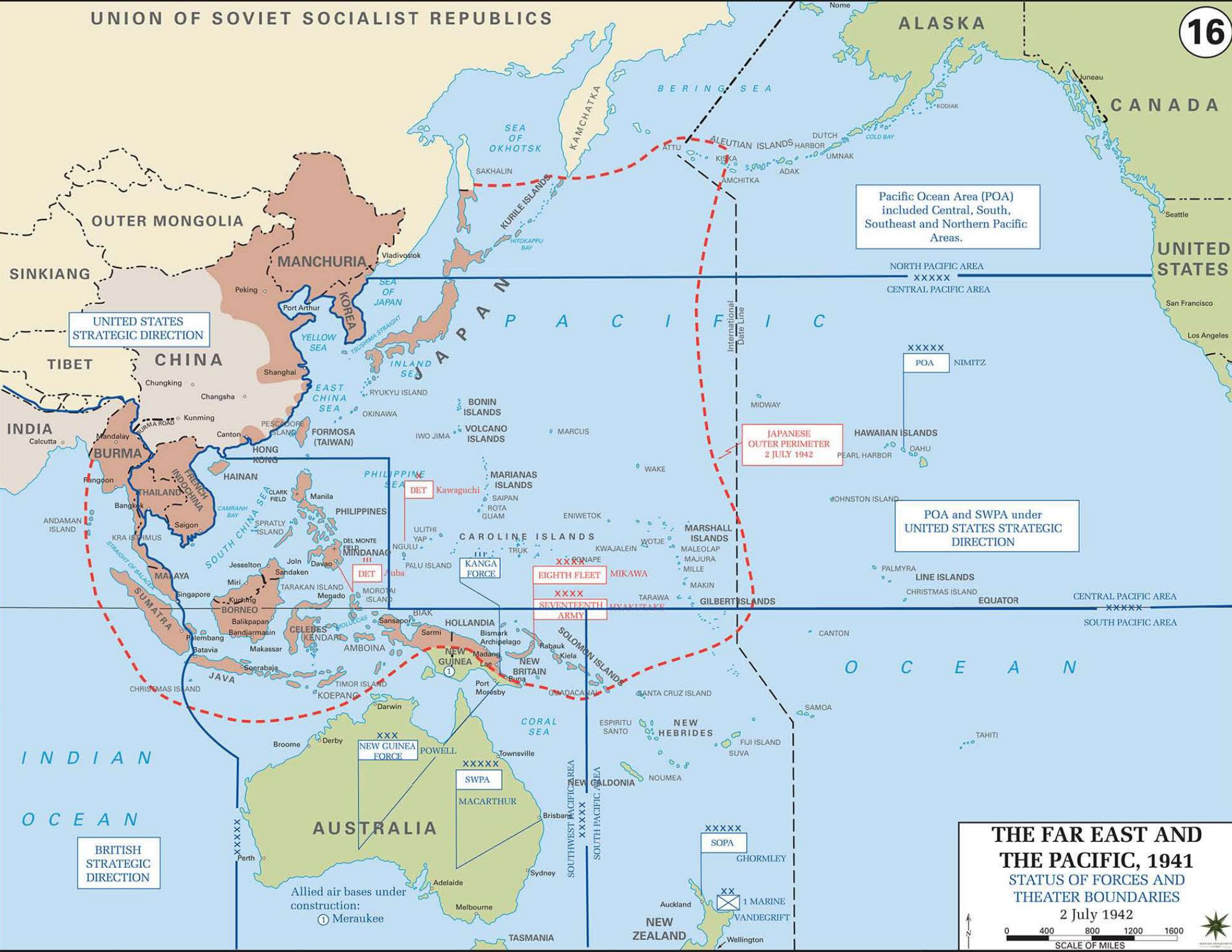
JAPANESE OUTER PERIMETER
2 JULY 1942

POA and SWPA under UNITED STATES STRATEGIC DIRECTION

CENTRAL PACIFIC AREA
XXXXX
SOUTH PACIFIC AREA

THE FAR EAST AND THE PACIFIC, 1941
STATUS OF FORCES AND THEATER BOUNDARIES
 2 July 1942

0 400 800 1200 1600
 SCALE OF MILES



UNITED STATES STRATEGIC DIRECTION

OUTER MONGOLIA

SINKIANG

MANCHURIA

CHINA

TIBET

INDIA

BURMA

THAILAND

INDOCHINA

HAINAN

PHILIPPINES

MINDANAO

CELEBES

KENDAR

AMBOINA

HOLLANDIA

NEW GUINEA

NEW BRITAIN

SOLOMON ISLANDS

NEW HEBRIDES

FIJI ISLAND

SUVA

TAHITI

SAMOA

INDIAN OCEAN

OCEAN

BRITISH STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Allied air bases under construction:
① Merauke

NEW GUINEA FORCE

SWPA

MACARTHUR

SOPA

GHORMLEY

1 MARINE

VANDERGRIFT

NEW ZEALAND

WELLINGTON

SOUTHWEST PACIFIC AREA

SOUTH PACIFIC AREA

NEW GUINEA

NEW BRITAIN

SOLOMON ISLANDS

NEW HEBRIDES

FIJI ISLAND

SUVA

TAHITI

SAMOA

NEW ZEALAND

WELLINGTON

ADLAIDE

MELBOURNE

SYDNEY

BRISBANE

TOWNSVILLE

POWELL

DERBY

BROOME

DARWIN

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Scale: 1:36,000,000 at 30°S
 Mercator Projection
 0 500 Kilometers
 0 500 Miles

What separates the “Great Captains” from the “also rans” in war is risk.

Everything about war entails risk. For a war to be waged without it, both sides would have to sit back and do absolutely nothing – which isn’t much of a war and certainly achieves at least as little as attempted: nothing.

The “Great Captain” is not the one who takes risks. He is the one who succeeds by taking risks.

This is an after the fact assessment. When the decision is made, success remains to be seen. Plans are made and the army is organized to reduce the risk, but it is always there.

Napoleon once remarked that the best quality to look for in a general is whether or not they were lucky.

What annoys many historians about studying war (beyond the policy and politics) is that a quantitative assessment of the opposing sides before any battle is rarely an indication as to how the battle will play out. The best manned, best trained, best prepared, best quipped side does not win more often than not. Human error and the unpredictable make a mess of things.

Dividing one's army before the enemy is considered one of the great risks that one can take in battle.

Neither force is as strong separate as they would be together. In many cases, the separation is such that both forces are weak compared to the enemy they face whereas they might not have been otherwise.

The risk is defeat in detail. The enemy can (in theory) defeat one wing of the army with its entire force and then turn and deal with the other.

The potential pay off is catching the enemy by surprise, facing the wrong way or both.

But to pull it off, the enemy must somehow be blind to what is truly happening until it is too late. They must be fixed upon a threat that one wants them to see and respond while unaware of the real threat approaching from a different direction.

Therein lies the real trick. How do you "hide" a large force from an enemy until it is too late for them to react effectively?

BURMA

Situation,
Dec 1944



Slim and 14th Army did not rest during the 1944 monsoon. They had to mop up the mess that they had made of the Japanese 15th Army.

And prepare for the next step.

Whatever that step was, Slim wanted to clear the ground of Japanese to the Chindwin River and move his army forward.

This meant roads. He had no plan to supply his army by road. His army was mechanized. It had tanks and trucks and they could not move over the mountain trails. Roads were needed to move them into the Chindwin valley.

But a permanent road would take too much time to build.



There were two “roads” from Imphal over the hills and into Burma.

The picture at left is the better of the two roads – the Tiddum Road also known as the Chocolate Road.

It was passable by vehicles when it was dry – and it rarely was and often it was buried under mud slides after heavy rains.

A water resistant surface was necessary but not a permanent one. The Army would only use it to move forward and once forward it would no longer be necessary but as it was it could not be relied upon without a water resistant surface. Such “temporary” surfaces were available.



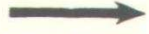



One possibility was Marston matting (top). This was a steel surface and was widely used for forward airfields throughout the world. But it was also in high demand and could not be acquired unless one ordered months in advance and Slim's roads would be well over two hundred MILES long.

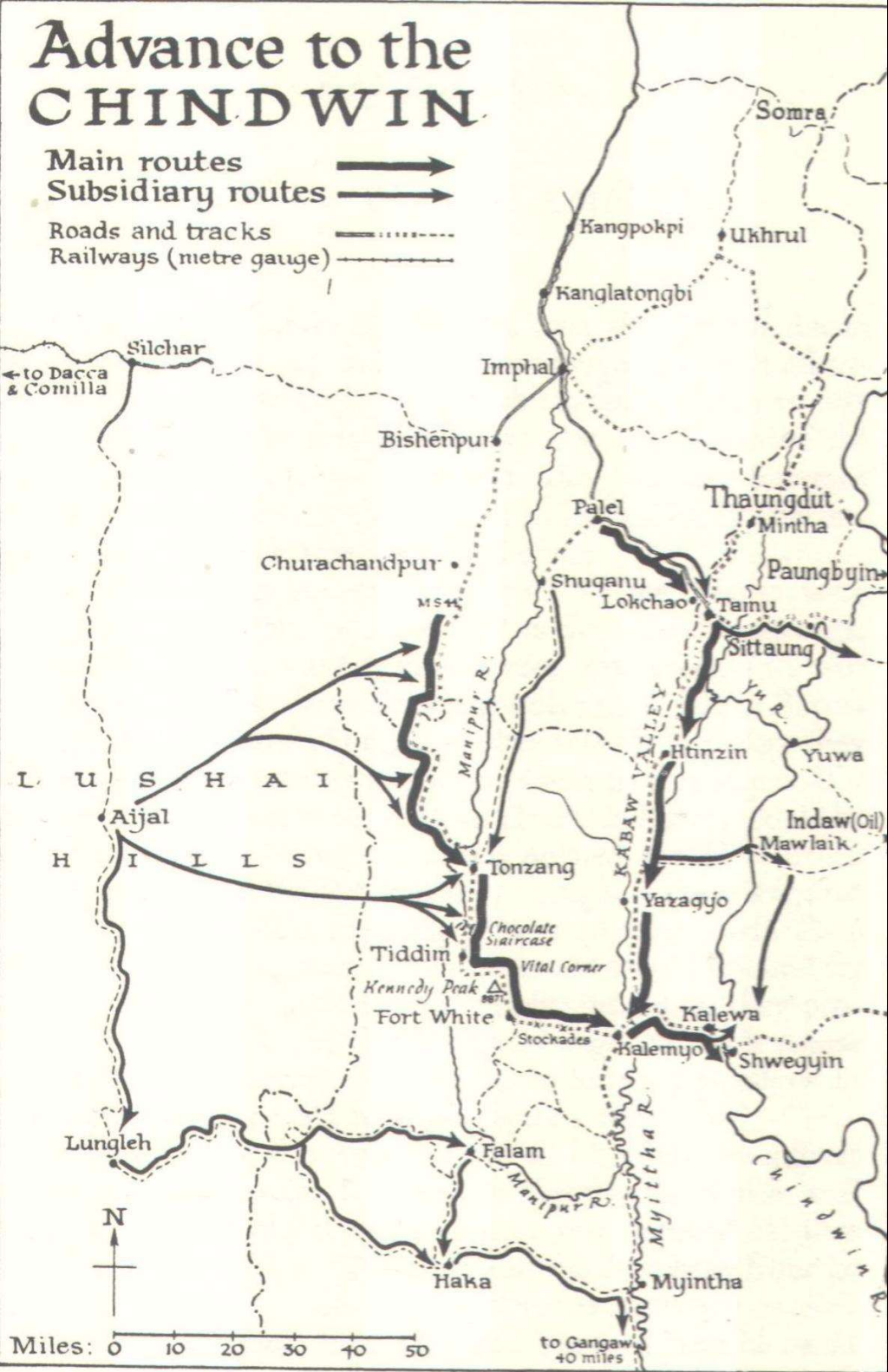


The option they chose was a Canadian invention. It was heavy cloth covered with tar. It was water resistant, easy to install and repair.

And it could be made in India. Slim's engineers had already used it for temporary airfields around Imphal so they knew it could work.

Advance to the CHINDWIN

- Main routes 
- Subsidiary routes 
- Roads and tracks 
- Railways (metre gauge) 

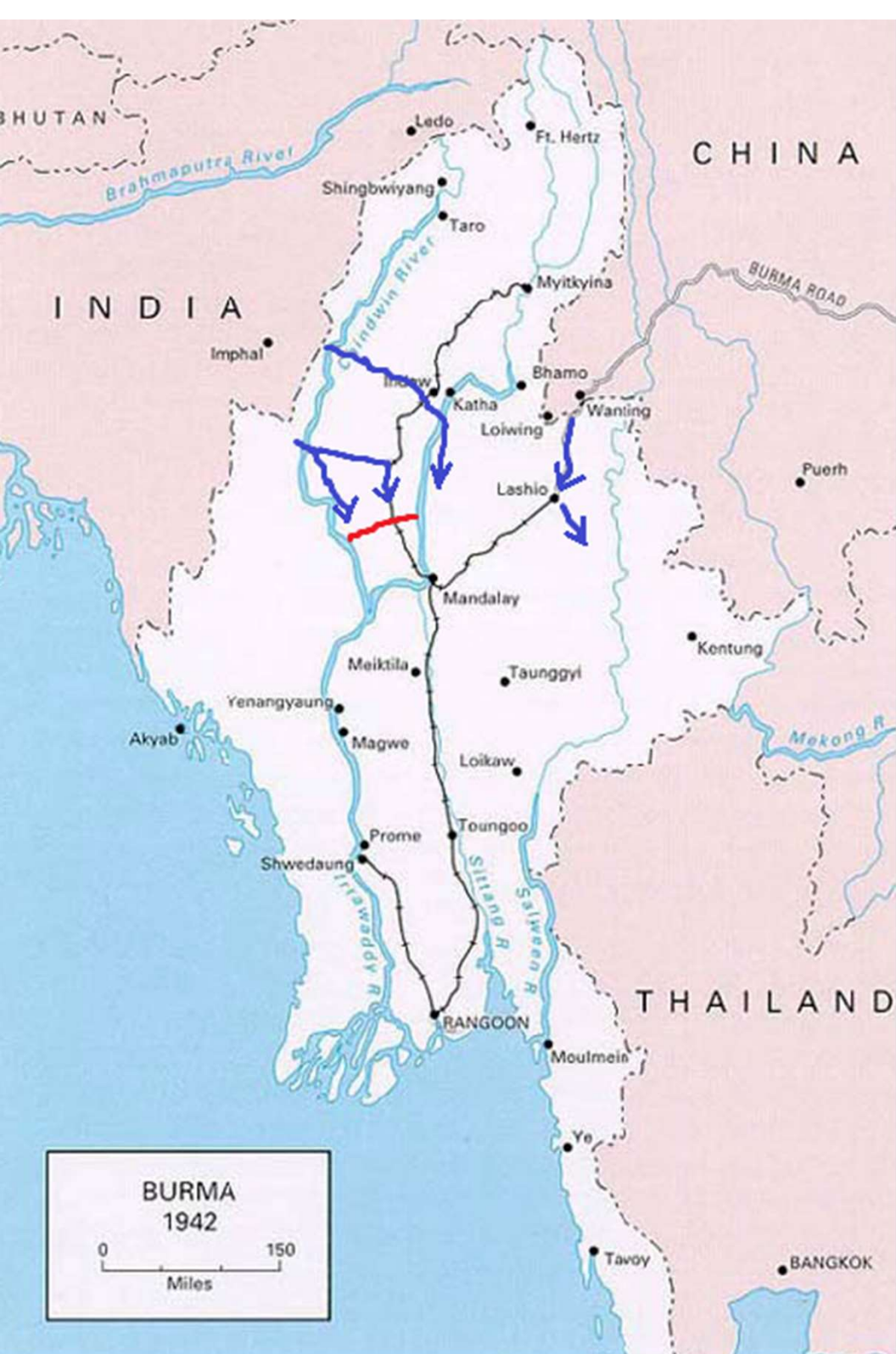


The advance on the Chindwin was necessary as a precondition for any major action in Burma. Slim had begun such a move a year before but then the Japanese walked into his range.

Now he had to clear what few Japanese were left and move his entire Army forward.

There was some fighting around Ft. White on the Tiddim Road but it was easily handled.

The goal was to clear the ground of any remaining Japanese on the west side of the Chindwin and send large patrols across the river both to clear the east bank and get the Japanese attention.

