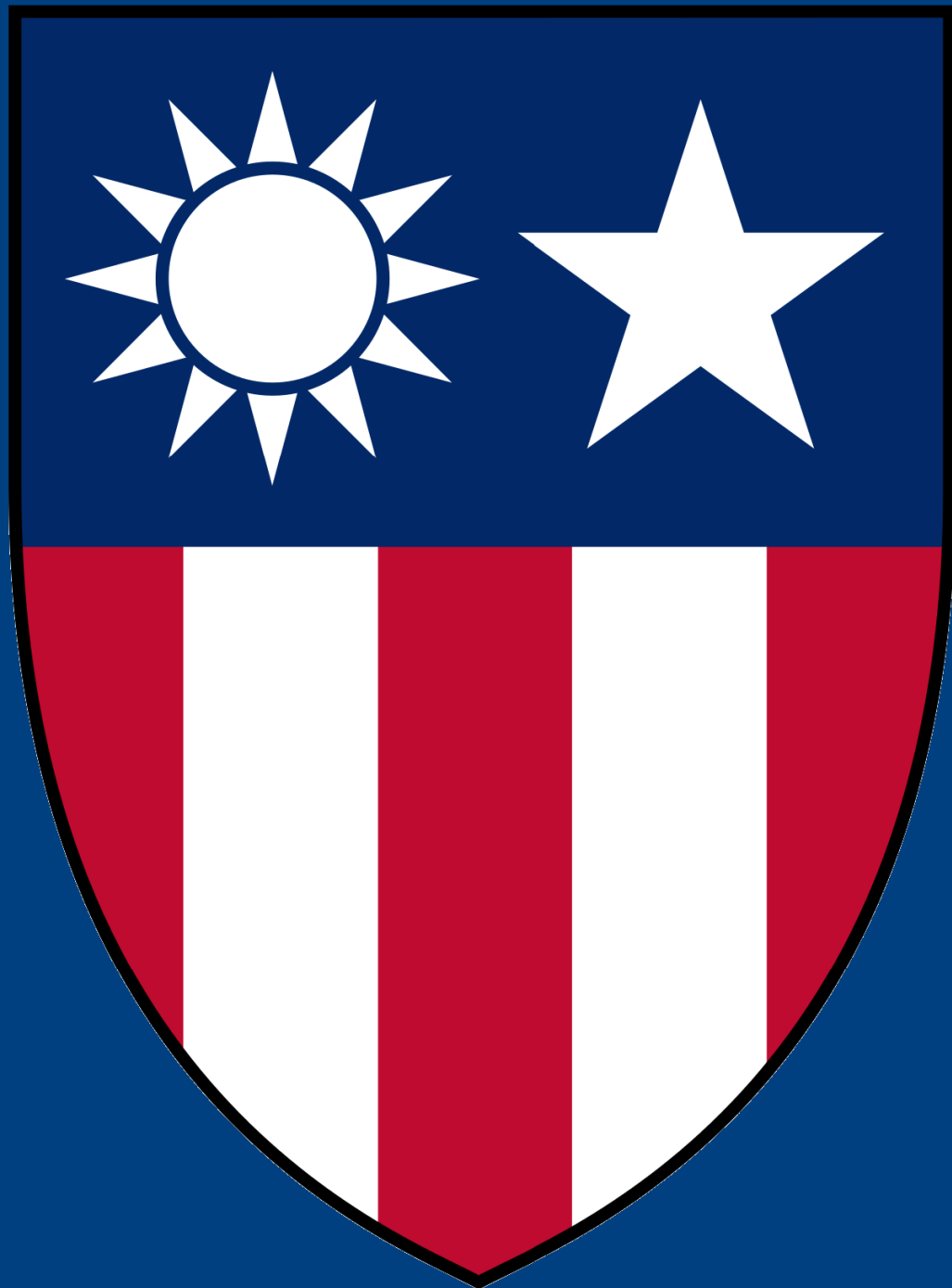


THE PACIFIC WAR

PART II

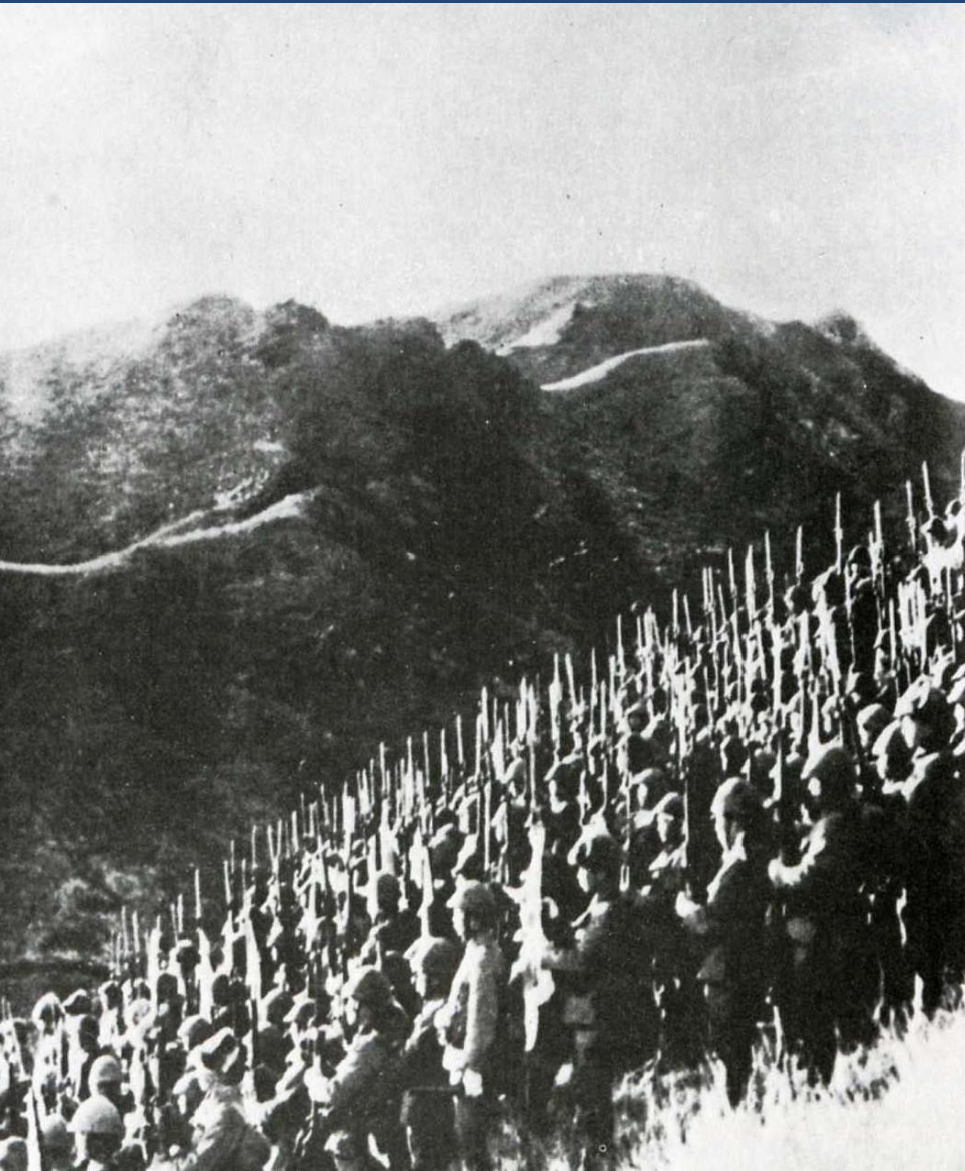




**THE FORGOTTEN
WORLD WAR:**

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

WEEK 3



The 17th Indian Division guarded a critical pass into Thailand with its two brigades – it was supposed to have three. On Jan. 20th, it was driven off by two full strength divisions of the Japanese 15th Army.

It retreated across the Salween River which was over a mile wide. Its commander wanted to withdraw further but was told to fight for every yard.

It was now a race to reinforce Burma. The 15th Army had two more divisions set to land once Rangoon was secure. But once Rangoon fell, the British could not reinforce or resupply.

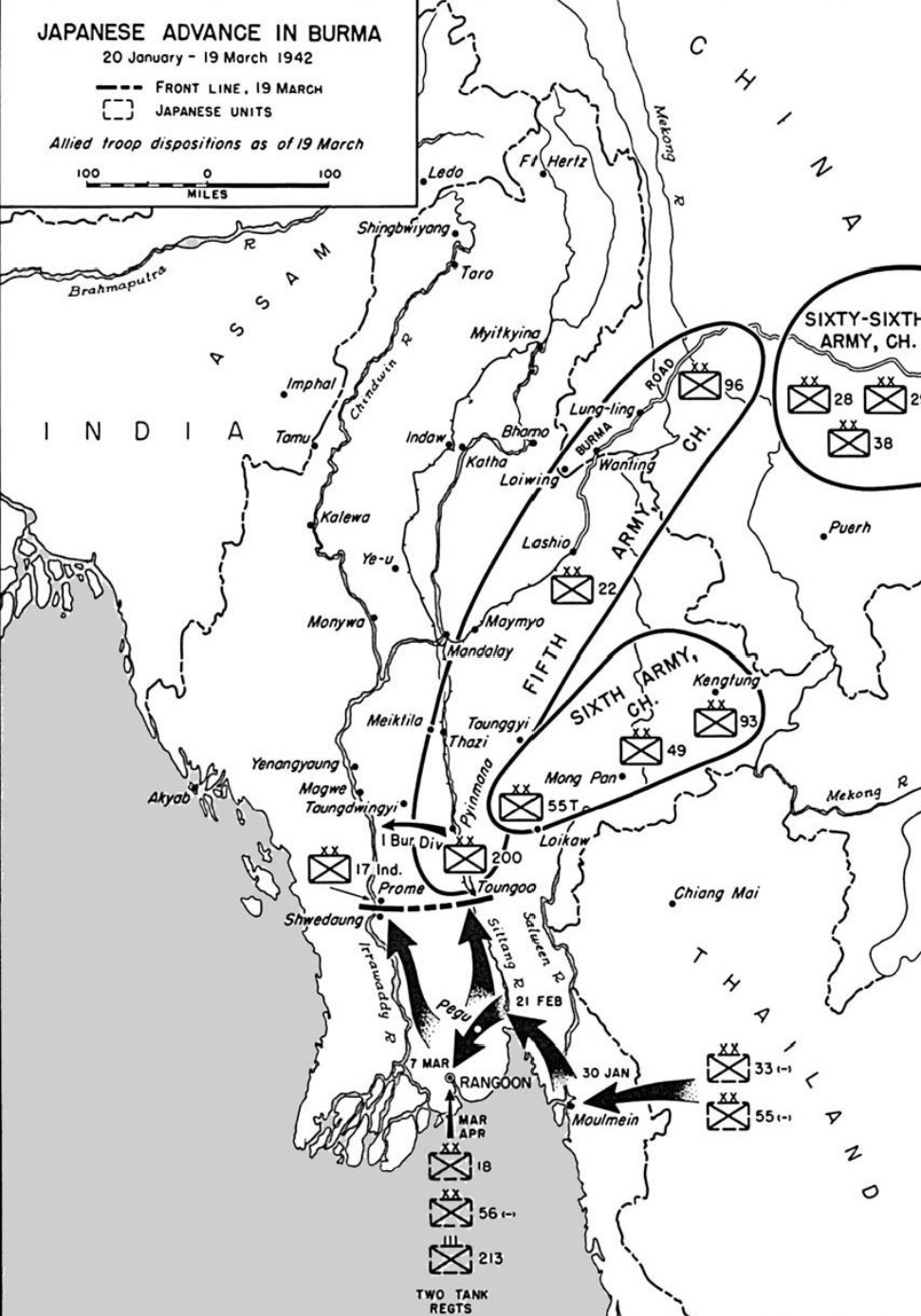
JAPANESE ADVANCE IN BURMA

20 January - 19 March 1942

--- FRONT LINE, 19 MARCH

☐ JAPANESE UNITS

Allied troop dispositions as of 19 March



It would take a month for the Japanese to push the 17th Division back to the next river – the Sittang.