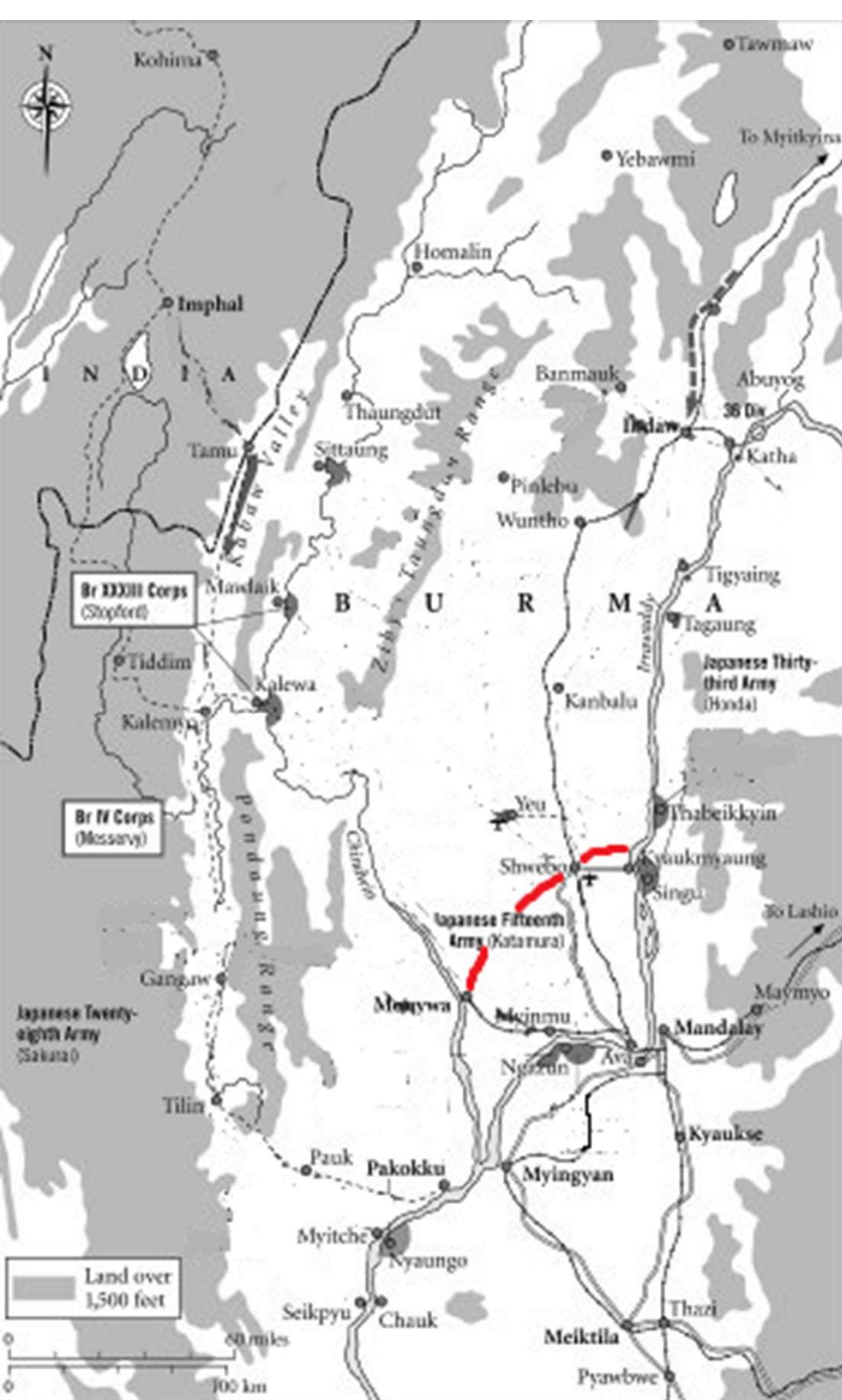


At this point – Nov and Dec 1944 – Slim had approval for Operation Capital which was a drive on Mandalay.

He considered Mandalay nothing more than an empty, political gesture. The only proper ground objective was all of Burma. Short of that, the objective was the destruction of the Japanese Army.

He figured once the Japanese knew his troops were crossing the Chindwin they would throw most of their force into a defensive position north of Mandalay between the Irrawaddy and Chindwin.

It was the best line of defense and where he planned to destroy the Japanese Army.

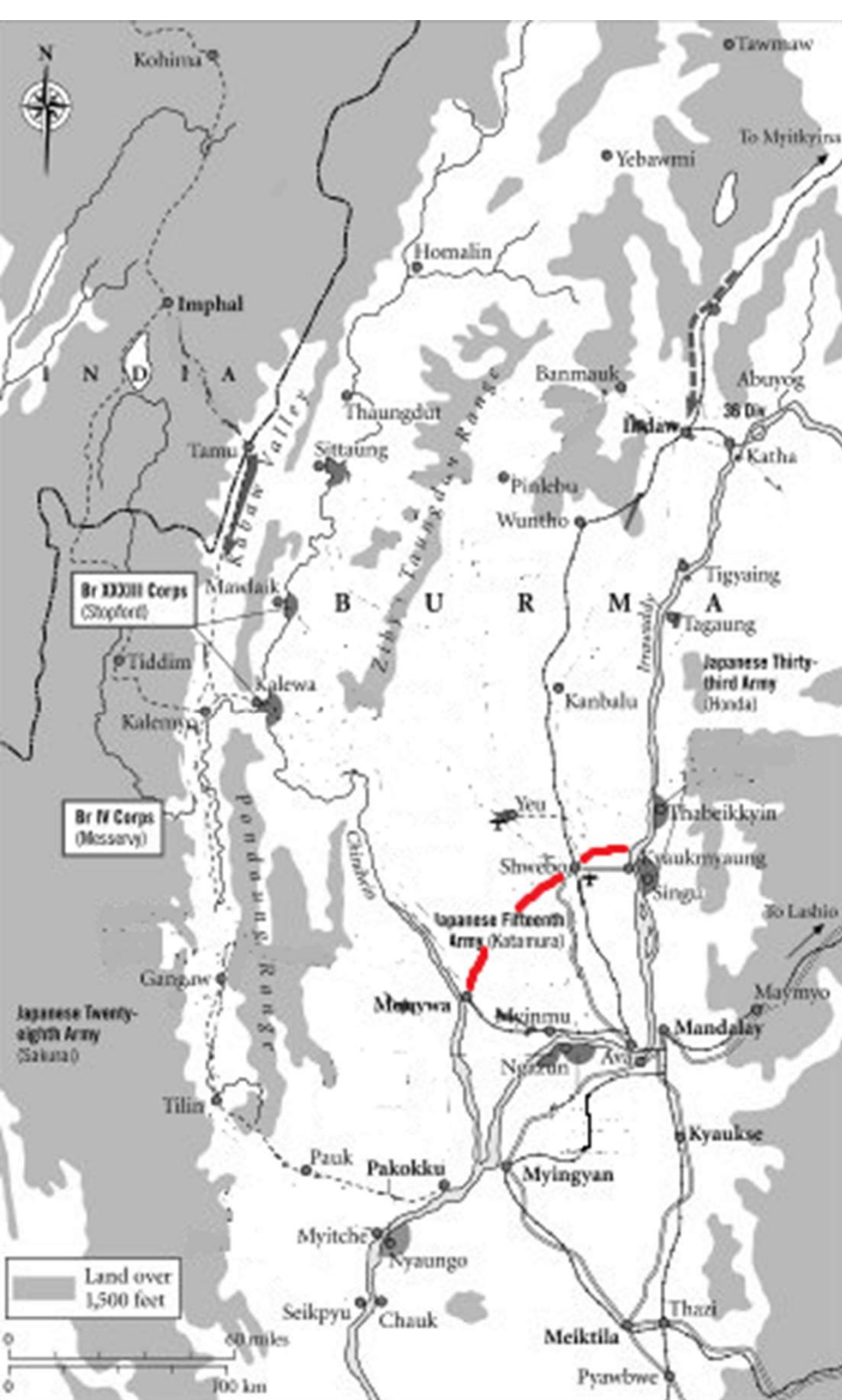


What Slim expected was that the Japanese would establish a defensive line just as they had in the Arakan. The enemy had three armies of three to four divisions in Burma although none were truly at full strength.

In the East near China was the 33rd Army which had been trying to hold the Burma Road and had recently failed.

In the West was the 28th Army which was dealing with the land and amphibious assaults on the coast.

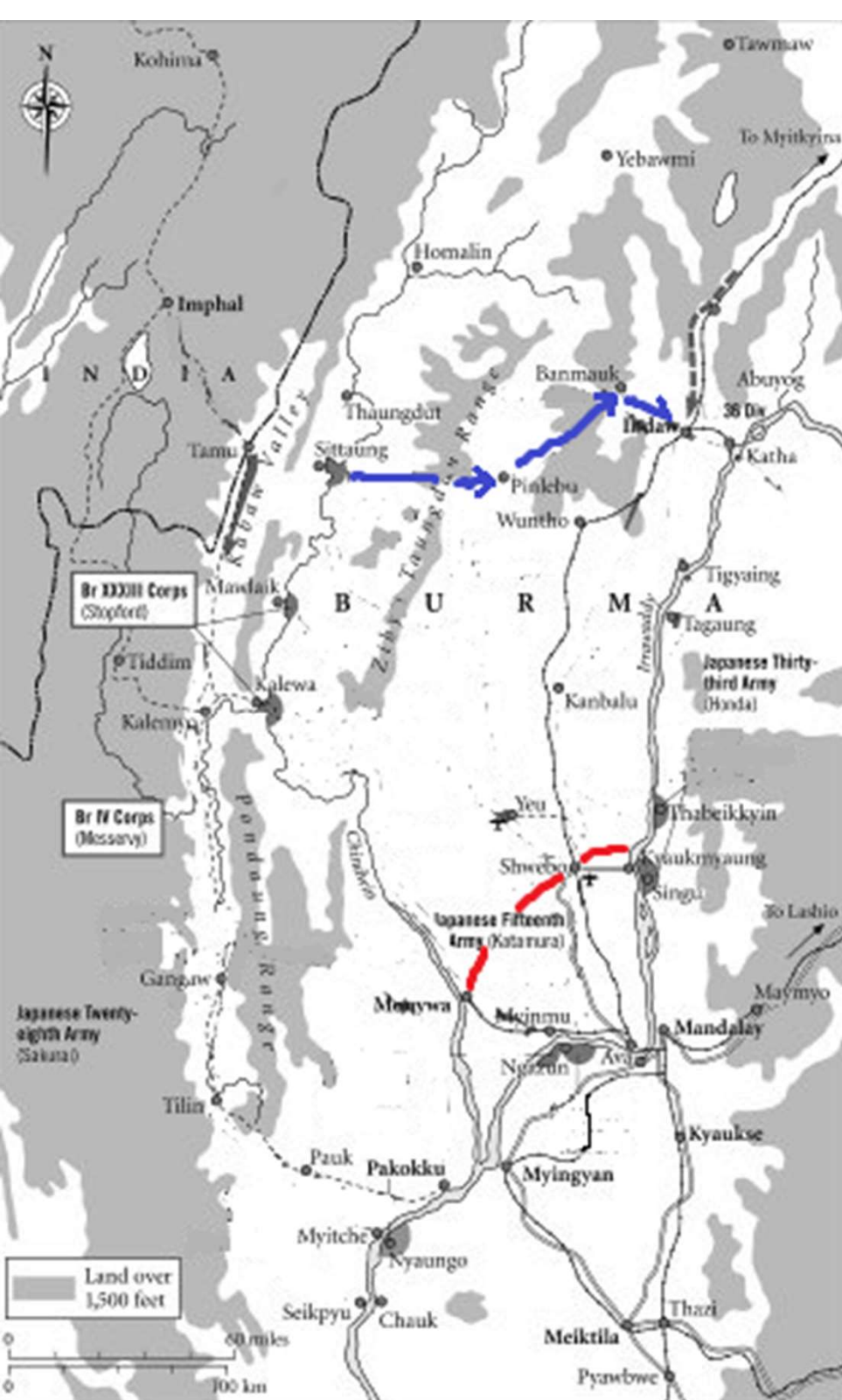
In the center was 15th Army which was rebuilding after the mauling at Imphal but was now in a state where it could not be ignored completely



Slim expected the enemy would defend a line between the Irrawaddy and Chindwin rivers probably along a line from Monywa to Shwebo which would both cover Mandalay and allow easier supply and support than a line closer to the Indian Border.

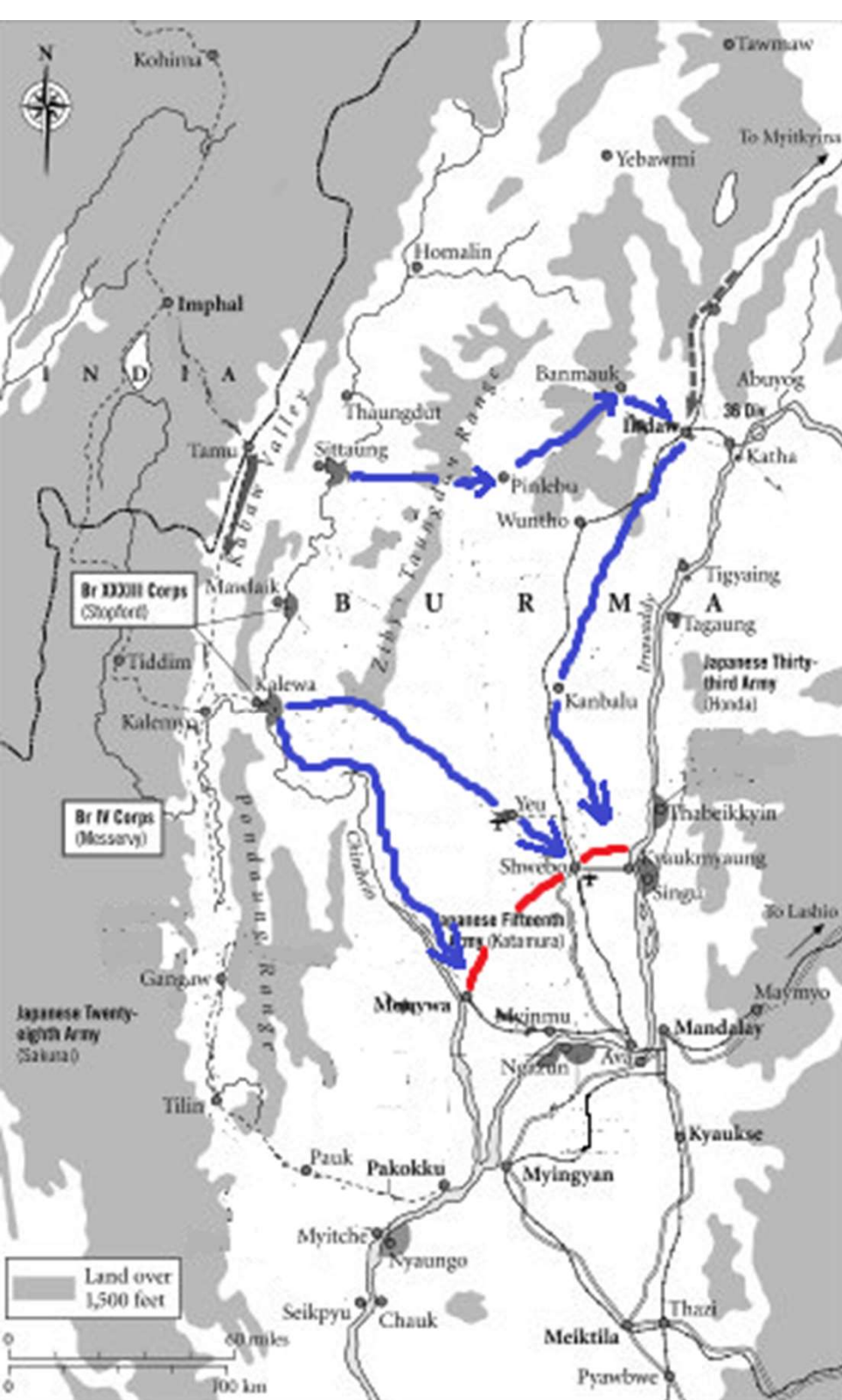
The downside to such a defense was the Japanese had their back to a wide river with no bridges. But it was the strongest possible defensive line – particularly against an attack that seemed to aim straight for it.

Slim's goal was to maul that army and thus where it was, wherever it was, was his objective.



The opening move was by a single division from XXXIIIrd Corps – the 19th Indian Division. It was to drive across in the north to Indaw and it would converge there with elements of the British 36th Division driving south from Myittha.

It was a diversion and not one Slim expected would change the Japanese defense of Mandalay. But it would put a large force covering the flank for the rest of 14th Army and moving to a position where it could counter a Japanese hook.



The rest of 14th Army would be further south and would advance towards Madalay after crossing the Chindwin River. XXXIIIrd Corps would be in the north and towards the town of Shwebo on the railroad. IVth Corps would be south along the Chindwin River and advance towards Momywa.

XXXIIIrd Corps and 19th Indian Division in the north would rely entirely upon air resupply. XXXIIIrd Corps' line of advance included already existing airfields, but they would built as they moved.

IVth Corps would be supplied by river barges built for the advance and the barges protected by gunboats, all built by 14th Army engineers on the Chindwin for the operation in the last couple of months.

14th Army was mechanized. It had tanks, trucks and artillery. It would not, however, be supplied like the mechanized armies in Europe. Its supply lines would never be more than about thirty miles regardless where it was.

Or at least its trucks would not have to travel more than thirty miles in any direction hauling supplies. Most all supplies would be brought to a forward supply point by air and from that airfield, trucks would distribute the supplies to the forward units.

And the army would not be forward deployed alone. When a new airfield was up and running for the air resupply missions, the last one would become a temporary base for air support aircraft – fighters and reconnaissance planes primarily. Close air support would never be more than ten minutes away.

There was a moment of panic when it all began. Several squadrons of C-47's based at Imphal took off on the day the 14th Army began crossing the Chindwin River in force not to support the mission but to return to flying the hump (they were from the ATC and had been on loan). Slim was not told they were leaving so soon. But before he could truly complain, a wing of C-47's arrived. They were newly arrived and were there for the army.



Elements of the XXXIIIrd Corps of 14th Army began crossing the Chindwin River soon after the 1944 Monsoon ended to establish a bridgehead and clear the eastern river bank of Japanese.

The crossings were mostly infantry units – company to battalion strength.

Heavy vehicles would not cross until later.

There were some manned Japanese outposts on the far bank but none proved difficult to drive off or wipe out.

Stealth was not a factor in the crossings. Slim wanted the Japanese to know his Army was on the move and for them to prepare to meet him.



The Army that returned to Burma in late 1944 was far different from the one that had fled in 1942.

This Army knew how to fight and operate in the jungle and was much better at doing so than the Japanese defenders.

The Japanese outposts were overrun as were their forward supply dumps.



The Japanese had stocked forward dumps specifically so their units could move to the supplies if the British threatened to cross the Chindwin. As it turned out the British were far faster than the Japanese. The supply dumps were in British hands before any Japanese arrived to use them.



The New Command Structure 1944 – 45. Lord Mountbatten SEAC, Lt. Gen. Slim 14th Army and Gen. Oliver Leese 11th Army Group.

Leese commanded XXX under Montgomery from El Alamein until Italy and then took over as Commander 8th Army where he pressed for the bombing of Monte Casino.

A routine transfer in Nov 1944 saw Gen. Giffard replaced by Gen. Oliver Leese. Leese had “grown up” under Montgomery and had brought his own staff from 8th Army to oversee 11th Army Group.

They did not understand nor like how things were done in India. Monty would never have approved.

They were told Monty was never here, this was not Europe and they were not fighting Germans and it would be best if they let people who knew the difference do their jobs as they had been.

But the staff had one skill set no one in India had. They had planned amphibious operations before and were set to looking for opportunities.



Dec 1944 – March 1945



Leese's staff's experience was put to use to clear the Arakan. Land attacks supported amphibious landings on the islands (often just a couple hundred yards off the coast).

The same XVth Corps went over the same ground. But it was a different Corps.

In 1943 they had been afraid of the Japanese.

In 1944, they thought they could fight the Japanese but did not know they could.

This time they knew the Japanese were not in their league at all.





The Japanese defenses which had given the XVth grief in 1943 were overrun after brief fights. Amphibious landings on the Islands occurred as units on the mainland arrived to cut off Japanese supply and retreat. (The main land thrust was by the 82nd West African Division.)

At Ramree Island, the Japanese defenders held for six weeks before fleeing into the mangrove swamps to head for “civilization.” 90% of the over 1,000 died in battle and in the swamps.



The story is the crocodiles had a feast. Some Japanese were eaten. But zoologists doubt there could have been enough mature crocks to eat several hundred Japanese in a couple of days.

Most died of disease or when they found the land blocked by the Allies.



The Third Arakan Campaign was not just about clearing the coast. There were large, all weather airstrips at Akyab and Ramree Island and taking them would deny the Japanese a forward base.

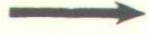



But more important it provided forward bases for the allied air forces to support ground operations inland.

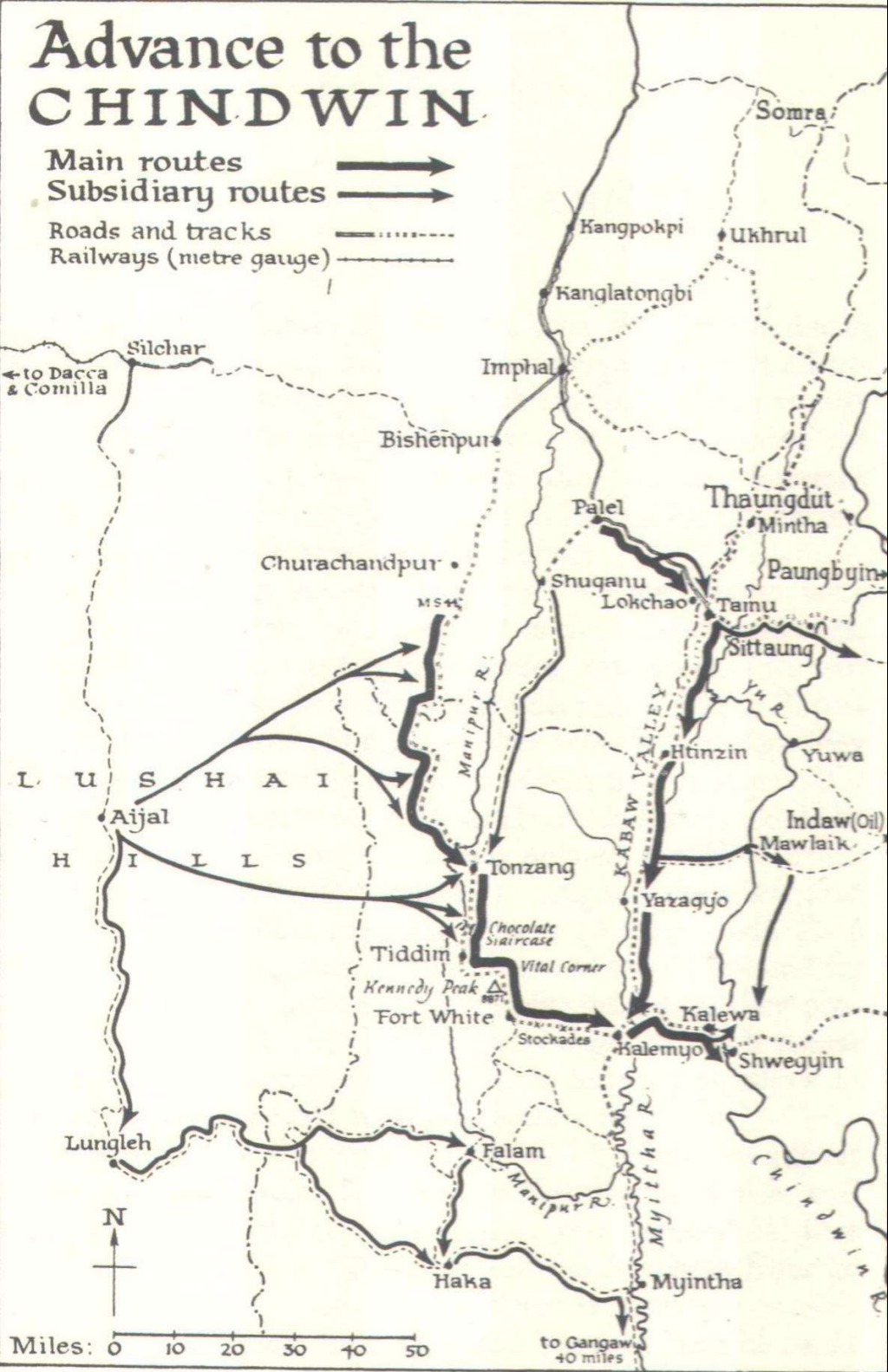
Mandalay – the initial objective for 14th Army – was just at the edge of air resupply from Imphal and beyond it from the main combat cargo base at Chittagong.

The Arakan would allow air resupply for the Army throughout the Irrawaddy Valley thus a ground campaign beyond Mandalay was now possible.

Slim was given the go ahead to consider such an operation if he saw fit to do so.

Advance to the CHINDWIN

- Main routes 
- Subsidiary routes 
- Roads and tracks 
- Railways (metre gauge) 



The main offensive began with the bridging of the Chindwin River near Kalewa.

The bridge would allow the mechanized forces to cross the river. It was not meant as a supply line. Most supplies would come by air or, where convenient, by river barge.

The 36th Infantry crossed to the north as both a diversionary force and a flanking force.

At the southern bridgehead, XXXIIIrd Corps was to cross first followed by the IVth Corps. The two corps would take parallel routes south towards Mandalay and hit the suspected Japanese line in force at two points.



The bridge at the Chindwin near Kaweba was the longest Bailey Bridge of the war in any theater. It was around 1,000 yards – over half a mile.

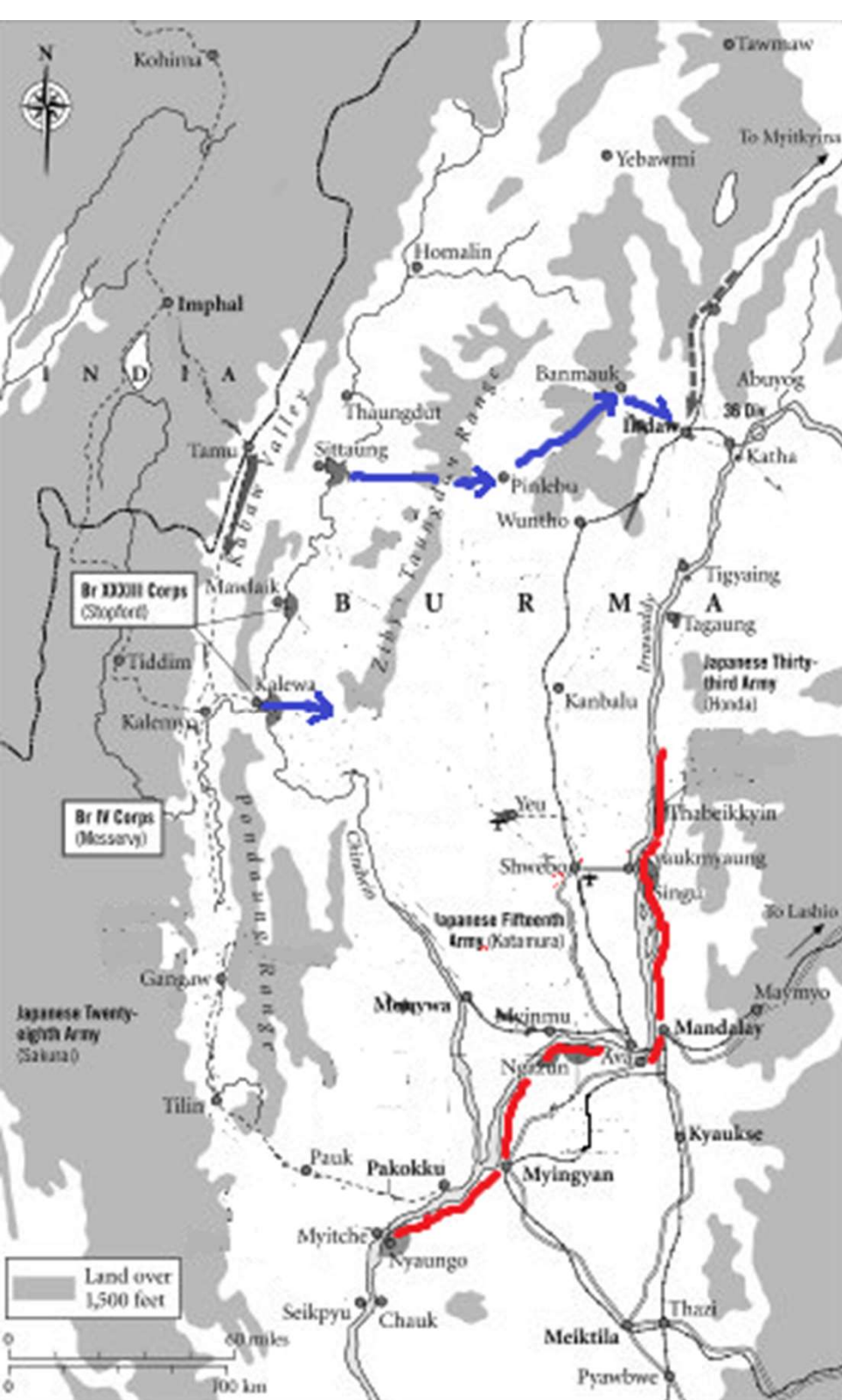
It took Slim's engineers less than a day to build.

The Japanese would try to bomb it but it was already too heavily defended both by fighters and by anti-aircraft batteries.



The XXXIIIrd Corps crossed without difficulty and the 17th Indian Division (which had fought at the Sittang River in 1942) of the IVth Corps followed.

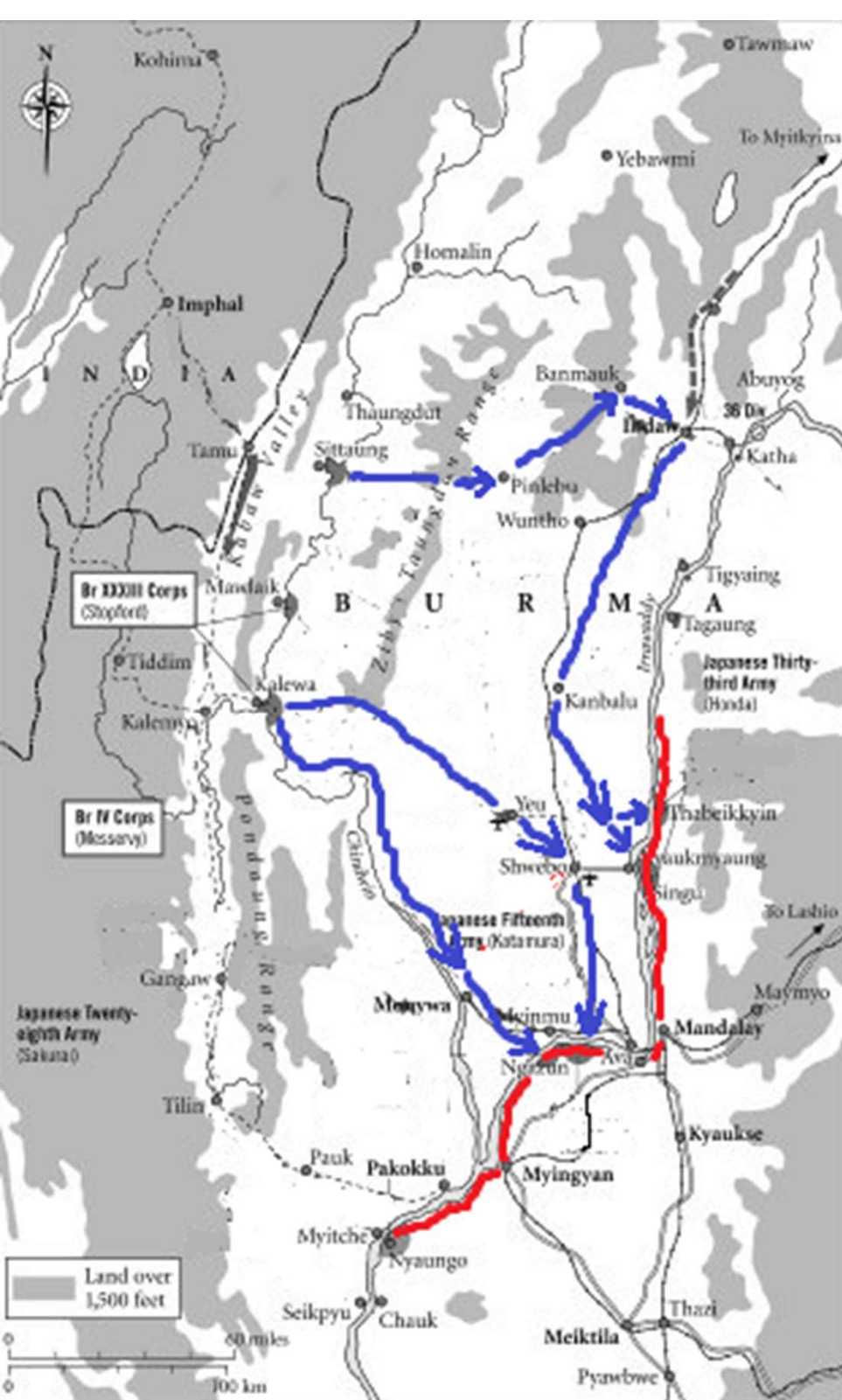
It was then that advanced patrols learned the Japanese were not north of the Irrawaddy in any force. The bulk of the Japanese defense was to prevent a crossing of the Irrawaddy.



The Japanese did not deploy as expected. Slim learned they were dug in on the banks of the Irrawaddy River. This meant he faced an opposed river crossing over one of the widest rivers in the world – with no bridges in place. His troops could be under fire as they crossed in their crude boats.

The plan did not envision such an operation. He did not have assault boats or the mountains of supplies for a large scale heavy bombardment of the far bank to support such a crossing.

Nor did he have bridging equipment, at least not enough to build even one bridge over the river. He could wait until he had what he needed or improvise.