During that month, two more infantry and one tank brigade arrived from India. In addition, six Chinese divisions entered along the Burma road and were deploying in the east.

That month would also see the arrival of two commanders, both would impact the current campaign and one would impact the theater for over two years.

Wavell had requested one – the other was sent by the Americans.



Wavell had asked for a senior general to command and coordinate all ground forces in Burma (British and Chinese). Churchill sent Harold Alexander.

Alexander was not bright. He knew it and he accepted his limitations. But he knew how to find smart people and with them see the job done. He could also work well with difficult personalities as he would prove as overall commander in Sicily later in the war with Patton and Montgomery as his subordinates.

He had commanded the evacuation of Dunkirk in 1940.

Whether his proven ability to avoid a total disaster had anything to do with his posting to Burma is unknown.



1883 – 1946

The other new arrival was Lt. Gen. Joseph Stilwell, USA.

Stilwell was very bright. He came from old money and a line of Yale graduates. He graduated from a high school at age 15 but his father arranged for him to stay on as he was too young for Yale.

Turns out he had too much time on his hands and after leading impressionable youths into indiscretion – that saw him kicked out, his father arranged for an education that would teach him discipline.

At age 16, he entered West Point.

For the next several years he would be the youngest at most things...

Stilwell graduated in the upper third of his class in 1904. Despite his boisterous gap year, he only had two demerits in four years both for laughing during parade.

Douglas MacArthur was a year ahead of him – but three years older. By 1942, he was one of the oldest officers in the Army behind MacArthur and George Marshall and often a decade older than the generals he worked with.

He had excelled at languages and on graduation was already being considered for a teaching position. After service in the Philippine Insurrection, he would be posted as a language and history professor – the youngest at the time.

In World War I, he was assigned as an intelligence officer on Pershing's staff and was one of the first Americans in France where he was sent to learn his job working first with the British and then the French.

He would come to loath the British in general and the British Army officer corps in particular for the rest of his life (with some exceptions – but when in doubt he loathed.)

After the War he was of the opinion Japan was next and asked for a posting as a junior attache. There was no opening, but there was one in China and he took it. He would spend nearly a decade in China over two tours – and would be fluent in several Chinese dialects.

He came to the opinion that the Chinese soldier was about the best raw material for the business there was and if properly trained, equipped and led would be man for man the best army in the world.

Unfortunately, he also saw the Chinese officer as unable to train or lead and inherently corrupt or worse (again with some exceptions.) He would leave China after the invasion of Manchuria to join George Marshall on the staff of the Infantry School.

(Two of his subordinates in China would rise to the top of the profession. Matthew B. Ridgeway would be Army Chief of Staff and Maxwell D. Taylor would be Chairman of the Joint Chiefs.)

He was 56 in 1939 and considered retirement. He was a colonel and old for that rank and did not see promotion as likely. Then his old boss George Marshall became Army Chief of Staff. Stilwell was the very first promotion.

In December 1941, Stilwell was tapped to command U.S. ground forces in Europe and was in Washington to work on the plans for what would become the invasion of North Africa.

Marshall called him in to discuss China. The Burma Road was now at risk and the Chinese needed someone to stiffen them. They agreed it must be a senior general.

Ideally, such general would also speak and read Chinese and be extremely familiar with the culture – add that and the list had only one name. Stilwell probably suspected a trap but at first he was there to recommend another for the posting.

That general (Drum) refused which was what Marshall wanted to both promote Stilwell (again) and get rid of more army deadwood (Drum). Stilwell would be sent to China.

He would arrive as Deputy Theater Commander (of the yet to be named theater), Commander U.S. Forces Far East (China-India), Commander U.S. Ground Forces Far East, Director of Far Eastern Lend Lease and Chief of Staff of the Chinese Army.

Stilwell earned the nickname “Vinegar Joe” as the senior tactics instructor at the Infantry School in the early 1930’s because he expected his students to do their job – walk in the woods like an infantryman. Any who complained found he had little tolerance for lazy infantrymen.

But to his troops he was “Uncle Joe” (until 1944). He made them work but the units always did well and were proud of it – even prouder if their efforts upset narrow minded senior officers.

In the Far East, he was rarely grouchy before the troops. He was grouchy around the British – with one exception. He was grouchy with Chiang without exception. He would be worse than grouchy around Claire Chanault who Stilwell saw as a fraud.

Although he considered most Chinese officers suspect, he was not grouchy around them and never before Chinese soldiers.

He hated any and all Headquarters – including his own (although not as much). He would rather be in the field with the troops and his critics would say he was the oldest platoon leader in the war.



When he arrived (Feb 16), he found his command consisted of his miniscule staff and an Air Force consisting of a handful of planes that had escaped the Philippines and made it to India. (At this point, the AVG was Chinese Air Force).

There was not yet a theater to be Deputy Commander of – and it would mean being nice to the British.

And he quickly learned that kissing a sister would be far, far more satisfying than being Chief of Staff for the Chinese Army.

That and he was tasked to build a road over the worst terrain possible to keep supplies flowing to China. In February 1942, he had no engineers and no equipment.



The 17th Division had stalled the Japanese drive but was bloodied and short of all supplies. The plan was to disengage and get across the Sittang River before the Japanese could respond and blow the only bridge. The withdrawal began Feb 19th, 30 miles from the bridge.



The Japanese were hard on their heels and as the division began to cross it also had to prevent the Japanese from taking the bridge.

With over half the division still on the wrong side of the river, the bridge was blown on Feb 22.

But the Japanese did not mop up. Most of those trapped swam to the far shore.

The division lost half its strength in combat including the debacle at the bridge. The blowing of the bridge meant most of their equipment was left behind. While most of those cut off escaped, they also lost their weapons.

Of the 3,484 who made it across the river, they had 550 rifles, 10 light machine guns and 12 submachine guns.

The Japanese were determined to get to Rangoon as soon as possible. The 17th Division had already set them two weeks behind schedule. That was why they did little to stop the crossing. But they were not ready to cross themselves and would not for another five days by which time the 17th was out of immediate reach.

The division commander was fired for blowing the bridge.

By this point, however, two “fresh” infantry brigades had arrived along with an armored brigade. The Japanese advancing to the Sittang had no tanks. It was hoped this addition would keep the Japanese from Rangoon.

The Air Force was not as hopeful having already moved north to Prome on the Irrawaddy.

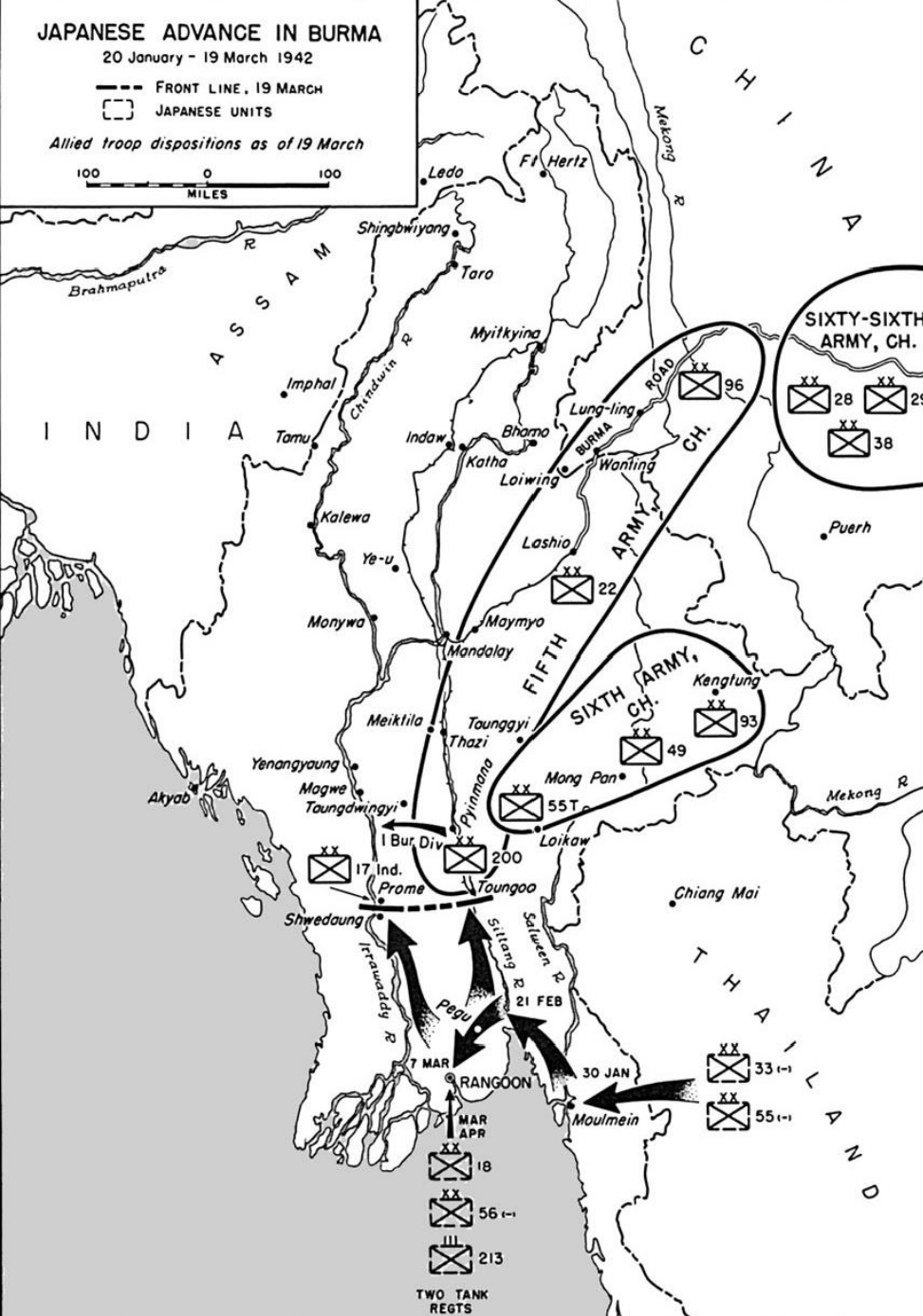
JAPANESE ADVANCE IN BURMA

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Even before the Japanese crossed the river, Gen. Hutton considered Rangoon lost. He ordered its evacuation.