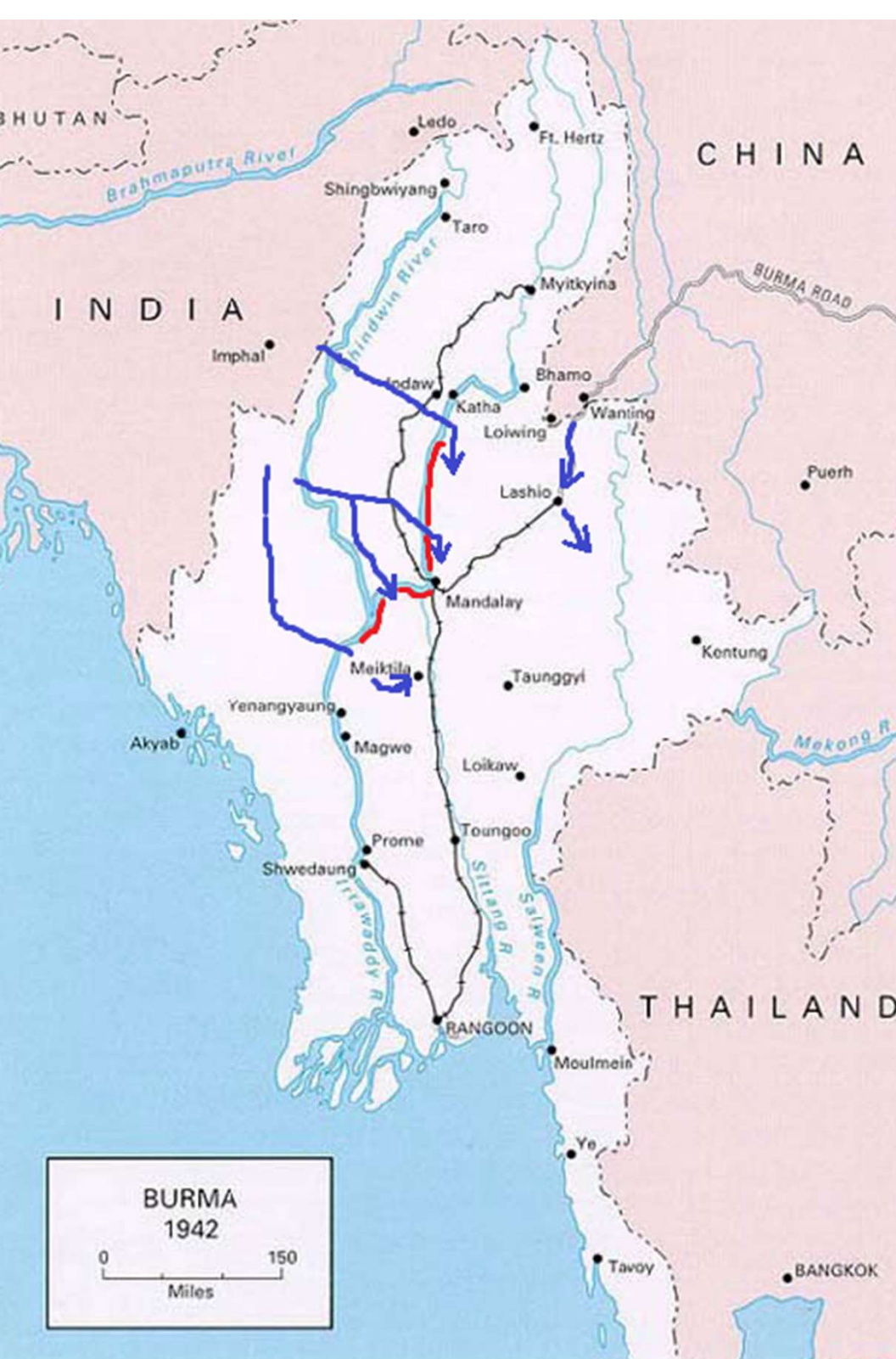


Slim improvised.

XXXIIIrd Corps would now use both routes he had planned. 19th Indian would continue as planned. It would also use both its own and IVth Corps radio call signs. They were to convince the Japanese they were the entire 14th Army and were going to force crossings of the Irrawaddy for an attack on Mandalay.

They had to be convincing because they needed to cause the Japanese to concentrate their defense to oppose those landings – pulling troops from positions elsewhere to the south.

XXXIIIrd Corps would be a decoy. But to work they had to make a serious attempt to cross the river.



Slim changed his plans again learning the east bank of the rivers were undefended. He split his army. 36th Division would continue as planned to the north. XXXIII 3rd Corps would drive along both the original routes aiming to demonstrate if not force a crossing of the Irrawaddy on either side of Mandalay.

IVth Corps would not cross the Chindwin but drive south using a low (for Burma) range of mountains to screen its movements.

17th Indian Division had to turn around and cross back over the Irrawaddy.

IVth Corps new target was Meiktila – the main Japanese supply point in central Burma.

The hope was that the Japanese would be fixated on the XXXIIIrd Corps advance on Mandalay and not notice IVth moving south on Meiktila. The right wing of XXXIIIrd Corps was given IVth radio call signs and IVth Corps was ordered to stay off their radios at all cost until they were across the Irrawaddy.

It was hoped this deception would fool the Japanese into thinking the entire 14th Army was driving on Mandalay.

To further fool the Japanese, the 11th East African Division would lead the advance. An African Brigade had participated in the last Chindit raid and perhaps if the Japanese noted activity west of the Irrawaddy they would think it was another such raid and not a major advance.

The entire deception operation was set up in less than three days.

(Allied deception operations elsewhere in the war had taken months of preparation.)

Slim hoped it would work but was not confident it would.



The Japanese did set up some delaying actions to slow the XXXIIIrd Corps – or so they hoped. It also meant they thought they knew where 14th Army was.

The 19th Indian Division's crossing of the Irrawaddy River north of Mandalay caught the Japanese by surprise and their plan – to concentrate on the main river crossing – went into effect.



This pulled units out of the defenses further to the south and moved the reserves to the north of Mandalay against what was a diversion.

The main attack of XXXIIIrd Corps was aiming to cross to the west side of Mandalay and the IVth Corps was still undetected.

The Japanese were going the wrong way.



The IVth Corps turned east and crossed from behind the hills. It was led by the East Africans and some native troops (Chin guerrillas.)

The Japanese continued to think it was nothing but a raid and only detailed a small force to keep an eye on it.

The 19th Division – with plenty of air support – was now fighting a holding action against a sizable force north of Mandalay.



On February 10th, the lead elements of IVth Corps reached the Irrawaddy and began scouting for a crossing point. They wanted a place lightly defended.

The Japanese still thought it was a raid.



From the Japanese point of view the surprise came on February 21st with the XXXIII 3rd Corps, led by 20th Indian Division began crossing the Irrawaddy on the other side of Mandalay. It was soon obvious to the Japanese that they had been tricked and their army was on the wrong side of Mandalay facing the wrong way.



They pulled back to defend what they saw as the main objective for the British and in so doing allowed 19th Division to the north to advance on Mandalay as well.

As far as the Japanese were concerned this was the fight that needed to be won. As far as Slim was concerned all he hoped was that the Japanese would remain interested.



Mandalay Hill was a key position. It overlooked the entire city. One would think the Japanese would defend it bitterly.

They did not or not effectively. While there was fighting, it was effectively in the hands of the 19th Indian Division within a day by March 8th.

The hill overlooked the entire city and few could move within the city without being spotted from the hill.



That being said, house to house fighting was costly in time and lives and was something Slim wanted to avoid. But he also wanted the Japanese to be fixed at Mandalay.



The British quickly surrounded the city. The Japanese defenders fell back behind the walls of Fort Dufferin – the walled city of the former Burmese royal palace.



It was protected by a wide moat and the British would rather avoid the trouble preferring to focus on the Japanese forces coming up from the south.

The fortress was bombed repeatedly and heavy artillery was brought up in an attempt to blast through the walls.

The walls were over 30 ft. thick and resisted the best efforts of the gunners.



The fighting was intense although not to the level of the urban fighting in Europe. The idea was to keep the Japanese in place for now, not to root them out.

That would come but not until IVth Corps took Meiktila and cut off the Japanese supplies.



The Japanese finally realized the trick around March 3rd when the British hit Meiktila in force. But they had been ordered to hold Mandalay at all costs.

The result was piecemeal attacks against the British forces at both Mandalay and Meiktila – to no effect.



By March 21st, the British had managed to blast a 15 foot gap in the wall of Fort Dufferin and were more or less resigned that they would have to attack.

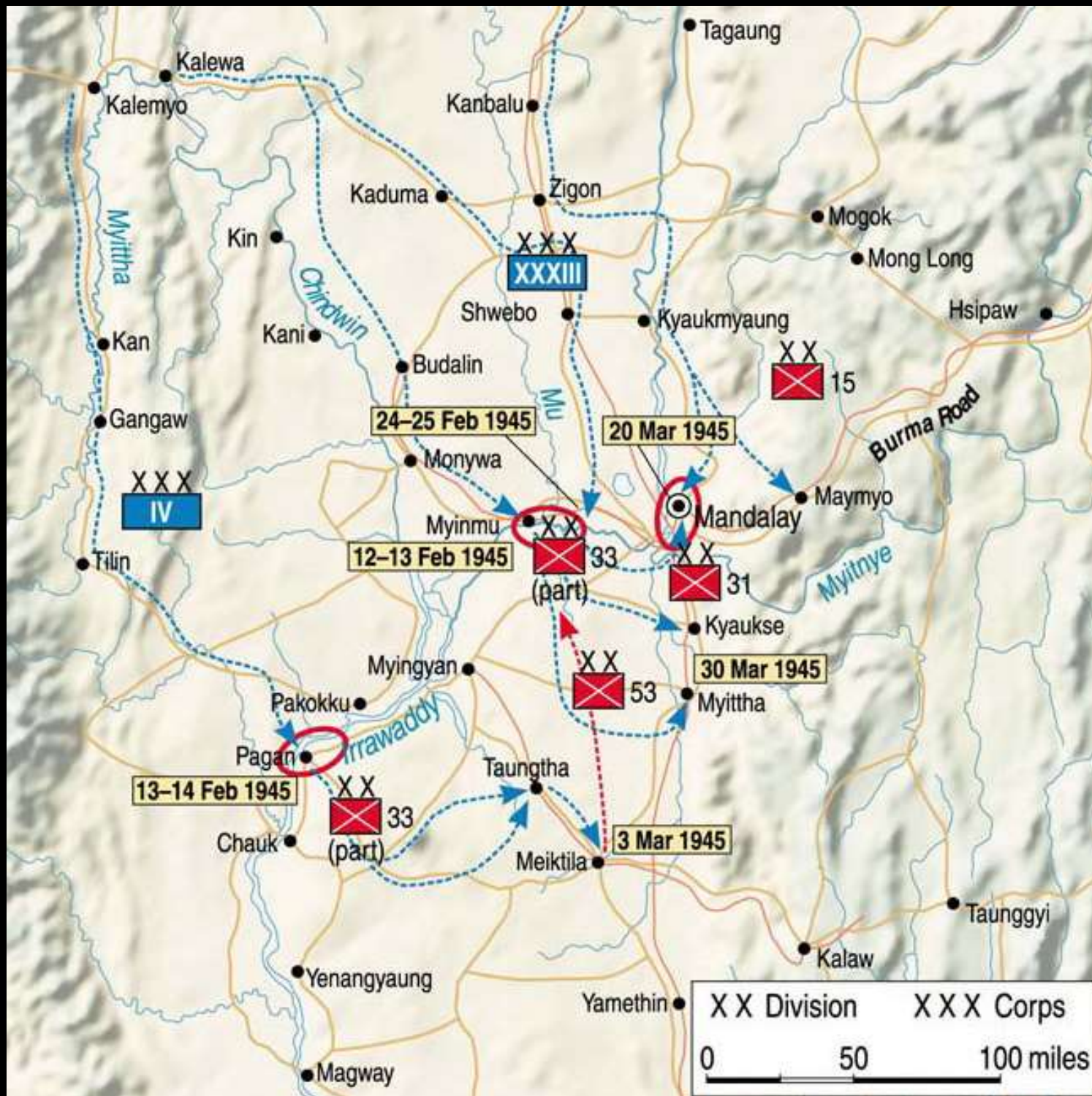
They were told by locals that the Fort was now empty. The Japanese defenders had snuck out through the sewers the night before.



(Oddly, the British were planning to use the same sewers to attack the fort.)

Mandalay had fallen.

But the Japanese had escaped to the south and were planning to attack the British at Meiktila.





Slim's plan for IVth Corps was to cross the Irrawaddy near the town of Mingyan. The shortest road from the Irrawaddy to Meiktila ran through that town.

But the Japanese held the far bank in some force.

The 7th Indian Division was further south opposite the ruins of Pagan. It too had been held – according to patrols that had crossed on the 10th. But a day later the Japanese pulled out (to defend the attack of the 19th Division far to the north) and was replaced by a brigade of the Indian National Army.



The INA figured out the 4th Corps (and Indian Divisions) were on other side of the river and promptly surrendered en masse.

The trick now was to get IVth Corps and all of its equipment across the Irrawaddy and to Meiktila (70 miles away) as fast as possible and before the Japanese figured out what was really happening.



The river was over a mile wide and had sandbars. Royal Navy divers were sent to scout the river for a course that would avoid the sand bars and the course across the river would be over two miles.

The British had no landing craft. Only some boats they found and barges they built nearby and with that they had to ferry troops, vehicles, artillery and tanks.



And mules.

But mules could swim even if they were reluctant to do so.

Tanks and vehicles, however, could not.



What the British came up with is probably the oddest invasion flotilla in modern history – if not the oddest ever. Barges were built and outboard motors installed – often they would fail at a critical point only to restart before things became desperate. A battalion found itself stuck overnight on a sandbar.



But as odd as it was, it worked and more importantly the Japanese still did not know that the British were crossing in force more than a hundred miles down river from Mandalay.

The entire crossing of the IVth Corps took only a few days and went unnoticed.



IVth Corps had crossed the Irrawaddy at Pagan unnoticed by the Japanese. The Japanese thought it was another raid. The 17th Indian Division led the advance out for Meiktila on February 20th, 1945.

The division was led by MGEN Cowen who had held command since the battle at the Sittang River back in 1942. Many were veterans of that fight and the retreat.



Slim, Lt. Gen Messervy (IVth Corps) and Cowen saw the move as a race. They had to get to Meiktila before the Japanese could set up a proper defense. On February 28th, the 17th Division surrounded the town and blocked the roads to prevent Japanese support..

They took the airfield the next day to the complete surprise of the Japanese.



Meiktila was defended by about 2,000 Japanese, mostly rear area supply and support troops. They were cut to pieces in short order and the town – and Japanese supplies – was mostly in British hands by March 4th.

But now the Japanese knew this was serious. Every Japanese unit anywhere in Burma that could counterattack was ordered to do so. The 17th Indian Division held the town and – more importantly – the airfield. Supplies and reinforcements came in by air.



The Japanese attacked from all directions, but without any plan or organization. They would overrun part of the airfield twice only to be cut down to a man. The British held.

The Japanese effectively surrounded the town. The British were cut off by road for almost three weeks – but it did not matter as supply was by air.



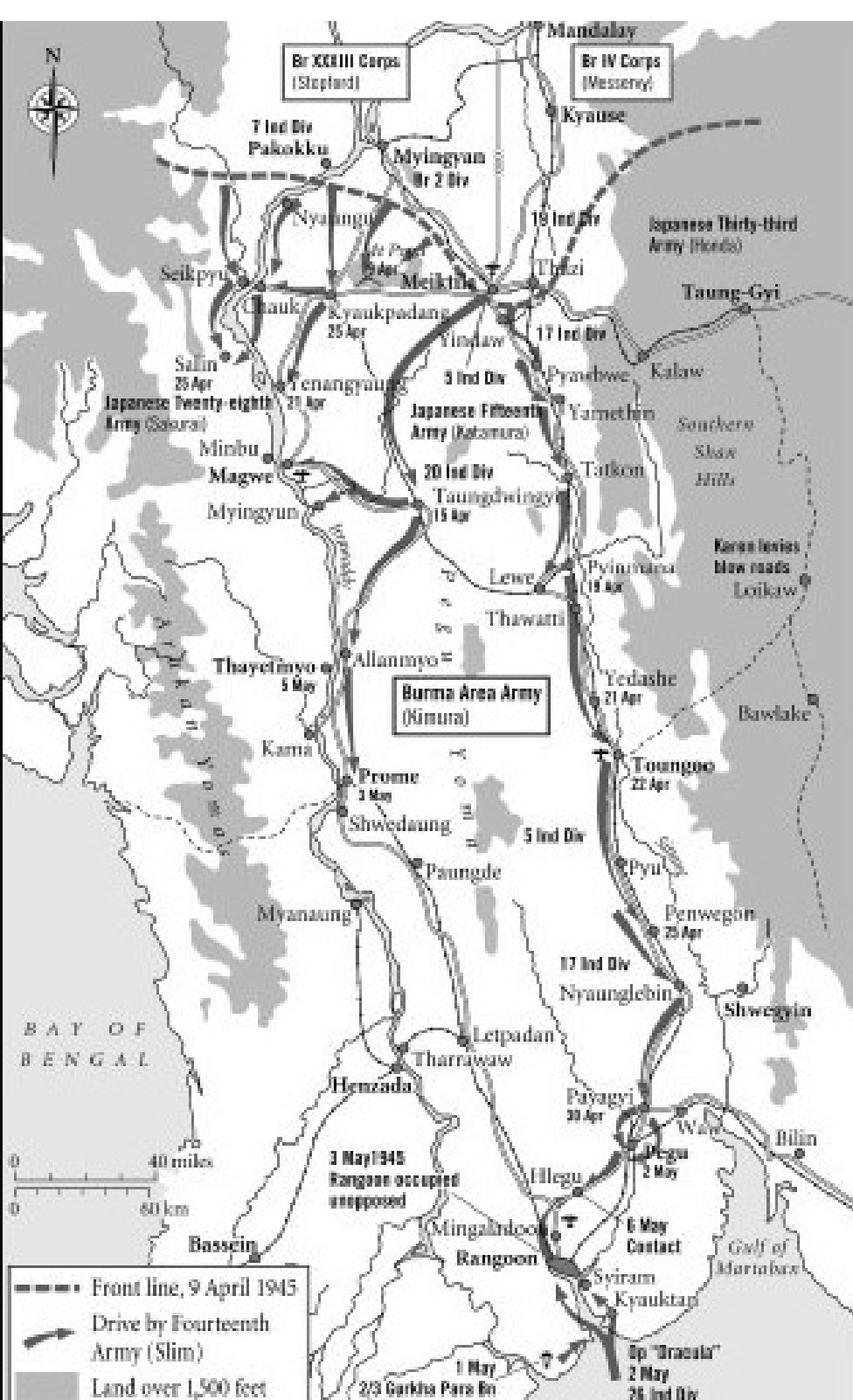
7th Indian Division broke through on March 22nd. (It had initially remained on the Irrawaddy to clear the river bank and open the river north for supply barges.) On March 28th, the Japanese claimed some success and called off the attack to regroup.