Wavell learned of this and on Feb 28th (as the Japanese began crossing the river) ordered Hutton to fight for the city. Hutton would not and was relieved of command and reassigned as Gen. Alexander's Chief of Staff.

Alexander was in agreement that Rangoon could not be held – and Wavell did not question that. Alexander wanted a Corp Commander for the British Forces to defend what was left. Wavell asked for one officer who he felt would not give up...



1891 - 1970

William Slim is now considered one of the greatest generals in history – at least to professional officers. His campaigns in Burma are a required course of study at the U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps Command and General Staff Colleges. (And because he was good, not as a lesson in what not to do.)

One historian has written that “Bernard Law Montgomery was tactically innovative. William Slim was a military genius.”

That was years later.

Whether Wavell saw that in early 1942 is unknown. Slim was known to him and known to be an uncomplaining commander who got the job done.

William Slim was a younger son born into a lower middle class family in Bristol. He was brilliant and excelled at a challenging parochial school but his family could not afford university tuition for two sons. (His older brother went to medical school.)

Despite only a secondary school education, his Headmaster recommended him for a position teaching at an inner city school in Birmingham. He agreed. (By then the family had moved to Birmingham.)

He loved everything about the job – except the pay.

He took a side job as a shop clerk and hated it.

He then took a side job as a junior manager in a factory and loved it.

But it was not enough so he signed up for the Army Officer Training Corps at Birmingham University which trained reserve officers.

It was much like our own ROTC including the annoying little requirement that one be enrolled at the university and working towards a degree – neither of which was the case with Slim. (Surely he had one as he was teaching secondary school...)

The unit found out about this ... oversight but as he was by then their top cadet they decided to overlook it.

Upon completion, he did not receive a commission but affiliated with the local regiment anyway helping out as if he were an officer – and the commander appreciated the effort.

At the outbreak of WWI, he was called up and commissioned a Coronet (2nd Lt.) with the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. He showed up at the regiment in uniform and with one senior NCO was one of two who did (of the reserve call-ups). He was immediately breveted to Lieutenant and given command of a company that consisted at first of himself and the uniformed sergeant.

His soldiers arrived later – in civvies and for a time that was all they had to wear. It was some weeks before any of them saw much less were issued a weapon.

By 1915 his company and its battalion were ordered overseas – where was anyone's guess but France seemed logical.

They boarded the troop ship and sailed south – far too south for France. (Slim was the first to opine the true destination.)

The regiment was forming on an island in the Aegean for the planned invasion of Suvla Bay in the Gallipoli campaign but his battalion was sent to the trenches at Helles Point to replace losses. They were there for a month during which time he was breveted Captain and then made Battalion Commander when the Commander was wounded.

His battalion was pulled out of the line and sent to the island where the regiment was forming where he made a nuisance of himself about the terrible conditions for his men.

The landing at Suvla Bay was easy. (But the senior commanders did not exploit the opening believing it was a trick – it wasn't.) Later, his regiment took part in an assault by the division on a key position, control of which could break the stalemate.

His battalion lost contact with the rest of the regiment (which had broken and run back to the trenches) and he connected with a Gurkha battalion to attack the key hill. The hill was taken. The two battalions were the only ones to take the objective as the rest had fled for their own trenches.

Slim did not see the success. He had been shot in the chest and calmly walked to the nearest aid station.

The wound just missed his heart (and anything else vital) and passed out his back shattering his shoulder blade. On the hospital ship, he was placed to one side as the triage doctor was convinced he would never survive.

Another doctor had a different opinion although the first was nearly correct. He almost died three times on the trip back to Britain.

A venerated orthopedic surgeon wanted to use Slim for a new procedure guaranteed to save the arm. A younger doctor told him to refuse as while it might save the arm, the arm would be crippled. The doctor recommended physical therapy if Slim wished to truly use the arm.

It worked – although full recovery took years. He was assigned to the West India Regiment on light duty and became an Escort Officer – taking newly trained replacements to their units at the front – whatever front that might be.

His first escort was to France near Ypres. Nothing much happened.

His second was to Basra – in what is now Iraq. He arrived with all his charges and they were better trained (on the voyage) than any other replacements. At Basra was his old regiment. There was a shortage of officers and Slim was offered his old battalion – which he accepted despite being medically unfit for line duty (and he knew it.)

He would command it for over a month before being wounded in the leg (not severely) near Bagdad. In hospital the staff learned two shocking facts. First, he was on medical hold and could not be in theater much less in a line unit and second he was now AWOL.

So, rather than get caught by the Inspector General in aiding and abetting, the hospital put him on the first ship they could – to India.

Upon arrival he was promoted with pay to Captain, breveted to major and assigned to a regimental staff (6th Gurkhas) based in the Himalaya foothills. As he was now India Army, he could no longer be AWOL and staff duty did not violate the medical orders.

At the end of the war he wanted to stay in the Army. The British Army would not have him. The India Army immediately commissioned him as a Captain and assigned him to one of its best regiments – the Gurkhas.

In 1925 he set the record for highest score on the staff college entrance examination – both for the India and British Army. He attended the course at Quetta in India.

In 1934 as a major he was assigned as an instructor at the British Army Staff College in England. Not much was expected from a colonial, and certainly not the fact that he was soon rated as the best instructor at the school – and most popular.

But Britain brought both a cut in pay and increased cost of living. So he wrote (popular) detective stories in his spare time under the penname Anthony Mills.

When his tour was up he hoped to be sent back to India (and the better pay) only to be sent to the Imperial Defense College. When the war broke out in Europe, he was back in India as head of the Senior Officer's School.

He was given command of a mechanized infantry brigade training in India for the desert war. Such a brigade was supposed to have trucks, infantry carriers and some tanks. It had men when he arrived and a single staff car.

He could either wait for equipment or come up with something. He chose the latter training the brigade in tactics and operations using ox carts for trucks and elephants for tanks.

The equipment arrived only weeks before they were sent to Sudan to take part in the operations against the Italians in Africa. His brigade performed extremely well but Slim was wounded again by a strafing Italian fighter. He would later write Sudan taught him to trust his gut – even if staff disagrees and what it was like to fight without any air support.

After a short stay in hospital and staff duty in Delhi while he recovered he was promoted again and given command of an infantry division in Iraq and led it against the Vichy French in Syria and then into Iran to secure a land supply route to the Soviet Union.

It was beside a large mountain lake north of Tehran that Wavell's request found him.



Rangoon fell to the Japanese on March 7th. By then only the Burmese were left. The allied troops, the rest of the population and all of the government and civil service were on the road heading north.

It was the start of the one of the longest refugee migrations in history – over 800 miles. The estimates are between 500,000 and 1,000,000 would eventually become part of the long columns.



Only about 300,000 are known to have made it to safety in India. The rest died of hunger, disease, enemy action, accident, drowning (crossing rivers) or at the hands of bandits and the Burmese.

The retreat from Rangoon had begun days before the Japanese arrived. In addition to civilians, an infantry brigade was on the road north along with support troops and staff. It hit a Japanese road block and was stalled for over a day with heavy fighting.

Then the blocking force disappeared. It was the 33rd Division of the Japanese 15th Army passing east to west across the road to take Rangoon from behind and prevent the British from escaping.

It is not known if the Japanese knew the British were on the road less than a mile away (or that General Alexander was in the retreating column). But it is conceivable the Japanese were aware to an extent.

The Japanese lived (and died) by their plans which once set were never altered. They would pass up opportunities if in seizing the chance they had to depart from their plan.

They had a chance to surround a brigade and the British high command and take them out of the war but it was not the plan so the Japanese continued and went on to take a city devoid of any defenders.

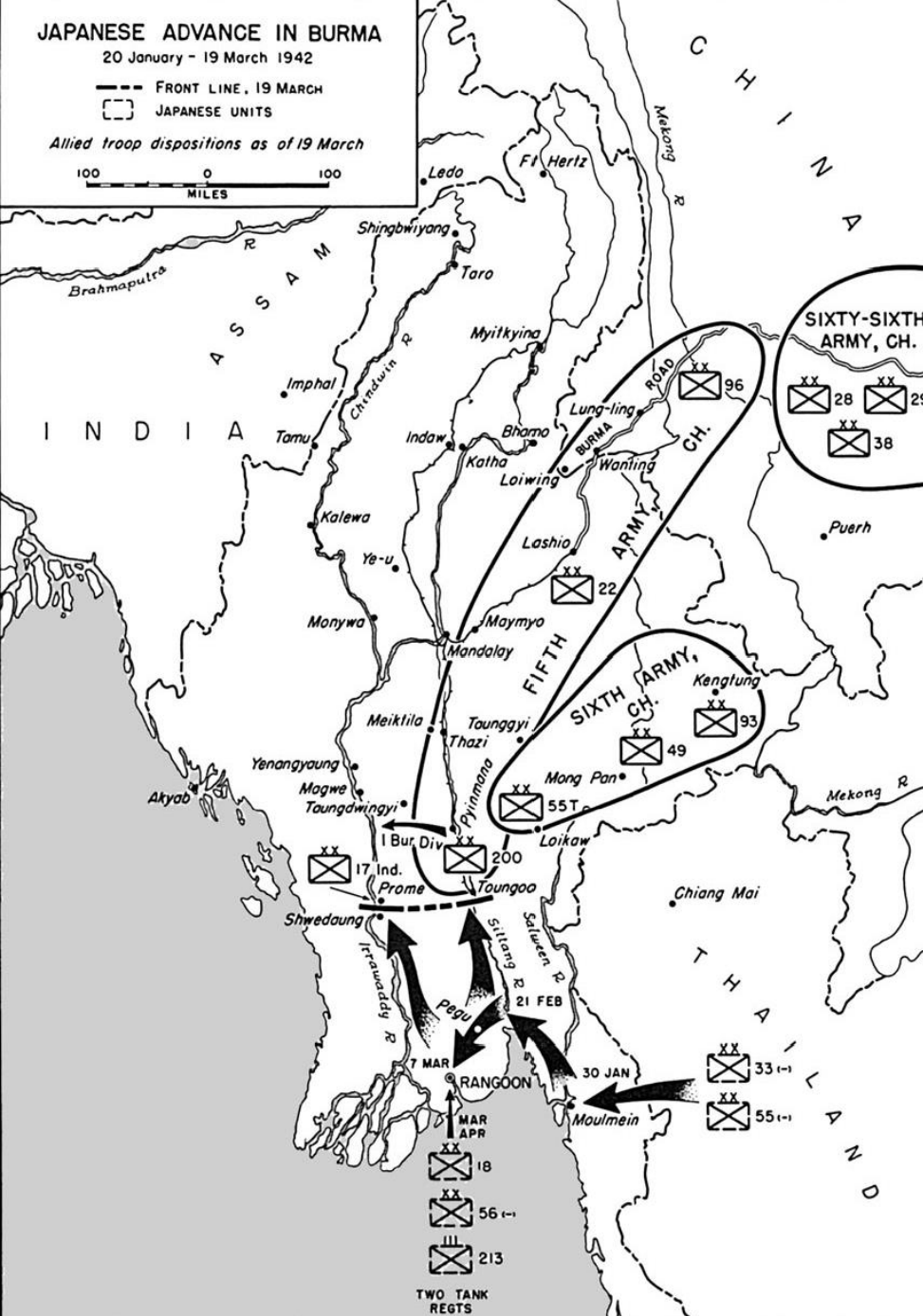
JAPANESE ADVANCE IN BURMA

20 January - 19 March 1942

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General Slim first arrived in Burma the day after Rangoon fell and learned of Alexander's narrow escape. He was there to observe and report his observations to General Wavell. He did not yet know he was to take charge.

He would report back to Calcutta and when he met Wavell and before he could begin to offer his observations he was told he was now a Major General and Commander of the Burma Corps (1st Burma Division, 17th Indian Division and 7th Armored Brigade.)

He returned on March 19th to find that the airfield near Prome had already been abandoned.



The Chinese 200th Division began arriving and fortifying Toungoo on March 7th and there were five divisions behind it. Slim now wanted to consolidate his forces at Prome. 1st Burma was in the Sittang valley and the hills (mountains to us) of the Pegu Yomas lay between but with the Chinese in place Slim had time to shift the Division.

It also helped that the Japanese did not pursue immediately. First contact with the Japanese moving north from Rangoon happened on the day Slim took command on March 19th – over a week after the Japanese entered Rangoon.



The Chinese 200th Division was soon surrounded by two Japanese divisions at Toungoo. Slim's forces were beating off probes from a solitary division to their south. If the 200th Division could hold, Slim felt there might be a line of defense.

But the 200th would not hold. It would break out of the siege on March 29th (the day the Air Force left for good) and retire towards China. This made Slim's position at Prome untenable and the Burma Corps also began to retreat to the north.

Fortunately, the rear guard was somewhat effective at keeping the Japanese at arm's length.

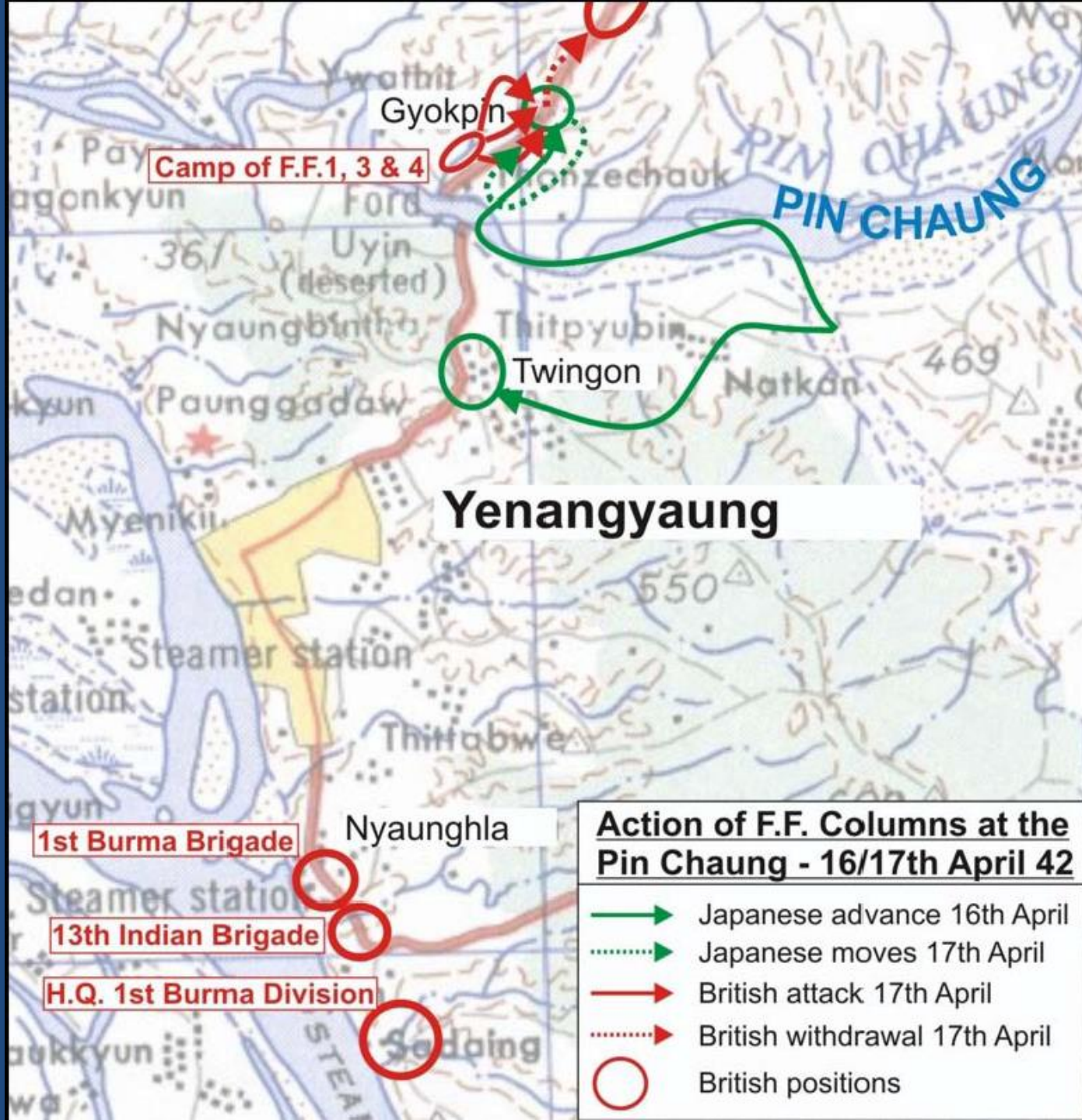


The next critical objective was the Yanangyaung oil fields. While the field was not a strategic objective in Japanese planning – its production was small compared to Borneo – it was a ready source of fuel for an Army. It was providing fuel for the British.



Slim wanted to hold it as long as practicable to get as much for his vehicles as he could but then deny it to the enemy.

The Japanese arrived on April 11th to find the road blocked by the 1st Burma division. They hooked around the flank and reached the oil fields on the 16th cutting 1st Burma off from the rest of the Army





As the Japanese entered the oil fields, the British blew it up. They had rigged explosives on every well, pipeline, storage tank, pump they could find. The field would not produce one drop of oil for the Japanese.



After the war, the oil company sued the government after its insurer refused to pay its claim. The government claimed “act of war.” Slim testified it was deliberate to deny it to the Japanese.

The British court found it was effectively an act of eminent domain and the government had to pay. That case was later cited by companies filing claims against the British government for losses due to Brexit.

The Japanese had failed to take the oilfields intact. But they had split the British army. The bulk of the army was north of the fields. 1st Burma Division was south, cut off and effectively surrounded. It had no water (the river was polluted with oil from the ruined fields) and between the fires and the hot, dry climate of the central plains in April, daily temperatures were as high as 140°F.

14th Division tried to break through but failed.

Enter Stilwell and the Chinese. Stilwell learned of the predicament in a meeting with Slim and offered to help if he could.

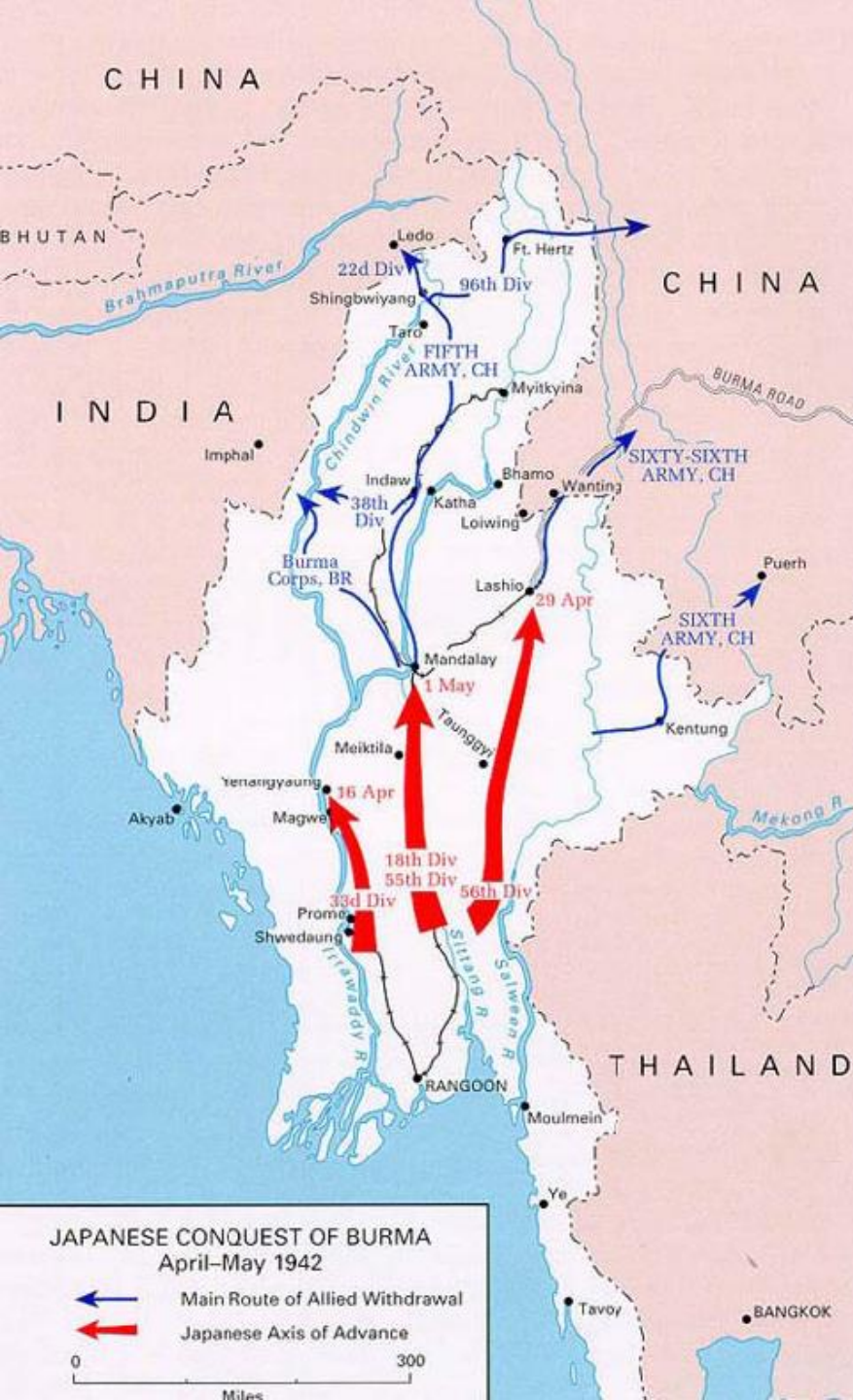
The problem was 5th Chinese Army, with the battered 200th Division was fighting to delay the Japanese from taking Mandalay (and would succeed). 6th Army had broken on first contact with the Japanese a week or so earlier and was fleeing back to China. (Its 55th Division vanished.)