There was not much left to regroup. Every unit engaged had been decimated. All were unsupplied and had no food and little ammunition.



Worse, the Burmese turned against them. Anything less than a full platoon of armed Japanese risked slaughter if they were seen near a Burmese village.

All the Japanese could hope to do was delay the inevitable and it was already a false hope.



For all intents and purposes, nothing truly stood between 14th Army and Rangoon except time and distance. The Army spent a week mopping up and reorganizing for the drive south. They had over three hundred miles to go and the monsoon was about one month off.

Slim sent IVth down the center of Burma on the most direct route to Rangoon. XXXIIIrd Corps followed the Irrawaddy river.

Again, the advance for the IVth Corps would be supplied by air. XXXIIIrd Corps could be supplied by river. XXXIIIrd mission was to cut off and destroy Japanese units coming from the western side of the Irrawaddy, mostly from the Japanese 28th Army.



IVth Corps drove as hard and fast as they could but were delayed by Japanese holding the towns along the route. They would drive until they hit resistance, and then surround the strong point and destroy it.

It was effective but it took time. Each day was a day closer to the monsoon and once that arrived, the roads would be impassible and the army would slow to a crawl.



Slim asked for a contingency plan from SEAC and they had one – although it was not meant to be a supporting operation. One of the plans had been to take Rangoon by amphibious and airborne assault . That plan had been shelved since January but now it was on again. 14th Army had until May 3rd to take Rangoon without help.



As the Army advanced it continued to build airfields for supply. Once the next field was up and running, the previous field became a base for close air support aircraft. They were basic. There was a runway and a radio van and little else. But it meant air support was minutes away when called up.



The Army met firm resistance first at Taungoo and later at Pagu, barely forty miles from Rangoon. But what ended the speedy drive was the monsoon which began in earnest on May 2nd, more than two weeks early.

The 17th Indian Division of IVth Corps had only just begun to move past Pagu when the roads turned to mud. The next day, Operation Dracula was launched.



Operation Dracula was a XVth Corps operation. The Corps had been detached from 14th Army command back in December for the Arakan offensive. The first phase was an Airborne assault on Elephant Point at the mouth of the river leading to Rangoon. The Japanese had major coast artillery in the area and the Gurkha paratroops were tasked to take it out.

The planes were flown by Americans and had to be refitted to drop paratroops as the planes were cargo configured. The jump masters were Canadian. (The Gurkha Parachute Battalion had trained with them earlier in the war.)

The drop was considered the only perfect drop of the war. Everyone arrived on time and on target. No one missed the drop zone and they found it undefended.





The reason was the Japanese were gone. They had cleared off the day before.

Rangoon was liberated by a pilot of a DeHavilland Mosquito recon plane who set down with engine trouble to find the city empty of Japanese. He liberated the prison where several hundred allied POW's had been left behind and he and the senior prisoner walked to Elephant Point to tell the troops landing there the Japanese were gone.



“Does this mean we get to shoot Burmese?” a Gurkha NCO asked his officer when told the city was open.



Slim met with the newly released prisoners. Most had been captured before he first arrived in Burma in March of 1942.

What little respect he had for the Japanese officer corps died.

They were nothing but criminals in his mind and deserved even less respect. He would see them stripped of all rank devices, medals and anything martial in nature. They would never be address as a soldier again if he had his way.

But he would not get it right away.

One of the oddest miscommunications in history delayed anything.





It was May 1945 and the end was not immediate. With Burma free of the Japanese, Mountbatten planned to invade Malaya. He now had the ships to do this and the troops. He felt Slim needed a break and would assign the task to MGEN Christonson who had commanded XVth Corps and would lead a new army into Malaya.



Leese was told to make it happen.

He told Slim he was relieved as commander of 14th Army and would command the garrison troops.

This was not what Mountbatten had meant. 14th Army was to remain in Burma. The new 12th Army was to invade Malaya.

Being relieved of an army is either because the general is to be promoted or because he has been fired.

Garrison in Burma was not a promotion. Everyone except Leese drew the only other conclusion: Slim was fired.

He had taken Burma in less time and with fewer casualties than expected and he was fired. To a concerned subordinate he quipped: "This happened to me once before and I bloody well took the job of the chap who sacked me."

He submitted his letter of resignation within days. Leese was sent to explain the situation and found no one wanted to hear his excuses. Slim left for leave in Britain.

When he arrived, he was told he had to go back. He replied he had resigned. Well, it was not accepted. Leese had just been fired and Slim was to take over as Commander of 11th Army Group with 14th and 12th Army under his command. He was allowed to take his leave before returning.

He returned after the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima.

It has never been explained why Leese relieved Slim of command. He said at the time it was some sort of misunderstanding.



He was a professional army officer. He knew what the implications would be and knew what Mountbatten wanted.

But he was also Slim's superior as Commander 11th Army Group and yet Slim effectively answered to Mountbatten directly. Leese could not give Slim an order Slim did not like. Mountbatten would back Slim.

Slim had to go for Leese to truly be in command. It is speculative but the only explanation that makes sense.

OKINAWA



Okinawa was the largest of the Ryukyu Islands south of Japan and had a strategic purpose. Control of the Island would put the southern most of Japan's home Islands within range of land based close air support.

Bombers from Okinawa could hit all of Japan.

And aircraft could then complete the blockade of Japan by making it impossible for any vessel to leave or make port.

It was also an ideal forward base for any future invasion of Japan.

The task of invasion fell to LGEN Simon Bolivar Buckner – who answered to ADM Spruance.

OKINAWA



In early 1945, a lone U.S submarine slipped into the harbor of Jeju Island off Korea and had a field day sinking Japanese merchant ships and escorts before slipping away into the night.

Add to it the Americans had bombed it from China, and the Japanese knowing America wanted a base near Japan were convinced this was the target, sending about half a million troops to defend it.

This included troops from Okinawa.

Oddly, neither did the Americans ever consider Jeju Island nor had they ever set out to deceive the Japanese about their next objective.

The Japanese chose to deceive themselves.

OKINAWA



The invasion would be the largest of the Pacific War to date. Four divisions would land on D-Day, two Army and two Marine. Three additional divisions were in reserve, two would land later.

The invasion would be preceded by the most massive air and naval bombardment of the war. They were not going to let anything remain that could pin them to the beaches.

The Japanese had no plans to even try. They were dug in deep on a series of hills that ran from just near the coast north of Naha, through Shuri to the east side of the Island.

They would let the Americans land and wait for them to hit their line.

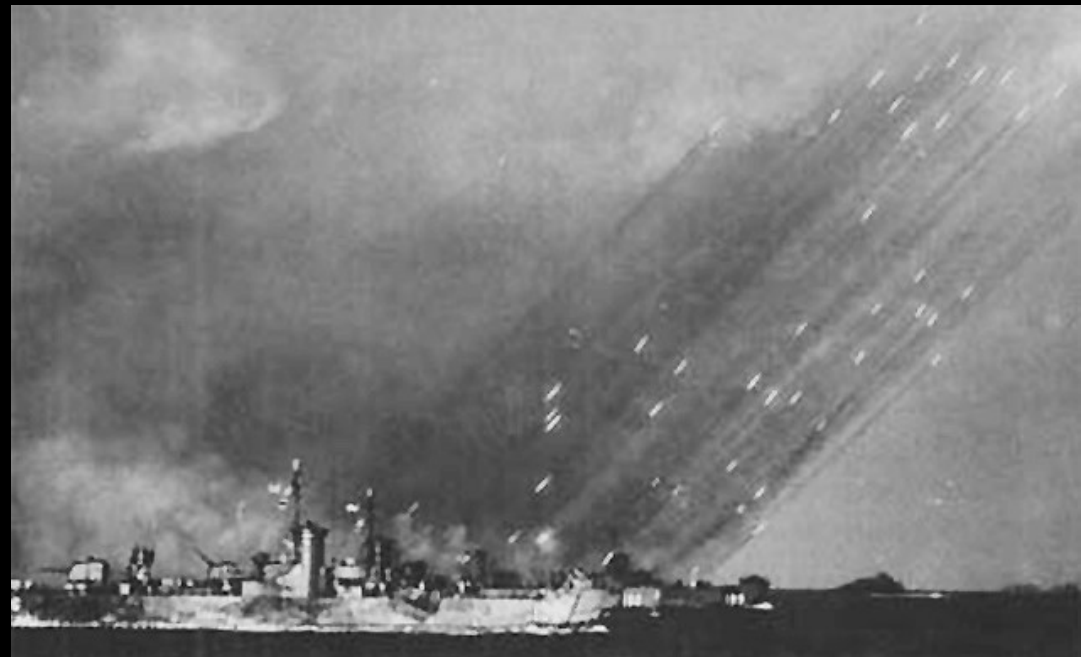
OKINAWA



The pre-invasion bombardment went as planned – except they hit nothing. They did not yet know the Japanese had conceded the beaches completely.



The Kamikaze stayed away on the opening days of the operations, planning a massive and ultimately futile strike for later.



OKINAWA

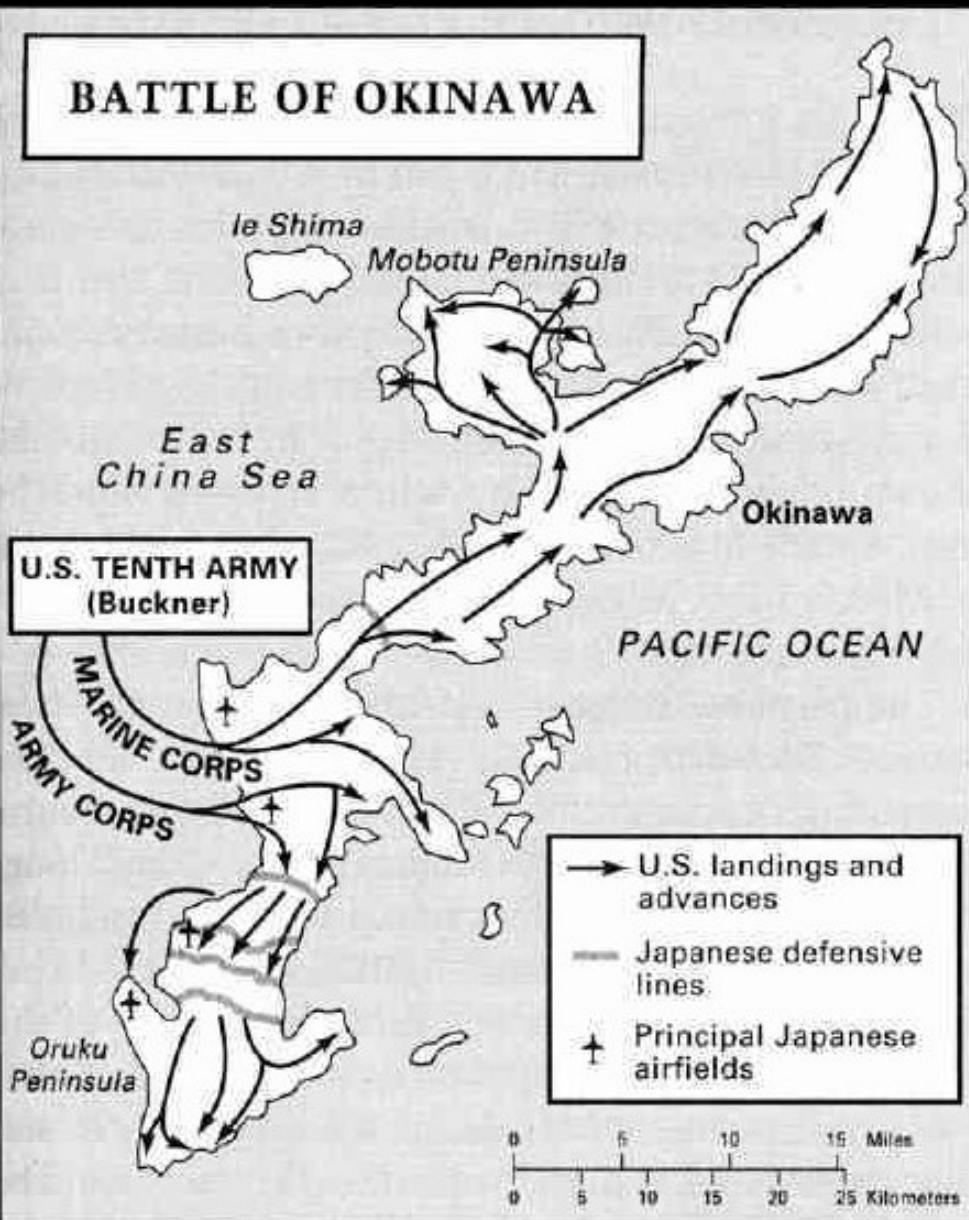


The soldiers and Marines were told to expect heavy fighting and casualties on the beaches. They found nothing – not even recently prepared defenses.

They over-ran one of the major airfields on the island on the first day, even killing a Japanese pilot who landed not knowing it was already in American hands.



OKINAWA



The Marines were to drive due east across the island and north. They would find some Japanese – about a Regiment in total – and deal with them quickly. Within two weeks they had seized all of their assigned objectives.

The Army was to take the south of the island – and soon hit the Japanese forward lines and were stopped cold.



OKINAWA



The Army was as methodical as always, but failed to gain any ground.

The Marines assumed it was poor tactics, or leadership or soldiers and not the Japanese defenses – at least from what they had heard. They would soon learn the truth. At the end of April, they were sent south and into the real battle.



OKINAWA

President Roosevelt died on April 20th and Harry Truman became President.

The Army on Okinawa was still stalled before what would become known as the Shuri line.

It was fighting off Japanese attacks, it just was not able to gain ground.



OKINAWA



The War in Europe ended May 8th, 1945. The Army barely noticed for their war was far from over.

The Marines were sent south into the western side of the line and soon learned that the Army was not lacking in ability. The Marines were just as stuck fighting over the same bad ground.



OKINAWA



The fighting would be the most intense of the entire Pacific War. The Japanese were well prepared and in strong positions and the Americans had to cross open, broken ground to close the enemy.

The going was painfully slow and costly. But the Japanese were weakening, it just was not apparent.



OKINAWA



At the end of May, the Japanese line broke partly by the efforts of the Americans but also because the Japanese commander knew his men could not hold any longer.

He retreated to the south. The Americans advanced cautiously suspecting a trap.



OKINAWA



The Americans followed south, destroying the Japanese who stood their ground or tried to hide.

The battle was nearing its end. The Japanese were almost out of everything and the Americans were well supplied and now moving with some ease.



OKINAWA

With the end of the battle almost in sight, General Buckner was killed by Japanese mortar fire observing the advance of his troops.

For a brief time, an American Army was commanded by a Marine Aviator – LGEN Roy Geiger.

He would turn over to Joe Stilwell on June 23rd.



OKINAWA



The battle ended June 22nd 1945. Many Japanese killed themselves on or just before that day including their commanding general.

12,520 Americans were KIA. 55,162 were wounded.

The Japanese lost between 77,000 and 110,000. More than 7,000 were taken prisoner.

Between one quarter and one half of the civilian population died during the battle.

The Americans tried to avoid civilian casualties. Many were killed directly or indirectly by the Japanese. They had drafted some 1,780 boys under the age of 18 for front line service. Most of them did not survive.



ENDGAME

In May, ADM Halsey and Third Fleet staff took over the navy off Okinawa.

Spruance had two flagships hit by Kamikazes – USS Indianapolis and USS Mississippi – his former command.

On June 5th, despite a warning, Halsey sailed his fleet into another Typhoon. This time he was trying to avoid it but he guessed wrong.



ENDGAME

While no ships had sunk in this second “Halsey Typhoon,” the fleet suffered far greater damage – or at least that portion of it that had sailed into it. It was not large. There were ships twenty miles away that were not aware it was around.

There was another court of inquiry and this one found Halsey culpable – which usually meant he would be fired and if the Navy was particularly angry – kicked out.

Except it would not be good for morale back home to fire a popular commander.

So King decided he would force the Carrier Task Force Commander to retire ... in a couple of months. King didn't like Admiral McCain anyway so there was no loss. (McCain would be relieved shortly after the surrender in Tokyo Bay. He would die of a heart attack the day after he returned to his home.)

For now, there was the end game to consider.

And that meant an invasion of Japan and for once King could not win his war against MacArthur. While Nimitz would remain in charge at sea, the ground game went to MacArthur.

ENDGAME

A colonel from Okinawa made it back to Japan with a message from the now dead commanding general to the military leadership.

The message was the war was lost and Japan must surrender.

The militarists had other ideas and began preparing to send everyone out to defend the home islands.



ENDGAME

As a banzai charge, it would have been impressive. As a war winning strategy, it was a fool's errand.

Many of this civilian home guard would be armed with the Type 99 rifle (below). When introduced and early in the war it was arguably the best military bolt action in service.

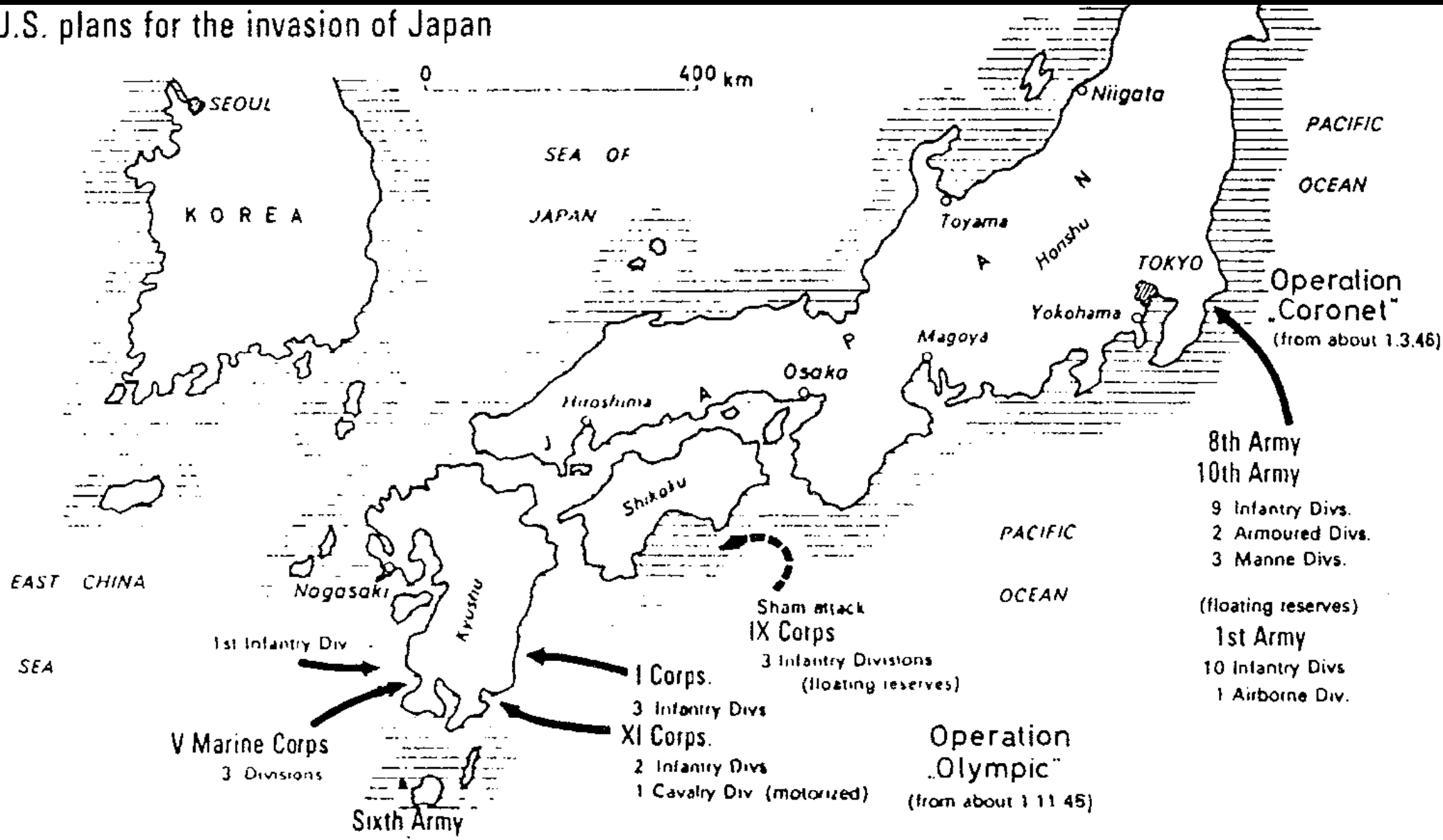
But by the late war, the lack of quality steel, lack of gunsmiths, lack of machine tools, lack of any quality control, meant the rifles entering service were basically junk, more likely to kill the user than anyone or anything else.

This was the result of the recent bombing campaign and blockade.



ENDGAME

U.S. plans for the invasion of Japan



ENDGAME

There were not enough divisions then available for operations in the Pacific Theater to man the invasion force. Divisions that had already won the war in Europe were now alerted that they would redeploy to the Pacific.

The estimates as to the potential costs of the invasion varied. The most optimistic estimates predicted around 250,000 casualties. Most of the planners and decision makers were thinking a million U.S. casualties was more realistic.

The first invasion would be of the Island of Kyushu, the southern most. Its purpose would be to seized harbors and ground for airfields and ports to support the main invasion near Tokyo.

The first invasion would be Operation Olympic. Its scheduled date was November 1st, 1945.

The much larger Operation Coronet was set to commence on March 1st 1946.

No one was thrilled with the idea. Most planners were convinced it was all over but for the formality. Japan was cut off from all supplies. In six months, all that would be truly needed for the invasion would be grave diggers for the starved population...

ENDGAME

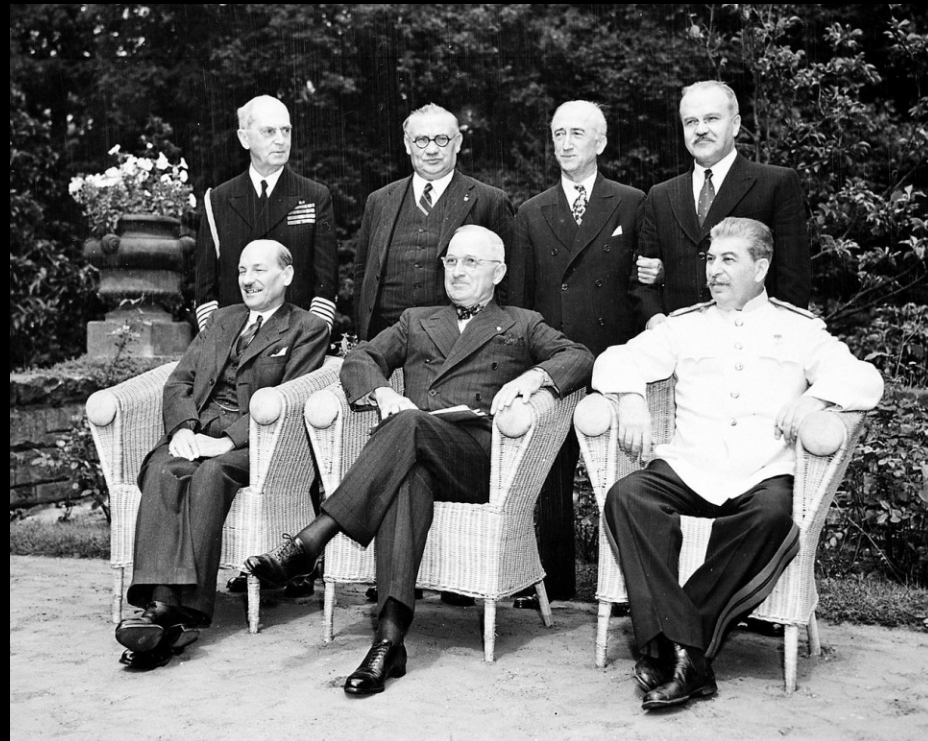
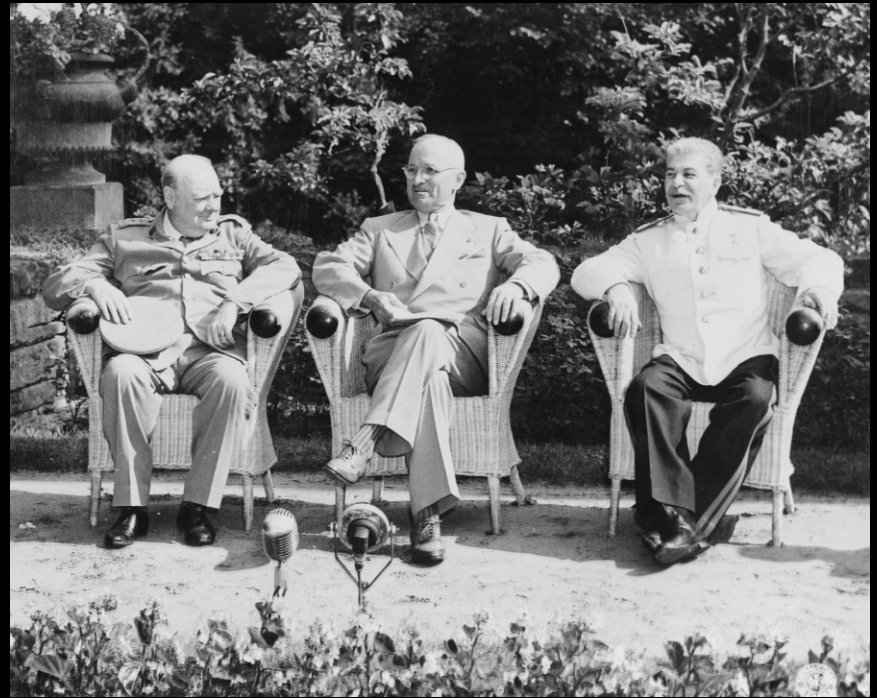
In July 1945, the last great power summit of the Second World War took place at Potsdam in what would be East Germany. It was Truman's first. In the end, only Joseph Stalin was a true veteran.

The critical matters were more discussions about Europe, but for the first time the war with Japan was at the forefront.

Two interesting things happened.

First, Prime Minister Winston Churchill had called for a General Election (it was not required) hoping to stave off the threat from the Labour Party by seeing his party returned.

His party lost. Halfway through the conference he was replaced by the new Prime Minister – Labour Party Leader – Clement Atlee.



ENDGAME

On July 16, 1945, the world changed forever.

An atomic bomb worked.

The men who built it knew that one of their designs would work. Trinity was a test of another, supposedly more efficient design and one they were not so certain would work.

It did.

Truman learned of the bomb only after he became President despite having been vice president for a couple of months.

He learned it worked within minutes.



ENDGAME

Truman did not waste much time in making up his mind. As soon as he knew it worked he had an ultimatum sent to Japan ... surrender or else.

The Soviets reaffirmed their agreement to enter the war within 90 days of Germany's surrender, but Truman was not counting on that to end things.

If Japan did not surrender, the bomb would be used as soon as possible.

The alternative – an invasion – was too horrible to contemplate.

His Pacific Commanders only learned of the bomb after the Trinity test. None of them thought it would change things.

But if it would force the issue, then it had to be used. The other options were a million U.S. casualties and another nine months of war or to await a famine from the blockade which could take a year or more.

Politically anything that added to the cost and delayed what was seen as inevitable was suicide.

TRUMAN'S DILEMMA

The Navy and Air Force did not want an invasion of Japan. They felt it was unnecessary and too costly. They preferred to blockade and bomb Japan (with conventional bombs) until they surrendered or there was no one left. This would take months and the American public wanted this war to end. Moreover, the death toll in Japan would be well over ten million.

(Asian historians are of the mind “so what?” On average, over 4,000 Chinese civilians had died every day since the Sino-Japanese War had begun in 1937 and an additional 4,000 civilians had died elsewhere in Asia and the Pacific every day since December 7th, 1941 and those are conservative estimates. 10 million or more dead Japanese is hardly much at all. The only argument in avoiding that fate was other Asians would continue to die in unacceptable numbers each day the war continued.)

MacArthur wanted an invasion (so he could win the war). At least as many Japanese would die. American losses would at least equal the number of Americans who died during the war in all theaters from December 7th through the fall of Okinawa.

Over 1,000,000 Purple Heart medals were made in preparation for the invasion. They are still being awarded despite all the wars the U.S. has fought since 1945; in other words not one has been made since.

TRUMAN'S DILEMMA

By the middle of July, MacArthur and his court were about the only ones who thought the invasion was a good idea.

The plans for the invasion of Kyushu set for November 1945 were made based upon the size of its garrison in early 1945 – 3 divisions. By mid-July this had expanded to 13 divisions. The American plan could handle up to six divisions although with difficulty.

The Americans knew this through code breaking and communications intelligence. They had “watched” those divisions arrive and deploy.

General Willoughby, MacArthur's Chief of Intelligence (who could barely spell the word and would never learn how) thought it was at worst a deception and as an invasion was what MacArthur wanted he chose to ignore intelligence that contradicted his idea – a problem that would truly come back to bite him about six years later.

It was understood that each bomb would kill 80 to 100,000 – less than the number killed in Tokyo in a single raid. This was far less than the millions who would die under either other option.

Sec. State Byrnes would later note it was the least horrible of the terrible options available.

ENDGAME

Unknown to the U.S. at the time, Japan had its own atomic bomb program, one which was about as far along as Germany's and it was not in any way known to or supported by Germany.

When Truman issued his ultimatum, which included warning of a "rain of ruin from the air", the Big Six called in the head of Japan's bomb program and asked if this meant the U.S. had the bomb.

The Japanese physicist told them that a bomb was technologically feasible. It was for Japan and thus it was for the United States. The problem was manufacturing enough weapons grade uranium or similar fissible material to make the bomb detonate.

He had no doubt a bomb was possible in the next few years.

He had serious doubts even the United States could have devoted the resources necessary to achieve a bomb at the time...

ENDGAME

By August 2nd, 1945, the United States had two atomic bombs, one had just arrived on Tinian and the other was due shortly.

Actually, most of the first was already there, it was just the uranium core that had just arrived.