Stilwell sent the 38th Chinese Division of the 66th Army which had moved into North Burma and was backing 5th Army's defense of the approaches to Mandalay.



The 66th Army was led by Gen. Sun Li-jen. Sun was a graduate of the Virginia Military Institute – making him suspect in the eyes of Chiang as he was trained by barbarians. But Sun would prove to be one of the most capable Chinese commanders of the war.

Sun knew his division could not hope to succeed without supporting firepower. He had little artillery and no tanks. The British had both and placed them under his command. It would take three days of hard fighting, but his troops never stopped and broke through to bring out the 1st Burma Division. The battle also exhausted the Japanese who stopped their advance into Burma for some critical days.



By April 19th, the British were moving north to Mandalay with little contact. The Chinese 5th Army was delaying the advance of two Japanese Divisions for now. The commanders met at Mandalay to discuss options.

In reality, retreat from Burma was the only option. The question was to where? Naturally, the Chinese wanted to go back to China. The fact was Mandalay was the only crossing of the Irrawaddy river towards India and China was easier as there were roads into China and none into India.

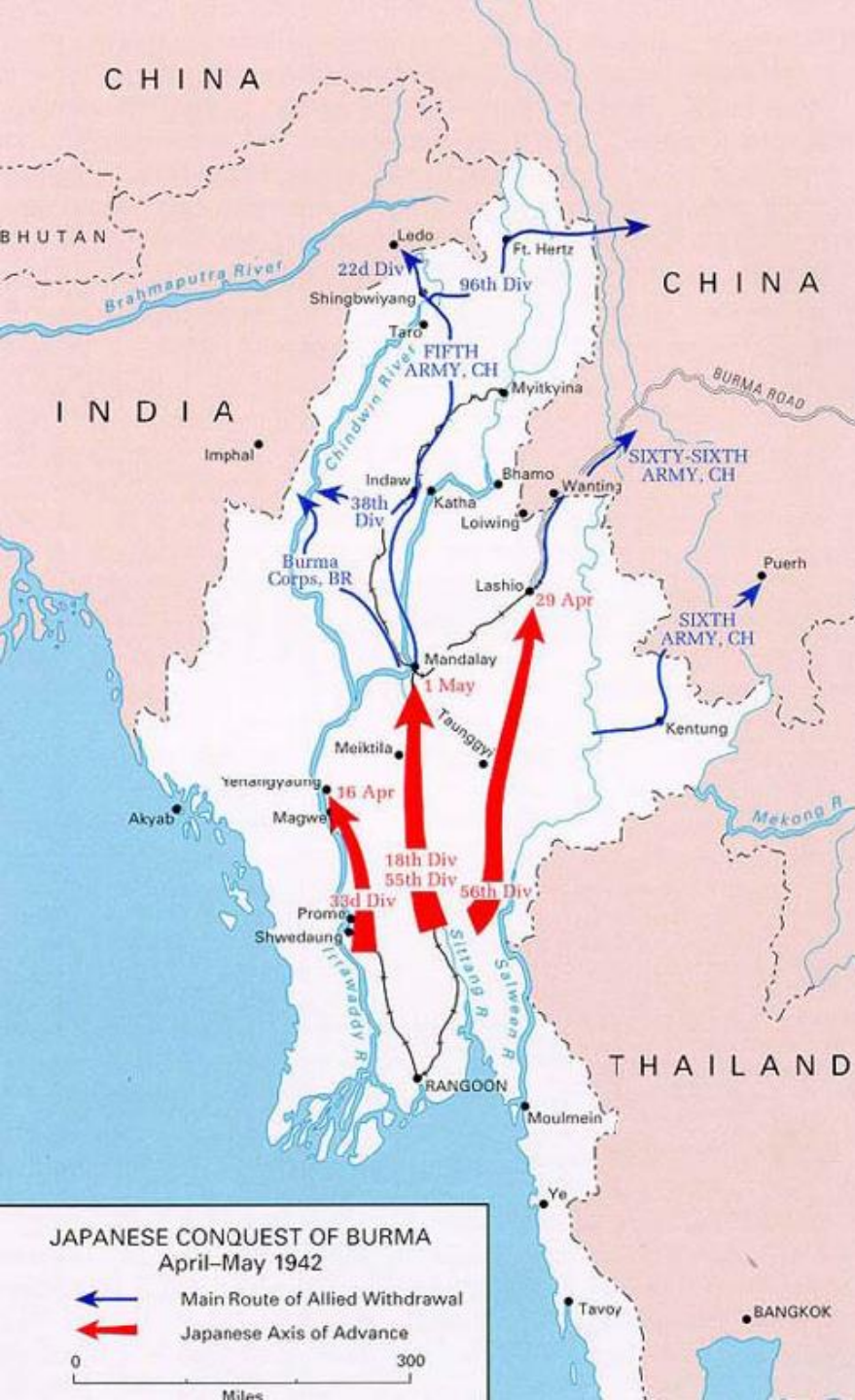
Neither Stilwell nor Slim wanted to move into China. Stilwell wanted as many Chinese to move into India as possible, beyond the influence of Chiang. Slim felt his troops were no better off in China than as POWs.



The Burma Corps and the 5th Chinese Army would go west to India. By April 29th, they were all across the Irrawaddy River and the British Engineers destroyed the Ava Bridge.

It would not be repaired for 17 years.

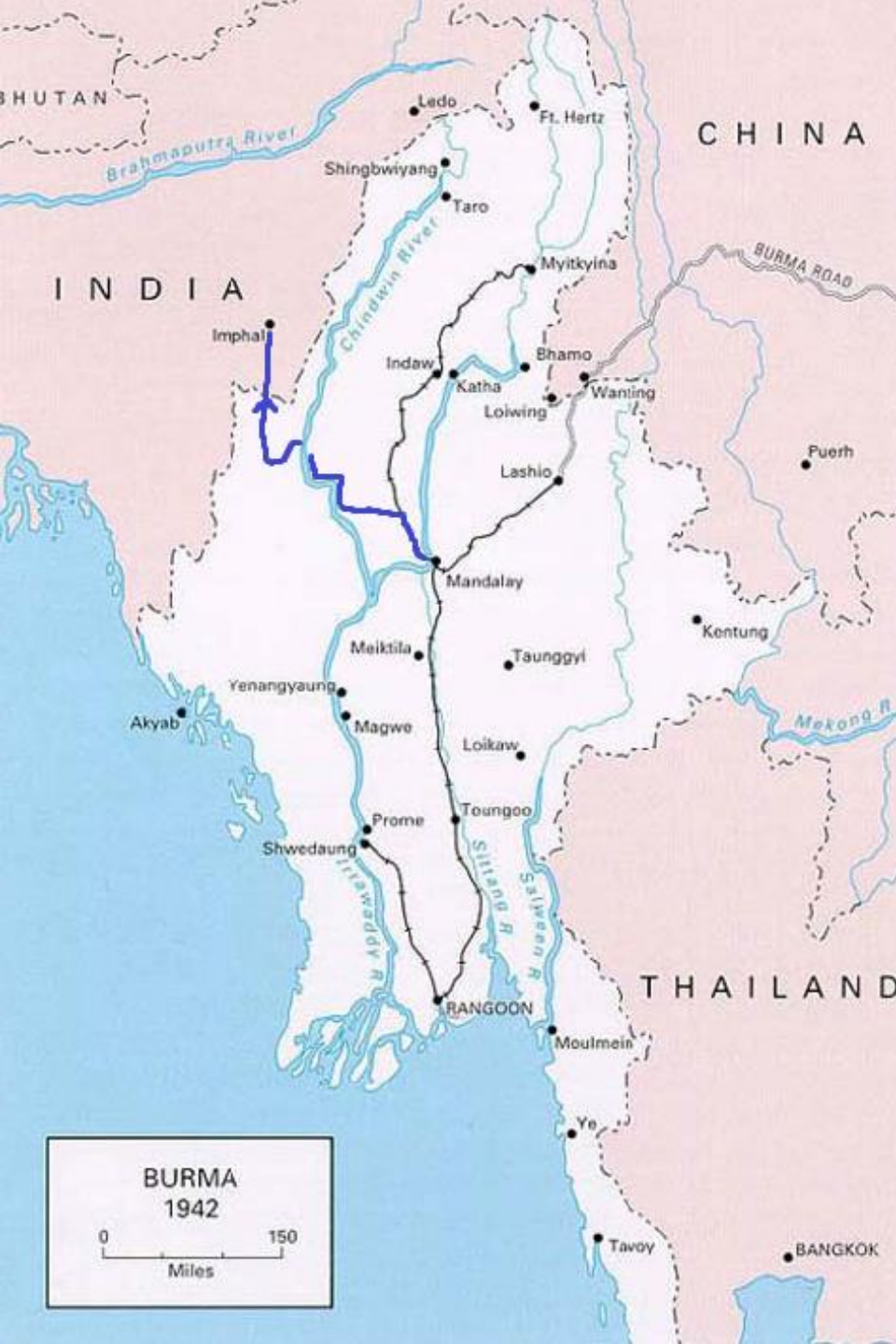
The Japanese reached Mandalay and the ruined bridge two days after the British and Chinese crossed.



The trick now was to keep ahead of the Japanese or at least ahead of any Japanese force large enough to slow the withdrawal or stop it.

The Japanese would be days behind with a major crossing of the Irrawaddy, but they scraped up motor boats to move smaller units up the Chindwin River. There was a dirt road near the river which was the main route of the British. (The three Chinese divisions and Stilwell were further north.)

There were numerous firefights and a larger encounter at Moynwa – in the form of a rearguard action with a large Japanese force being thrown back by the tail of the British.



The road ended at the Chindwin River where there was merely a ferry landing – the opposite landing was at Kalewa, more than ten miles upriver.

The British would leave behind most of their vehicles and artillery – all destroyed before they left. As a parting gift, the British gunners fired every shell left into the Japanese positions and the road leading to the landing.

The British were across by May 9th and the lead elements would begin arriving at Imphal on the 15th. Most of the army would arrive by the 28th although stragglers would continue in until October.



A little over half the army made it into India. The Burmese Brigades were the most depleted although most were known to have either deserted or had been allowed to do so.



By May, any Burmese soldier could ask to leave and would receive three months pay, his rifle and 100 rounds to go out and fight their own war. Most would form or join guerrilla units.

The survivors were suffering from malnutrition, malaria, dysentery and were as often as not in rags, but they were armed and still considered themselves soldiers.



The first air transports arrived in India in mid-April – only a handful. One of their first missions was to pull Stilwell out of Burma. He saw the planes packed with sick and wounded ordered them off.

Stilwell would personally lead a rag-tag group through the jungle to India. It included the health members of his staff, some British and Chinese stragglers and a medical missionary with 20 Burmese nurses.



He told them he only promised two things: when it was over they'd hate his guts but all of them would make it out alive.