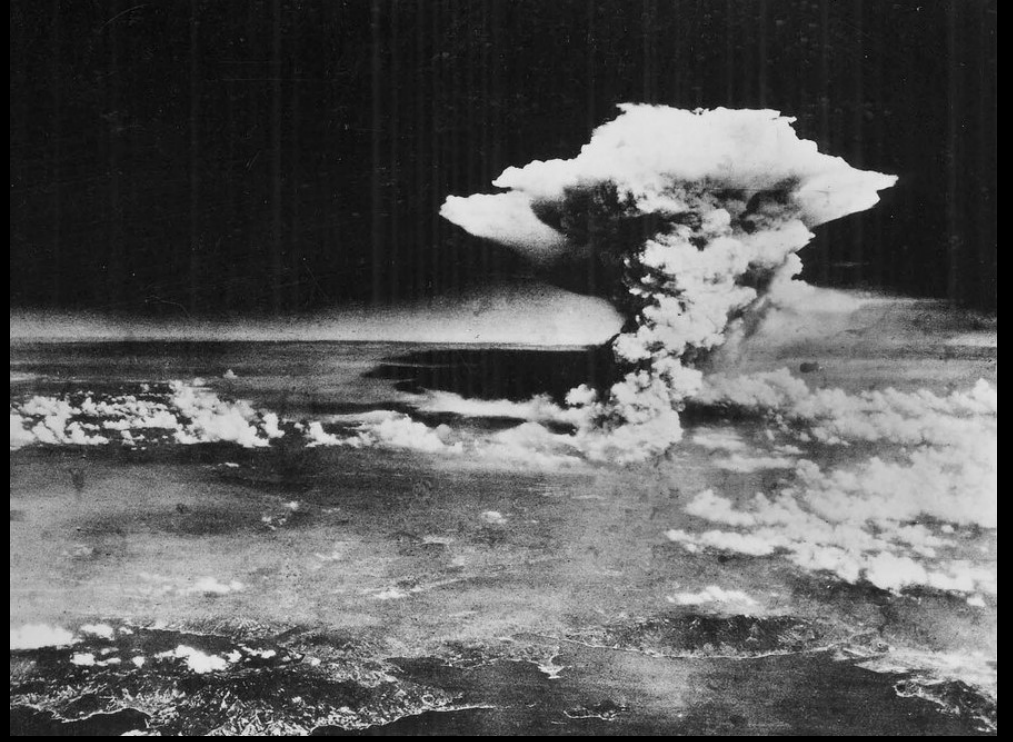
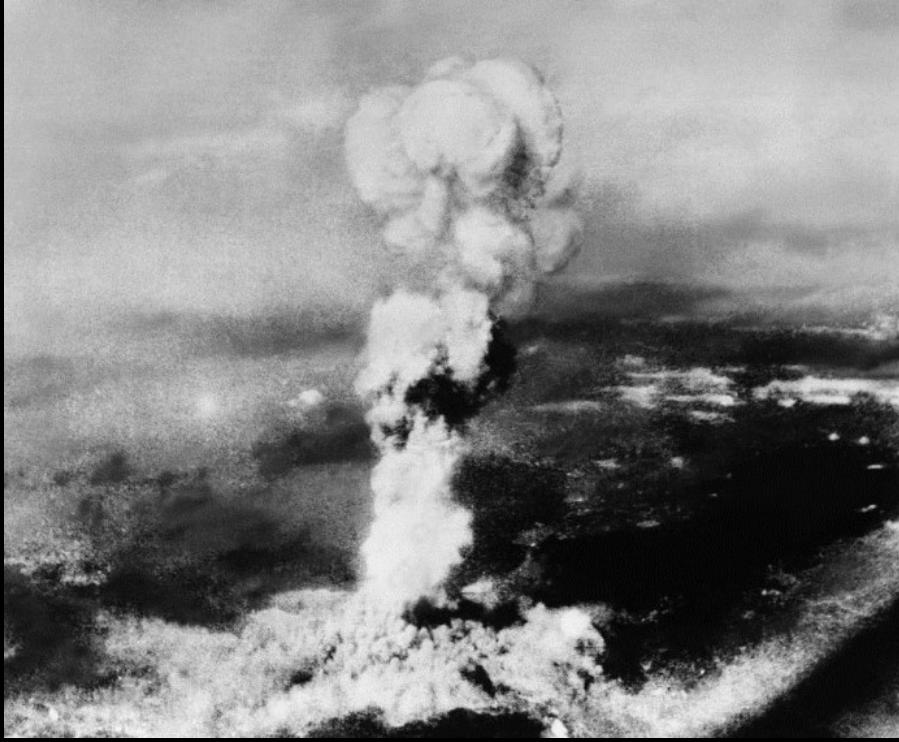
The bomb was the one the scientists knew would work.

It was scheduled to drop first. Two targets were selected. Hiroshima would be the primary. If it was clouded over, Nagasaki was the secondary target.

The mission was scheduled for August 6th, 1945.



ENDGAME



ENDGAME

Between 60,000 and 80,000 people died in the first atomic attack of the world's first nuclear war at Hiroshima. The mission had been perfect.

The bomb was not as destructive as LeMay's raid on Tokyo, five months earlier but that raid had over 200 planes. This was only one.

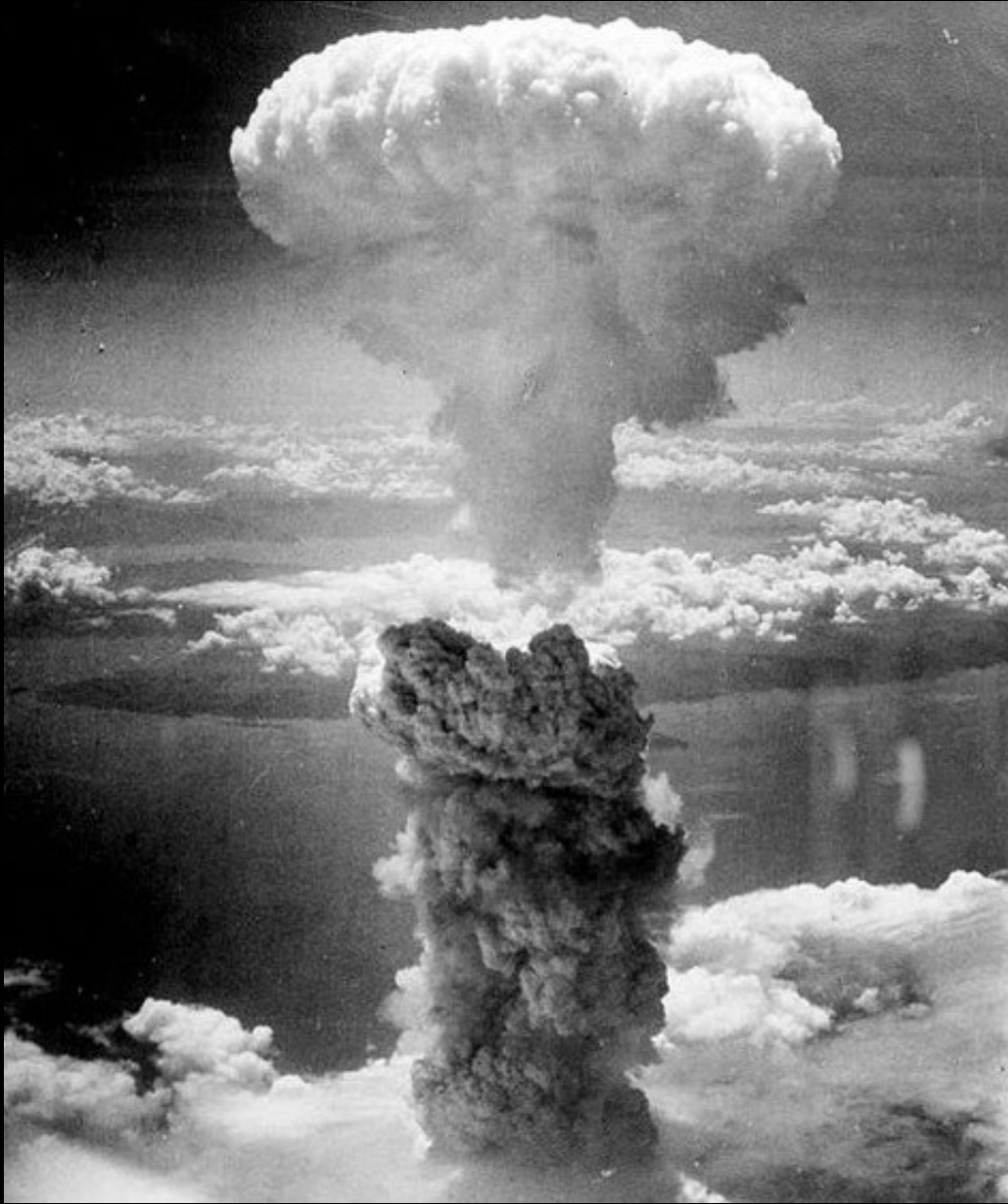


The first indication anything was wrong was when all communication with Hiroshima and the surrounding area was lost. A team of scientists from the Japanese bomb project and others were dispatched.

The head of the project reported their findings to the Big Six later that night. It was an atomic bomb and in his opinion if the U.S. had one, they must have an arsenal of them because why would anyone use their only bomb?

The Big Six was not yet convinced.

ENDGAME



ENDGAME

The second mission was not as flawless.

First it had been scheduled for August 11th, but a front was approaching Japan which would make bombing problematic for a few days. The mission was moved up to August 9th. The target was Kokura, Japan.

The bomb mission arrived over the target to find it entirely cloud covered. It was smoke from one of LeMay's incendiary attacks on the nearby city of Yawata. A radar run was attempted, but the radar could not clearly identify the target. They went for the secondary target Nagasaki.

It was clouded over too. The Weapons Delivery plane waited, tried a radar run and eventually there was enough of a break to make a run. The bomb missed its aim point by over a mile. The delivery plane had to land at Okinawa. It had less than five minutes fuel remaining when it landed.

The bomb was less effective than the one on Hiroshima partly because the topography limited its effects and partly because it missed its aim point. Between 35,000 and 40,000 were killed.

ENDGAME

An interesting side note:

On August 6th, 1945, a Japanese businessman from Nagasaki was in Hiroshima for a business meeting.

Obviously, that meeting never occurred. He was there and survived the bombing.

It took him a couple of days to get home to Nagasaki...

Just in time to be there for the next atomic bombing.

He survived that bombing as well.

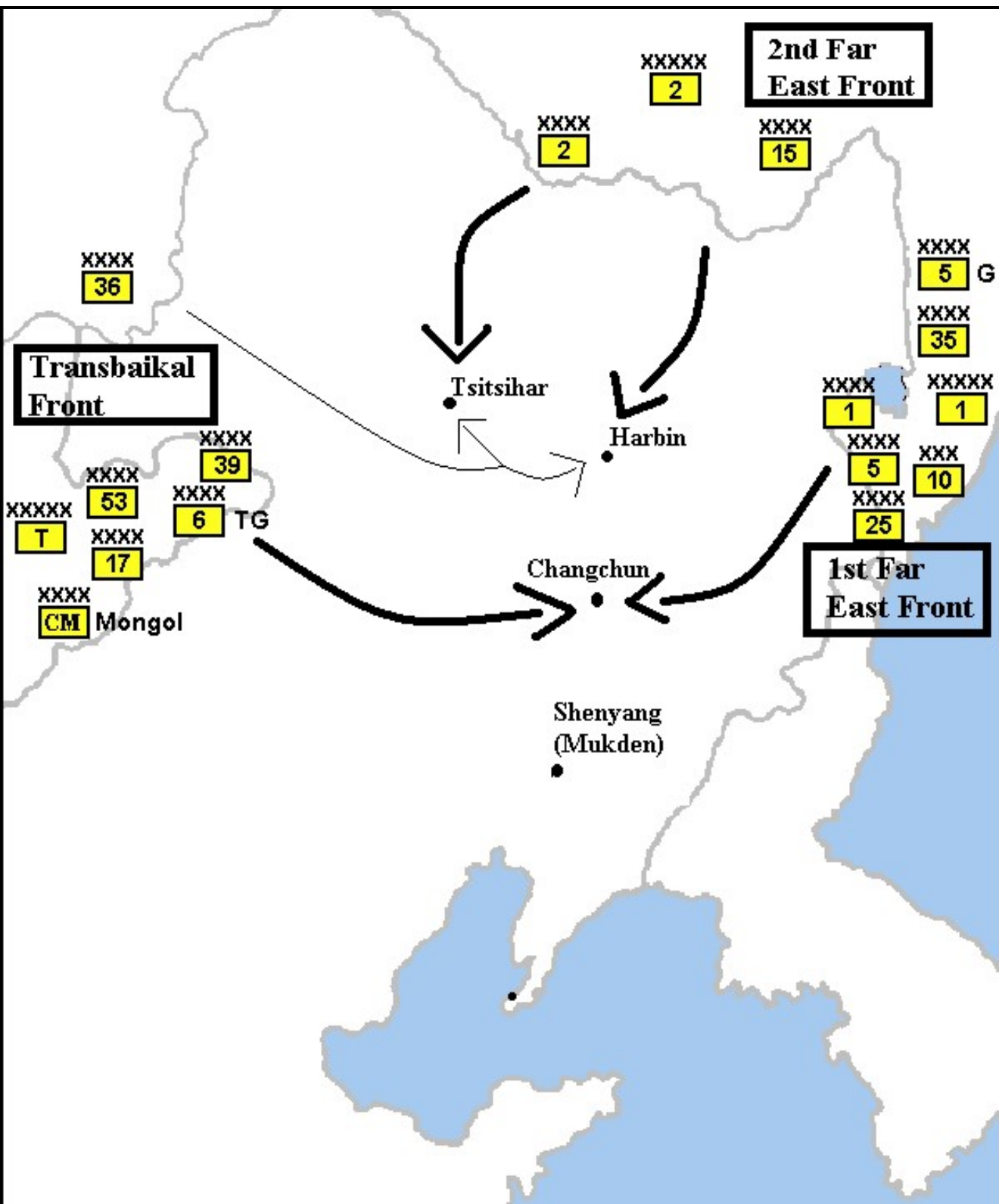




Germany surrendered on May 8th, 1945. On August 9th, 1945, the same day the second atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki, the Soviet Union invaded Manchuria. The Japanese had over 1.2 Million troops.

They were outnumbered and heavily out gunned.





The Soviets threw fourteen armies at Manchuria – almost 1,600,000 soldiers, almost 4,000 combat aircraft, 27,000 artillery pieces and almost 5,600 tanks.

The Japanese were overrun almost from the beginning although they would fight hard when they could.

On August 14th, 1945 – just six days after the Soviets invaded, the Japanese Emperor Hirohito announced the unconditional surrender of Japan.



The war in Manchuria continued for another six days. It was pressure both from the United States and from the Japanese Emperor that finally silenced the guns.



The Soviets had suffered over 35,000 casualties in their eleven day war. The Japanese suffered over 40,000 casualties.

Soviet troops continued forward after the shooting stopped ultimately occupying much of the northern half of Manchuria including the Liaotung Peninsula and Port Arthur – territory lost by the Russian Empire in the Russo-Japanese War forty years earlier.



CHINA, 1941
OPERATION ICHIGO, 1945
AND FINAL OPERATIONS
IN THE WAR

0 100 200 300 400 500
 SCALE OF MILES

The Soviets took over 600,000 Japanese prisoners after the shooting stopped.



Almost all of them were shipped off to the Gulags, in many cases for years.

Grudgingly, the Soviets began repatriation beginning about a year after the war.

It would claim the last prisoners were released by 1954.

The last (fewer than 100) were allowed to return to Japan in 1992 after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

ENDGAME

On August 10th, LGEN Leslie Groves – Officer-in-Charge of the Manhattan Project – informed GEN Marshall that the third bomb could be delivered to Tinian in time for an attack on or after August 17th with three additional bombs per month thereafter.

The reply stated that all further attacks were at the sole discretion of the President.

The plan had been to drop them as soon as they were ready on targets from an approved list or – once such targets were destroyed – at the discretion of the military commanders. Truman revoked that order after Nagasaki.

The new plan would use the entire arsenal then available in the pre-invasion bombardment of Japan.

ENDGAME

After the issuance of the Potsdam declaration which Japan decided was unworthy of reply, the Foreign Minister contacted his Ambassador in Moscow and asked about getting the Soviets to mediate a peace deal. The Ambassador poured cold water on the idea.

The Soviets would not do so unless they had something to gain that could not be gained otherwise. What could Japan possibly offer the Soviets that they could not take whenever they wanted?

The Americans were aware of this exchange (having long before broken the Japanese diplomatic code.)

At around 10:00 PM, August 8th, the Foreign Minister was called before the Emperor and told to accept the terms of the Potsdam Declaration without reservation. A meeting of the Big Six was then scheduled for the next morning to discuss...

ENDGAME

The meeting of the Big Six convened and the Emperor's "suggestion" was discussed. The three "peace faction" members knew an order when they heard it even if Navy Minister Yonai had been in favor of negotiation. The other three did not see how the bomb changed anything and, despite knowing about Soviet intervention, saw no reason to entertain anything until after the invasion.

Then a messenger came in and told them that Nagasaki had been nuked.

While a decision was not made immediately, the Six left with the opinion that something had to be done while there was still a Japan left as it was clear that to do nothing would mean the absolute end...

Within a couple of days, the resistance to the Potsdam Declaration within the Big Six had evaporated...

(These details were not known for decades. The final details being revealed when the papers of the then Keeper of the Privy Seal, Marquis Kido were made public in the early 2000's.)

ENDGAME

The silence from Japan after Hiroshima was puzzling.

The problem was, Japan did not know what had happened. Communications with Hiroshima were out and the government had nothing but rumors. They learned that Hiroshima was gone and probably by a single bomb the same day and then Nagasaki suffered a similar fate.

The Prime Minister now demanded that Japan accept the terms of the Potsdam Convention (unconditional surrender – but with a secret proviso that allowed the Emperor to remain as some kind of Head of State). He was backed up by the Emperor.

A Major in the Army would have none of it. On August 14th, (while the third bomb was being readied for shipment to Tinian) he tried to take over the government only for his regiment to be routed by the Imperial Guard and the generals who had supported him to have either killed themselves or suddenly forget who he was. He killed himself in a park the next morning upon learning his Emperor had announced Japan's surrender.

It was done over the radio. It was the first time the Emperor had been heard by the Japanese people.

SURRENDER – SEPTEMBER 2nd 1945



SURRENDER – SEPTEMBER 2nd 1945



SURRENDER – SEPTEMBER 2nd 1945



SURRENDER – SEPTEMBER 2nd 1945



Above: Japanese survivors at the surrender of Rabaul – Sep 1945.

Right: Japanese survivors at the surrender of Truk – Oct 1945.

(It took that long for the allies to send someone there.)



SURRENDER – SEPTEMBER 2nd 1945

114,000 Americans died in combat in the Pacific War between December 7th, 1941 and August 15th, 1945.