On May 22nd, they all reached Imphal India alive.



The rains began as the British were crossing the Chindwin River but the true monsoon broke on schedule on May 15th. The rains ended all campaigning and any Japanese pursuit or harassment.

The remnants of four divisions made it to India but without most of their heavy equipment. (about 35,000 troops total). Most of their losses were from combat.



They had not won. Most were convinced the Japanese were some kind of super jungle warriors.

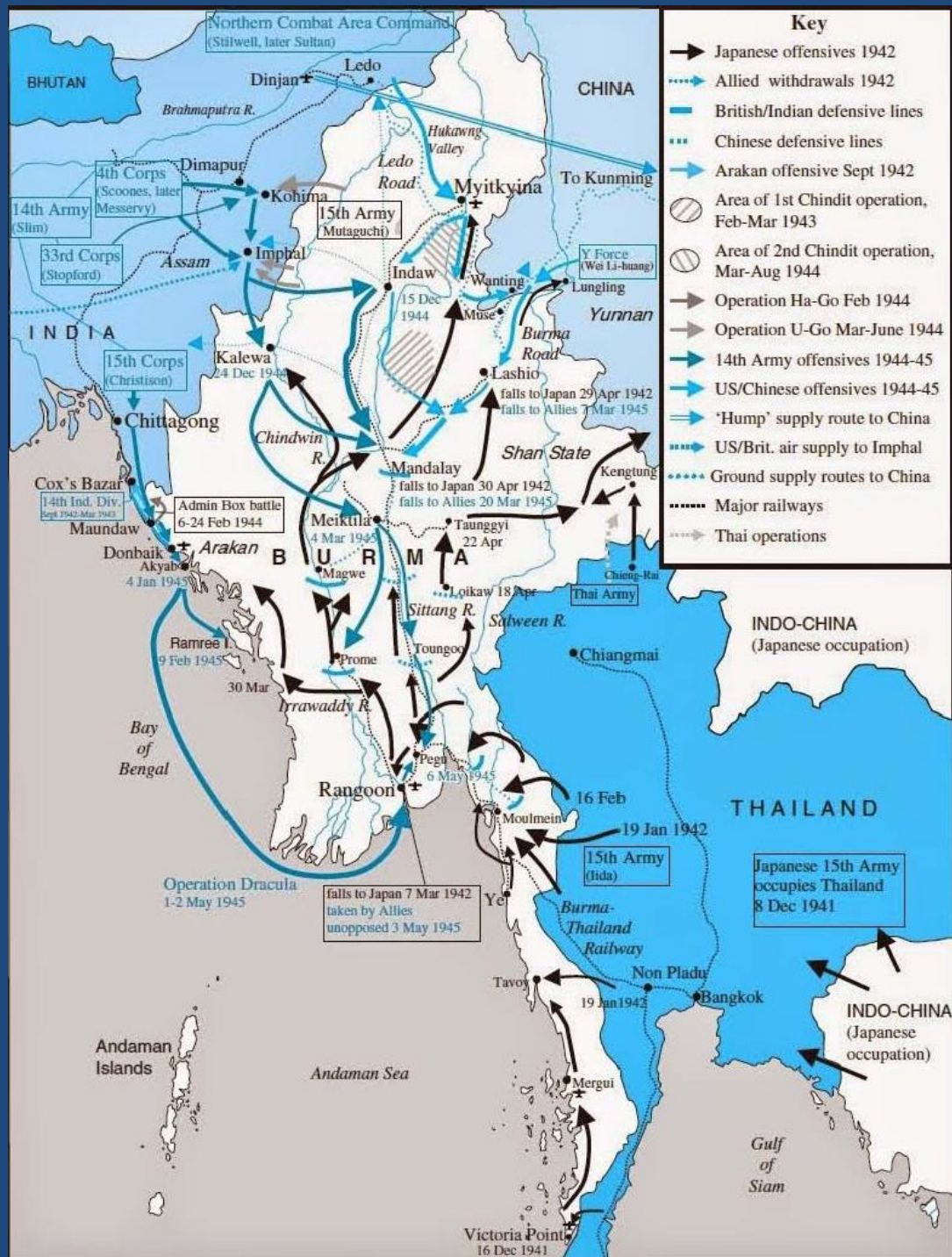
Over the next year, they would learn that the Japanese were not that special at all...

“Let’s face it. We were licked. We’re gonna figure out what went wrong. We’re gonna fix it and then we’re gonna go back and take Burma.”

Lt. Gen. Joseph Stilwell June 1942.

“Jungle warfare is ambush warfare. An ambush is nothing more than pre-meditated murder at point blank range.”

(I will attribute this to 2nd Lt. Johnson USMC who was my platoon leader at Quantico in 1983 although I am almost certain he was quoting someone else)



Northern Combat Area Command (Stilwell, later Sultan)

BHUTAN

CHINA

INDIA

INDO-CHINA (Japanese occupation)

THAILAND

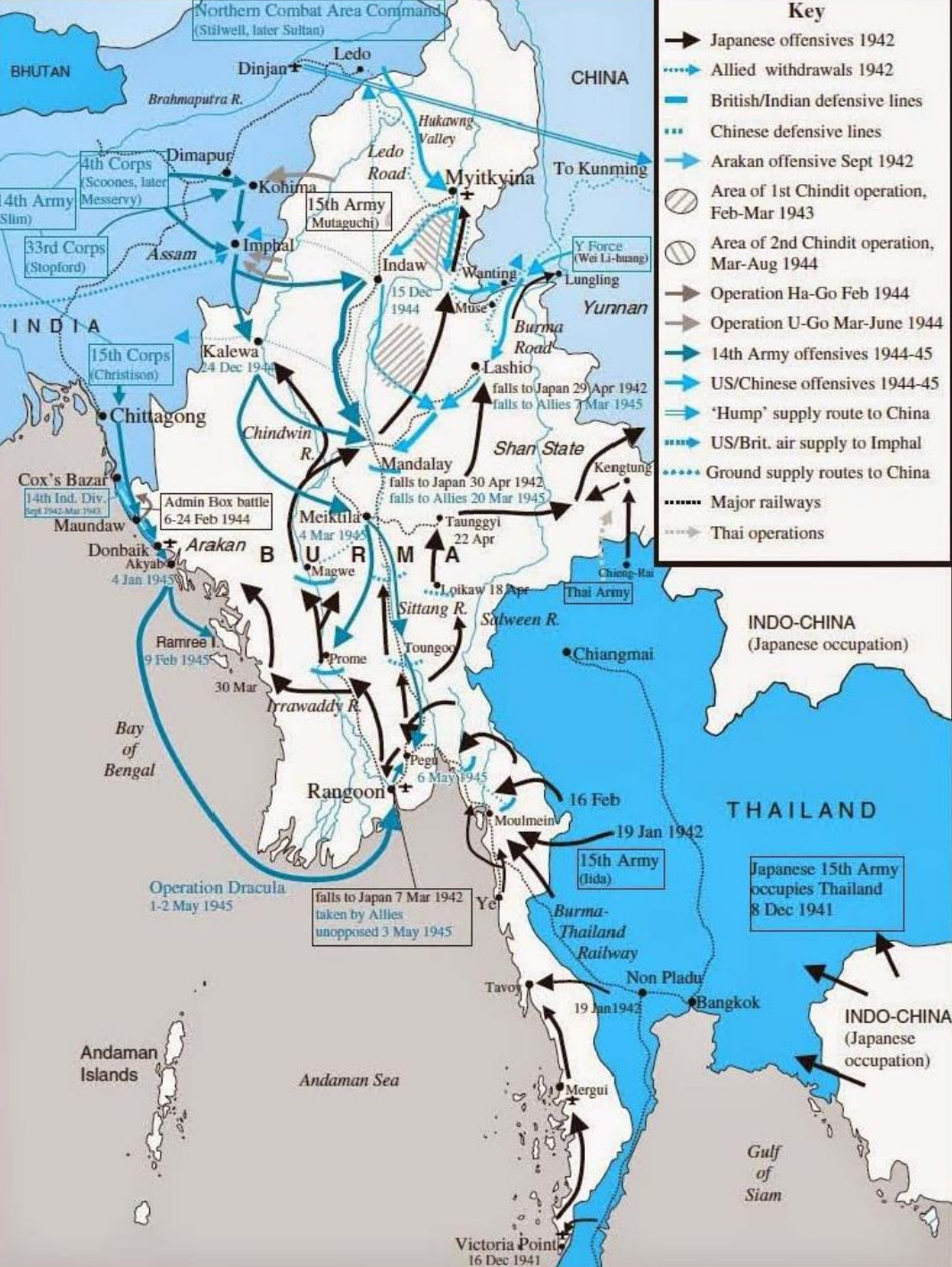
INDO-CHINA (Japanese occupation)

Andaman Islands

Andaman Sea

Gulf of Siam

Victoria Point 16 Dec 1941





The Japanese had won Burma. But they were three months behind schedule and their army was physically and logistically exhausted.

The British Army had suffered higher casualties and was starving in the end. It would not be until after the war that they would learn the Japanese were almost as sick as they were.



The British had been cut off from all resupply for over two months and yet managed a fighting withdrawal from Rangoon to India. It never broke and ran.

Its soldiers still had their weapons – if next to nothing else – when they marched into Imphal in May.



It is said that armies train to fight the last war. There is some truth to this given that the last war was their last experience with war.

But that was not absolutely the case in 1942. No one wanted to fight the last war again and in the intervening two decades, most armies – including the British – were doing their best to develop tactics that would ensure they would not fight the last war again.



That being said, no one could say with certainty as late as 1935 where the next war would take place and what the next war's armies would be like.

And even then, if you were wrong...



By 1941, the British (and Indian) Army knew where it needed to fight and how and that war was a mechanized war in the desert of North Africa.

In the desert one could often see for miles. Digging in provided cover but not concealment. Movement was by vehicle.



Roads were mostly a convenience. Except in the mountains and in the sand dunes, vehicles could move just as easily over open ground as they could on the roads. It was a war of speed and maneuver.

And while it was hot, it was also dry



Gen. Slim realized early on that what worked in the desert was useless in Burma and until his army was trained to fight in Burma it could not hope to succeed in Burma.

Open ground of any kind was a death trap and that included the roads.

But vehicles could not travel off road. The vegetation was too thick for anything other than a tank and even for a tank visibility was often cut down to a few feet.

And that presumed the ground could support vehicles and often it was far too wet.

Likewise, unless there was a road, the “hills” were impassible to vehicles, but not to the enemy. This kind of war meant entering the bush and securing ground before any vehicles could move.



The desert trained British (and Indians) feared the Japanese and the jungle. They would need to learn to hunt the Japanese in the jungle.

They would need to become experts at it.

Slim was of the opinion all that was truly required to outfight the Japanese was training and the right attitude.



There were two additional problems that would ultimately need to be addressed: air power and supply.

When the RAF and AVG withdrew (due to supply problems), the Japanese gained (temporary) air supremacy over Burma. It was the second time Slim had to fight a war where the enemy controlled the skies and he did not want there to be a third time. Still, he also learned that air power had its limits.

The Japanese control of the air never had an appreciable effect on the battle on the ground and little real effect on movement. What it certainly gave the Japanese was information about the British location and movements.

Conventional supply was impossible once Rangoon fell. There were no roads to India and only a narrow one into China. Off road was often jungle, steep mountains, swamps or rice paddies which did not allow mechanized units freedom of maneuver (as was the case in the desert.)

It was therefore necessary to come up with something very different so that an Army supplied from India could operate effectively in Burma. Slim caught a glimpse of the future. What few supplies he did receive came by air drop.

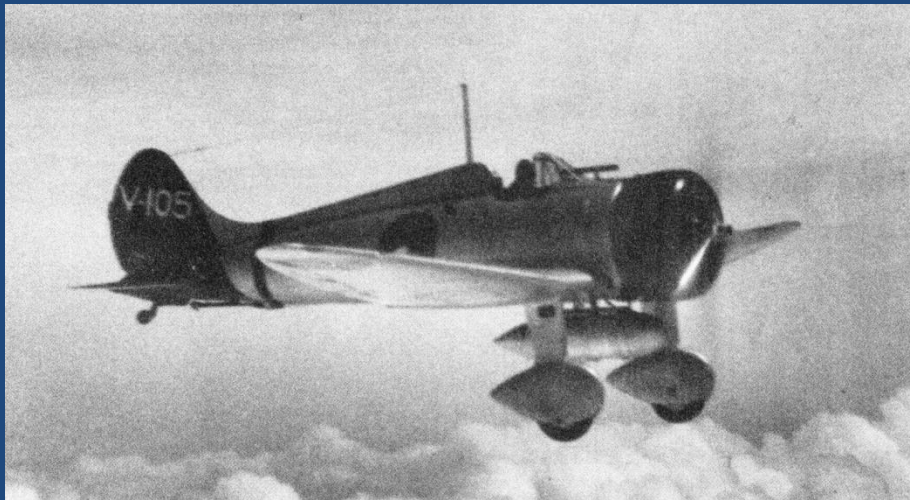


In September of 1937, in the beginning weeks of the Battle of Shanghai, the first large scale fighter battle between all metal, monoplane fighter planes took place in the skies above.



The Chinese Air Force was flying the still relevant American made Boeing P-26 Peashooters (above).

They faced the slightly newer and faster and more maneuverable Mitsubishi A5M “Claude” (below) flown from aircraft carriers off the coast.



The Chinese suffered far greater losses although the planes were not the problem. Chinese pilots were not nearly as well trained – something that would remain a problem.



Claire Chennault is an interesting and controversial character who can best be described as a failure who succeeded.

He was born in 1893 in Texas although all his official records say he was born in 1890. When he graduated from high school in Louisiana, he was too young for college so his father fudged his age to make him old enough.

By 1912, he was a principal at a primary school in Louisiana. At college he began ROTC but would not complete the program until 1917. Commissioned just after the Americans entered WWI, he entered flight training. It took him three years to finally pass.

Chennault actually flunked out of flight school at least once. He kept trying, determined to become a pilot and avoid the ground Army. Through determination if not sheer stubbornness, he was rated a pilot well after the war ended. He then was assigned as a Pursuit Pilot (fighters).

The 1920's was the age of Billy Mitchell. Mitchell had flown in combat in the war and by 1923 was the highest ranking pilot in the Army. However, he would never officially lead the new Air Corps. During his career, the Air Corps chiefs were non-flying officers of the Engineers and Artillery largely because the Chief of Staff (Pershing) considered the pilots as destabilizing elements.

Mitchell and the other Army pilots believed the days of a ground war and a navy were over.

Mitchell believed the heavy bomber was the future of warfare. He also argued for an independent Air Force. After he was court-martialed in 1926 and left the Army, his doctrine and ideas became the Air Corps.

In Billy Mitchell's world, only bombers mattered. Pursuit planes were thus a waste of money.

Chennault believed in the supremacy of air power but not the supremacy of the bomber.

By 1921, the Air Corps had its own school – the Air Corps Tactical School. By 1931, the Army finally considered it equivalent to the Infantry School and similar “branch” courses although the Air Corps saw it as their version of the Command and General Staff College (it would be the forerunner of the Air Command and Staff College of today.) The Army did not see it that way.

In 1931, Chennault became a senior instructor of the Pursuit Course (fighters) at the Air Corps Tactical School. By that time, the school was dominated by the “bomber mafia,” a group of instructors preaching the one truth – daylight precision bombing and arguing that nothing could stop the bomber as it flew higher and faster than anything else.

Chennault argued that while true in 1931, in ten years it would not be so. Fighters would one day dominate the sky and make (unescorted) daylight bombing suicide, thus reliance upon the bomber was not justified.

He was considered a heretic.



He would be proven correct – painfully a decade later. In one two month period from Aug 17 to Oct 14 1943, 40% of the entire 8th Air Force was shot down over Germany and another 40% damaged beyond repair.

In August of 1943, the 15th Air Force lost over 30% of the aircraft sent in a single raid against the oil refineries at Ploesti, Romania with about the same number damaged beyond repair.



Long range daylight bombing was halted pending the arrival of sufficient long range fighters to escort the bombers to and from the targets. It would not resume over Germany for several months.

During the time he was on staff at the school, he also led a precision aerobatics team for the Army that flew all over the country.

However, in 1937 his career was over. He would fail his physical due to respiratory and acute hearing problems and was he told was unqualified for promotion. This was in part due to his failure to attend the right schools (which he was now too old for) and for his service record of being insubordinate. He did not think much of the bomber mafia and less of the ground army and was not silent about it.



He left the army as a Captain – his highest rank.



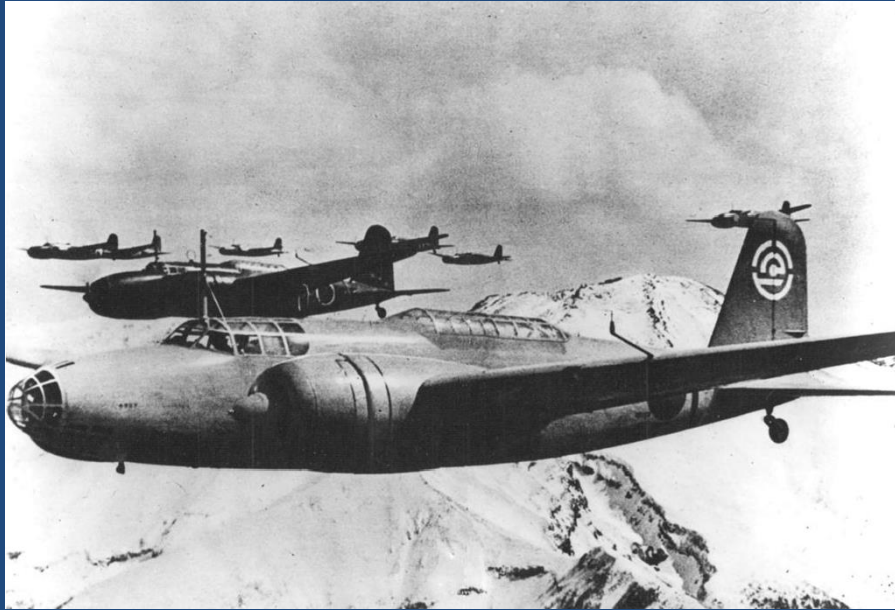


In August 1937, Chennault accepted a position as a technical advisor to the Chinese Air Force. He had received the offer from Madam Chiang months earlier after she saw his flight demonstration team in Florida, but had not accepted until his Army career was well and truly over.

He would advise on all matters – procurement, training, tactics and operations and would be particularly involved with the fighters.



However, beginning in 1937 the primary supplier of aircraft, technical assistance and training for the Chinese Air Force was the Soviet Union – if for no other reasons than they were closer and not hampered by isolationist policy.



By the end of 1938, the Japanese had established air supremacy over much of China. This meant their air forces could operate with impunity and the Chinese could do little or nothing to interfere despite their supply of planes and advisors. Chinese pilots did not last long.



But while the Chinese Air Force could do nothing against the Japanese, the Japanese were not nearly as effective as they might have been. Their bombers were inaccurate and carried small loads compared to American bombers.

And they rarely could achieve surprise. The Chinese knew they were coming before the first planes were in the air...

Air Superiority: One air force has greater numbers and ability than the other. That air force can operate with greater flexibility and with greater impact but the other is still capable of striking back.

Air Supremacy: For all practical purposes one side has an air force and the other effectively does not.

The Japanese would establish air supremacy over most of China and later Southeast Asia. In the history of air warfare, they are the only air force that gained and then lost air supremacy.

This was in part due to their inability to compete in mobilization. That is what would ultimately end their air force as a threat. But the push back began before the U.S. could even compete much less overwhelmed Japan with numbers.

Chennault was the first to see that the Japanese airmen were well trained but lacked flexibility and the tools to make their training most effective. They could not bomb accurately. They could not adapt to an enemy who learned to negate their tactics.

Slim would later see they also had no modern concept of close air support.

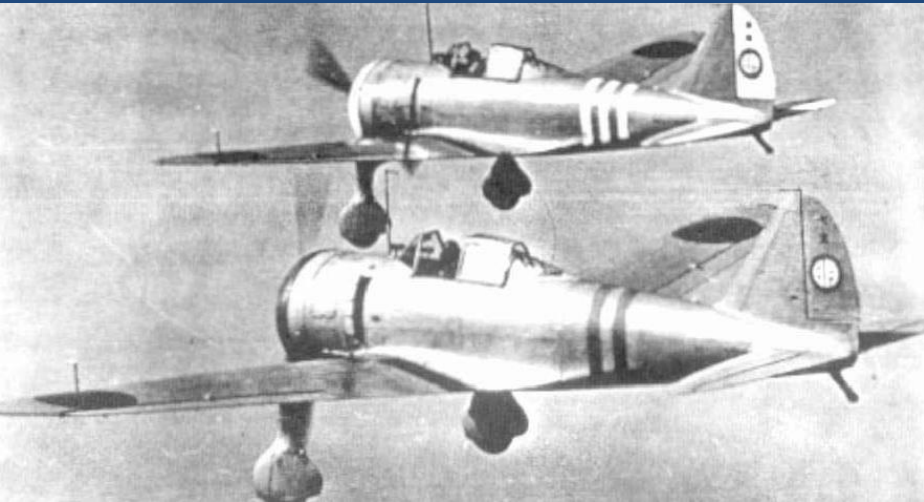
Despite help for the Soviets, the Chinese Air Force was combat ineffective from 1938 onward.

Chennault was not overawed by the Japanese. Their tactics were rudimentary (in his opinion) and their planes were flawed.

Throughout the war, Japanese planes tended to be faster, longer ranged and more maneuverable than most U.S. counterparts. But they had no long range bombers, no true heavy bombers and their fighters were easy to shoot down.

To gain the speed, range and maneuverability over their adversaries, the Japanese had to save weight and dispensed armor, heavy wing mounts (meaning the wings could fall off in a steep dive), redundancy and self sealing fuel tanks (standard on U.S. planes by 1939).