442,000 Americans died in combat in all of World War II.

Over 1,400,000 Japanese died fighting against the Americans in World War II.

That number does not include any who died in the bombing attacks on Japan, civilian or military.

A U.S. soldier was less likely to become a casualty from enemy action in the Pacific than in Europe.

He was also far less likely to contract a social disease.

But he was far more likely to be hospitalized for any one of a number of tropical diseases. The disease rate was the highest in the 20th Century in warfare.

History is written by the victors.

This is an ancient expression and true in ancient times – mainly because the losers no longer existed.

More recently it is more because the losers don't want to write about it – at least not in an honest way, or because few want to read about it.

But professional historians do want to read and write about it if only for purely professional reasons. The “victors” story is usually written first so to publish one needs an untapped source.

The problem then becomes whether the losers kept anything or even want to talk about it.

The problem is also that they lost and often because they were not nearly as organized as the victors.

The Chinese Nationalists (on the winning side but hardly winners) were terrible record keepers and even worse where honest record keeping is concerned.

The losers of the Second World War lost their ability to keep secrets. Their archives were swarmed with historians and other academic professionals as soon as the dust settled.

Both the U.S. Army and Navy had teams of historians copying everything they could from German and Japanese sources. They wanted as complete a record as possible (and such was limited because their own archives were filled with still classified materials.)

Among the more thorough, multi-disciplinary approaches to analyzing the war was the work of the Strategic Bombing Survey. This organization was not military and non-partisan. It was to evaluate the “truth” of the Army Air Force claim that strategic bombing won the war. (The Air Force would not be happy with their conclusions.)

They (and others) found the Germans kept and preserved detailed records of almost everything (as many German war criminals would learn to their cost at their trials.)

The Japanese were never as meticulous to begin with. Worse still was that most of what they had burned in the bombings of Tokyo during the war.

The Strategic Bombing Survey was largely ignored by the Air Force as it concluded strategic bombing had little effect on the war. Enemy war production in both Germany and Japan peaked during the height of the bombing.

It would fall off in the waning months of the war but not because of the bombers. In Germany, it began to collapse when the allied armies began overrunning German industrial cities. In Japan, the destruction of Japanese shipping led to the collapse of their arms industry as Japan had little raw materials.

The Survey could not say whether bombing shortened the war but it did reveal that the effect on civilian morale was exactly the opposite of what the bomber barons believed – it stiffened resolve.

But one can say it had an effect after the fact. Neither Germany nor Japan believed that they had not suffered total defeat. There was no silver lining when your cities have been flattened and your people reduced to beggars. Unlike major wars before WWII, the losers knew they had lost utterly.

Almost since the moment the war ended there are those who believed the atomic bomb was not necessary and did not lead to the Japanese surrender.

More recently, there are “revisionist” historians who argue that it was the Soviet Invasion of Manchuria that brought the war to an end and that the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was more aimed at the Soviets than at Japan.

As to the first point – the bombing was not necessary – hind sight is always near perfect.

The U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey’s findings (released around 1948) reached that conclusion. Had the Allies done nothing more after the Battle of Okinawa, Japan would have surrendered by November 1945 or they would have starved to death within a couple of months.

It was the destruction of their maritime supply lines by the Pacific forces that truly brought Japan to its knees. (Not the bombing of its cities or the losses of its military.)

The atomic bombing, Soviet intervention and planned invasion of Japan were not truly necessary to win the war.

As to the Soviet invasion being the cause of the surrender, the Emperor made his decision to surrender before either Nagasaki was bombed or he learned of the Soviet invasion of Manchuria. (His records were not bombed).

The U.S. could not know how bad things were in Japan were or how close they were to complete collapse when the bombings were ordered. The invasion was planned – but no one in the government or military truly wanted to go forward with it. They anticipated casualties greater than had been sustained up to that point in the war with Japan.

The Japanese casualties would have been even worse.

And waiting for Japan to come to its senses was never a realistic option.

What was also known was an order had been issued to kill all the POW's.

Anything short of ending the war as soon as possible was unacceptable and any means to end the war as soon as possible was deemed reasonable given that the cost in lives would be far worse for the delay.



The shooting was over but a lot remained to be done.

On May 8th, 1945 when Germany surrendered over ten million American servicemen were stationed overseas in Europe, the Pacific and the Far East.

Most were reservist or National Guard and their enlistments were for the duration plus six months or two years whichever was longer.

Most had been in for more than two years.

The clock was ticking...



And there were the prisoners of war.

About 27,000 Americans had been taken prisoner in the Philippines in 1942. 85,000 British and Commonwealth troops surrendered at Singapore and a few thousand more at Hong Kong and Burma.

At least 35,000 Dutch surrendered in Indonesia. And these number did not include civilian detainees from the former American and European possessions.

However after May of 1942, the Japanese took very few prisoners not so much because of a change in their policies but because the opportunities were rare. Most Allied soldiers fought to the death as by June of 1942 they had a good idea what being a POW of the Japanese would be like. The Japanese did not cover up their abuses. Downed airmen made up most of the later POW's presuming the Japanese did not kill them instead.



The Japanese had signed the various conventions then in existence on the treatment of prisoners of war but had never ratified the treaties (with the exception of one concerning treatment of enemy wounded.)

In Japan at the time, ratification occurred when the Emperor signed the treaty. The government was not required to submit treaties for his signature unless he asked.

The known instances of mistreatment of prisoner as well as the rumors meant few Allied soldiers were inclined to surrender. When the first Chindit Raid was called off in 1943, those too sick or wounded to make it out without being carried were killed as it was considered more merciful than leaving them to the Japanese.

For the Allies, one reason why there were so few Japanese prisoners was more often than not they were shot. There were Japanese special units that used an apparent surrender to kill the soldiers trying to take them prisoner. That combined with the known and rumored treatment of allied prisoners meant the Allied soldiers tended to shoot Japanese whenever they were found in whatever condition.

Orders had to be issued to take prisoners. It turned out that once taken prisoner, the Japanese talked. But even with those orders few were taken alive.

The Western Allies took about 39,000 Japanese prisoners during the war with almost half being taken in the last year. Slightly more Japanese surrendered to the Americans than Americans who surrendered to the Japanese. It is not known how many surrendered to the Chinese, only that none survived. The guerrilla units did not take prisoners as a general practice.

Those prisoners who were taken were well treated. The death rate was mostly from suicide.



At the end of the War, SEAC estimated there were some 250,000 Allied POW's scattered about Asia. (They grossly overestimated the number who were actually captured – by over 100,000).

They did know the prisoners were in bad shape and getting worse having liberated the prison in Rangoon and overtaking a POW column being marched to Thailand.

They knew from intelligence sources where some of the POW camps were but not all. The priority – even above disarming Japanese – was getting to the prisoners.

This often began as an air operation. Recon flights found the camps. Supply drops delivered food and medical supplies long before ground troops arrived.



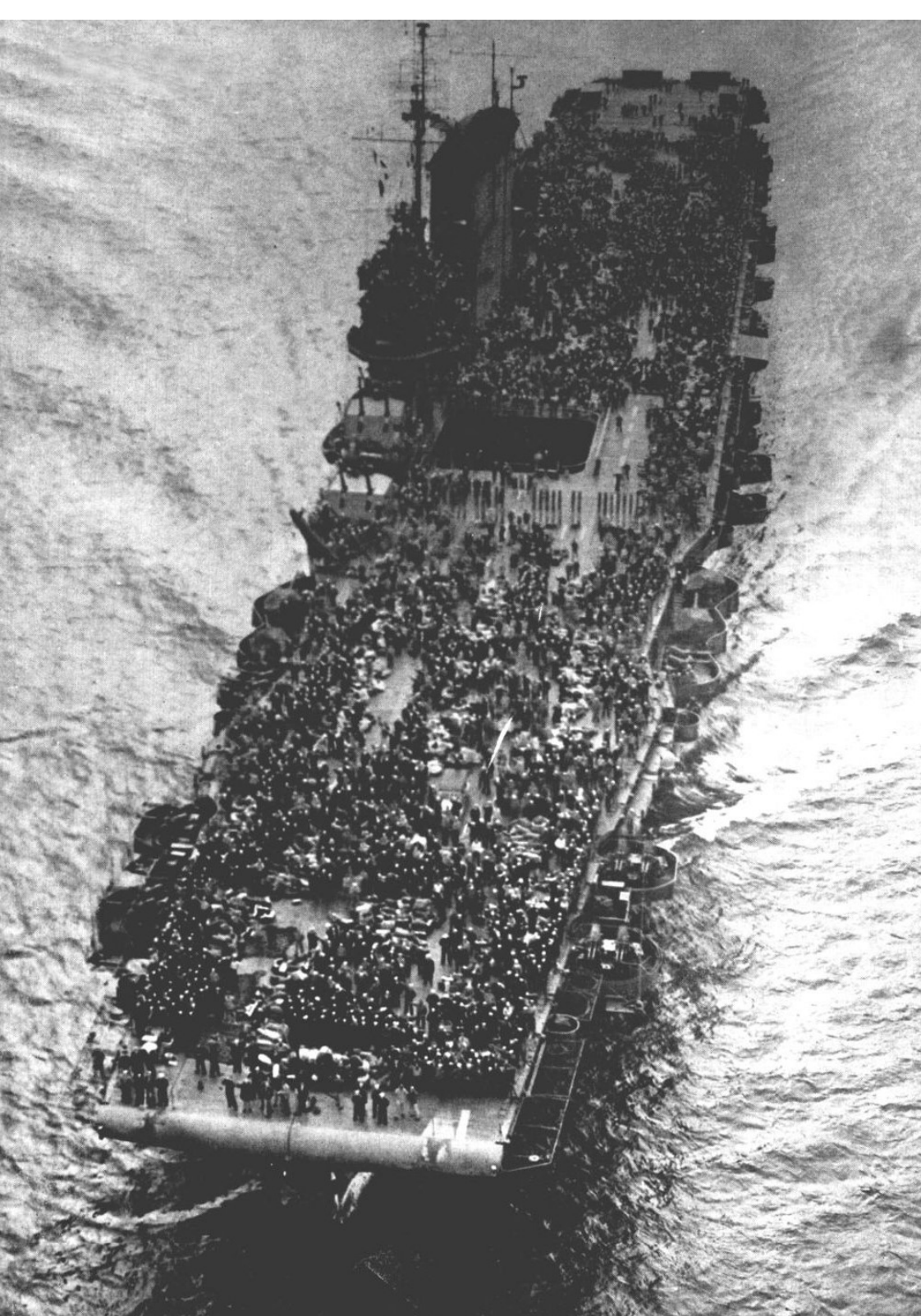
When all the prisoners were finally located and recovered throughout Asia, the number recovered is as follows:

UK (includes Canada and Australia)	37,583
Netherlands	28,500
U.S.	14,473
China	56

The death rates varied. 40% of all U.S. prisoners of the Japanese died compared with 33% of the British and less than 30% of the Dutch. The differences were often a case of medical care and condition upon capture. The Americans in the Philippines were in the worst condition of any group when they surrendered. They were grossly malnourished and riddled with illness (malaria and dysentery being rampant.)

The Dutch medical officers were experts in tropical disease. The British were not and the Americans were not to the same extent as the Dutch.

(The Japanese did not provide medical treatment. As the prisoners had their own doctors, the Japanese felt they had been more than generous.)



Britain, Canada and the U.S. all had systems based upon time in service and time overseas to prioritize repatriation. It was not, however, nearly that simple. Just because you were at the top of such a list did not mean you were about to go home. It just meant you would when transportation was available.

For the U.S., this was mostly by ship under what became known as Operation Magic Carpet.

Regardless of all other factors, POW's healthy enough to travel were at the head of the line. But even then one had to wait. It seemed it was easier to send them out than to bring them home.



Speed took priority over comfort. While troop ships were used, they could not carry enough men so anything that could cross the ocean would be employed.

The ship that held the record was the aircraft carrier USS Saratoga. It carried more than 3,000 men per voyage and brought more than 30,000 men back to the U.S.



The repatriation from Europe took six months. The repatriation from the Pacific and Asia took over a year.



But it was not just millions of Americans and other allies who were otherwise stranded overseas.

After the formal surrender of Japan on Sep. 2nd, 1945, the rest of the Japanese military surrendered. They all had to be disarmed and kept alive and ultimately sent home.



Gen. MacArthur – as Supreme Allied Commander – was responsible for the disarming and repatriation of the Japanese. His orders were that officers should retain their swords. In many cases and especially in Southeast Asia, he was ignored.

Slim and others felt the Japanese had no honor and deserved no such honors and refused to allow any such honors.



However “honorable” their disarming was, there were still around 6,217,000 Japanese military and civilians overseas. Most – over 5,000,000 were military spread throughout Asia and the Pacific. Many were starving – having been cut off from supplies for months and even a year or more.

And many – especially in Asia itself – were surrounded by a hostile population that would not mind getting rid of them all.

Even Slim would draw a line at that.

But the problem was there was no way to get the Japanese home.



Allied shipping priority went to repatriation of allied soldiers. If the Japanese wanted their soldiers home, they had to sort it out for themselves. The allies would supply fuel, but only to disarmed ships.



Among the ships employed was the Japanese carrier Katsuragi. It had been commissioned in late 1944 at a time when there were no pilots and it was damaged in an air raid not long after its first sea trials. It was repaired and pressed into service as a troop transport.

The Japanese repatriation (less Soviet prisoners) would continue through 1947.



Gen. Joe Stilwell was quietly named commander U.S. Ground Forces – a Washington D.C. post where he was in charge of training the Army.

In June of 1945, he was on a tour of Pacific commands meeting with Gen. MacArthur in the Philippines when MacArthur received word that Lt. Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner – commander 10th Army was killed on Okinawa.



He joked about giving Stilwell the job. To MacArthur's surprise, Stilwell jumped at it. Stilwell was then a full general and too senior in MacArthur's opinion but Stilwell got the job.

The 10th Army included the 7th Infantry Division he had commanded shortly before the war.



10th Army was slated for the Invasion of Japan that never happened and then occupation duty in China but Chiang made it clear Stilwell was not welcome.

Stilwell would accept the surrender of the Japanese in the Ryukyu Islands. By early 1946, 10th Army was deactivated – its units mostly demobilized and Stilwell returned Washington. He would be present at Operations Crossroads – the atomic bomb tests at Bikini Atoll in July 1946.



Not long after his return he fell ill. He had been complaining of stomach pain for years – since at least the walk out in Burma in 1942.

He died of stomach cancer on October 12, 1946.



Gen. Chennault was pleased when Stilwell was recalled. However it he was still denied any increased authority and his reputation was stained by the loss of his bases. When he argued that since the China Army command was outside SEAC, 14th Air Force should be, Stratameyer was named his superior in no uncertain terms. Unless his recommendations were approved by Stratameyer, Washington would not consider them.

Chennault made it easy by resigning in disgust.

He would later blame everyone but Chiang Kai-Shek for the loss of China and set up a secret, privately funded transport air line to supply the Nationalists – which the CIA would take over a few years later.



Lord Louis Mountbatten turned over SEAC in early 1946 and returned to Britain as a mere Rear Admiral.

He was named Viceroy of India in Feb. 1947 by Clement Atlee. Churchill was pleased as no member of the royal family could fail but to keep India British.

Atlee planned to get the British out and see India independent within a year. Mountbatten was in complete agreement – much to the surprise of the Indian National Congress Party and horror of Churchill both of whom assumed the opposite.

Churchill would never speak to Mountbatten again except and only if and when he could not avoid it by protocol.



Gen. Slim would retire in early 1946 and move back to Britain only to be recalled a month after his return to re-establish the Imperial Defense College which had been closed since the war began.

Its new tasking was to be the senior staff college for the British Armed Forces with the knowledge that the Empire would soon be a thing of the

past. When he took over there was nothing – not even a building. By the time he retired again in 1948, it was highly regarded as one of the best war colleges in the world.

He was then recalled again to be Chief of the Imperial General Staff (a soon to be defunct term). He was to replace Field Marshal Montgomery. Montgomery was horrified. He had promised the post to a friend.

“But I promised Crocker!” he protested when told of the decision by Prime Minister Atlee. “Then un-promise him!” was the reply.

In Atlee's opinion and many others Montgomery's tenure had been a disaster. He did nothing but complain and the army had suffered for it and the last thing it needed was one of Montgomery's people to carry on the complaining.

Slim did as asked. Parliament wanted a peacetime draft – but only for a year. Slim and the Army would rather not but certainly not for a year. Slim managed to get the term of enlistment increased to effectively two years which the Army could work with.

He retired again only to be asked to take up the position of Governor General of Australia. It was at a low point in relations between Australia and the UK.

He became the most popular Governor General in history. His tenure was extended making him also the longest serving since the war. When he finally retired, the government of Australia granted him and his wife lifetime pensions seeing as the British Army had not seen fit to do so.

In the entry hall of Government House in Canberra hung the sword of Gen. Kimura – the last Japanese Commander of Burma. When Japan re-established diplomatic relations with Australia and the new Ambassador came to present his credentials, against advice Slim left the sword on the wall. He wanted to see “the little bastards squirm.”