But what really hurt the Chinese was training. They trained too close to the front and only long enough to be able to safely take off and land before they were sent into action. They had no training in navigation, formation flying or tactics. The Chinese felt there was no time regardless of what Chennault argued.



The Chinese (led by the head of their Air Force Madam Chiang) believed they needed quantity (more planes and pilots). Chennault believed they need quality (better planes and pilots). They had neither.

But Chennault knew where he could find plenty of quality with nothing better to do – the U.S. armed forces.



The problem was Congress would never allow it.

But that presumed the U.S. armed forces openly entered the conflict. Roosevelt already sent war material to China as it was not at war so why not Chinese paid “civilian” advisors?



Chennault was a civilian and as such he did not need to go through the War Department channels. But to bypass them he had to go direct to their boss – the President and he was a nobody.

Fortunately Madam Chiang had a brother who was a somebody. T.V. Soong was in an unspecified position with the Chinese Embassy and deemed a close friend of the President – one who could get into the Oval Office without an appointment.



In the fall of 1940, Soong brought Chennault to see the President where Soong pleaded China's case and Chennault suggested an answer. The President then ordered the War Department to make it happen. The AVG was born.



R. J. Smith

The war department was directed to divert at least 40 P-40 warhawks to the AVG. (This was at the time when both the British and the Pacific commanders were practically screaming for them).

Chennault would be allowed to recruit pilots and ground crew from the Army, Navy and Marine Corps and the services were directed not to interfere with his efforts.

Gen. "Hap" Arnold (Chief of Staff Army Air Corps) was furious. He would not refuse the President but he also would never support the uppity Captain and would see Chennault removed if at all possible.

Further down, the reaction could be called mixed. Some units did as directed. Others pointed Chennault in the direction of their "problem children." (If the problem was with their ability as a pilot, this did not end well for the local commander. On the other hand, Chennault did not refuse a decent pilot that the service wanted to cashier for disciplinary reasons.)

By June of 1941, the first "advisors" began to arrive in Rangoon (mostly ground crew). They had resigned from the military. On their passports they were listed as missionaries, artists, engineers, businessmen, etc.

The planes arrived by ship in pieces and had to be reassembled. This occurred at their training base in Rangoon. Only after they were put together could training begin. Chennault did not seek out just fighter pilots and the pick of actual P-40 pilots was slim so all had to learn the aircraft and tactics.

Chennault made it “easy” in that his observations meant that the tactics the U.S. taught were useless. U.S. fighter pilots were taught to “dogfight” and that played to the Japanese strength.

The P-40 was faster and at top speed more maneuverable but it was less efficient – meaning in a turn it slowed down more quickly and at lower speeds the Japanese had the advantage. The AVG would not dogfight. They would hit and dive and if the Japanese pilots tried to follow they would tear their wings off trying to pull out – or overshoot and be shot down.

Once trained, the pilots were organized into squadrons and flew to China. By December 7th, none were ready. The first operational mission was flown on December 20th against the Japanese in Thailand. The first squadron did not arrive in China until the end of December 1941.



Once operational, the AVG had three squadrons of 20 planes each – two in China and one in Burma to cover the Burma road.

There were 105 pilots.

They were paid well more than double what they had been making in the military and that did not include the chance at the \$500.00 bonus for every Japanese plane they destroyed.



Chennault was a master at fighter tactics. His tiny force was always greatly outnumbered and yet only three of his pilots were shot down.

236 Japanese were confirmed shot down and 19 of the AVG pilots became confirmed aces.



\$148,000 was paid out in bonuses. (The bonus would be paid for enemy planes destroyed whether in the air or on the ground).

4 AVG pilots died in non-combat accidents. One was killed by friendly fire. One died of his wounds and three were shot down – one became a POW and the other two killed.



The AVG contracts expired on June 30th, 1942. At that time, all were to be drafted into the Air Force (including the handful of civilians). Chennault could not keep them out of the war, but he allowed them the choice to stay or return to the states for their next assignment. 5 stayed (including 1 Navy pilot). The remaining planes became the 23rd Fighter Group.

To the horror of Gen. Arnold (and Gen. Stilwell), Chennault was commissioned a Brigadier General when the AVG was disbanded and placed in command of what would then be known as the China Air Task Force (later 14th Air Force).

This Air Force included all of the American combat planes in China.

But by June 1942, Chennault was an American hero. Until he could get rid of the man, Gen. Arnold preferred he remained as far away from the U.S. as possible.

To Chennault's horror, he was under Stilwell's command. Chennault felt he should either be independent of such oversight - free to fight the war his way – or he should be Theater Commander. As he saw it all he needed was about 400 combat planes (mostly fighters) and he could beat the Japanese by himself.

Chennault believed his fighters could keep the Japanese Army away from his airfields (even after they failed to do so later).

There is little doubt Chennault was an exceptional tactician when it came to fighter tactics and operations.

What is odd is he also believed he was the expert on bombing strategy and operations despite being opposed to the entire concept of strategic bombing on tactical grounds only a few years earlier.

He was an effective leader. His men were fiercely loyal.

But he was politically naïve to a fault. The various factions vying for influence in Chiang's China used him for their purposes and later were against him when it suited their purposes and he never seemed to catch on he was their tool.

He was also ignorant of logistics. He refused to consider that even if he had priority (which he usually did not) it would still take weeks for anything to arrive. He refused to accept that the CBI was dead last for global logistics priority and his China Air Force was a low priority in that dead last place and that would not change just because he thought things should be different.

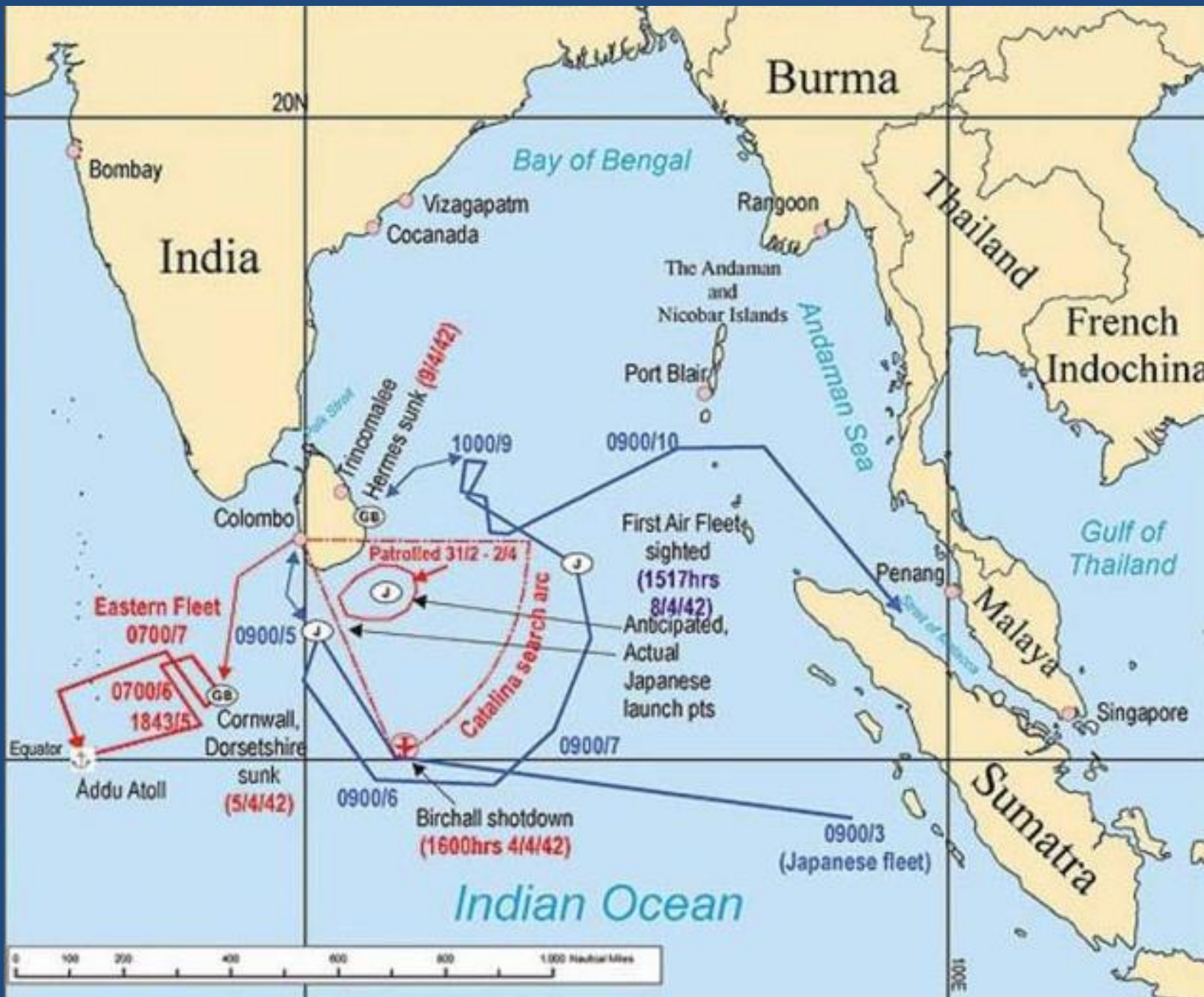


The initial air raid on Rangoon happened on Jan 10, 1942. The raid was driven back with heavy losses. Rangoon was defended by one squadron of the AVG and three RAF squadrons flying the Hawker Hurricane (slower but as rugged as the P-40).



The AVG scored the majority of air-to-air victories. Afterwards, the RAF pilots asked the AVG about tactics and the AVG was more than willing to share.

The result was an almost immediate improvement in the performance of the RAF Burma fighter squadrons. Until they withdrew from lack of supply in early April, they and the AVG managed to deny the Japanese control of the air with range of the allied bases in Burma.



In early April 1942, a Japanese carrier strike force entered the Bay of Bengal. Four of the six carriers that had attacked Pearl Harbor took part – Akagi, Kaga, Hiryu and Soryu (the other two were far to the east supporting landings in the Bismarck Archipelago).

This was a raid. Its intent was to drive the Royal Navy out of the Bay of Bengal. An invasion of Ceylon was never intended – and the force had no landing troops to do so. It succeeded in its primary task sinking two cruisers and a light carrier and destroying 54 British aircraft, most on the ground.

But the RAF would get some Hurricanes into the air and the Japanese would lose over 20 planes for three RAF losses.

Churchill was stunned and feared India would be invaded, but the carriers returned to Japan. Aside from the occasional submarine the Japanese Navy never returned. But the Royal Navy would not return either – not until 1945.

The raid failed to destroy the bases on Ceylon which was a mistake...



While the RAF fighters pulled out of Burma, the bombers and bombers of the former U.S. Philippine Air Force (that were not on Luzon when the war began) were operating against targets in Burma. They could not provide air support at this time.

But they could make things very difficult for the Japanese. Even as the British troops were crossing into India, the Japanese supplies were in trouble. Bombers from Ceylon and India effectively closed the port at Rangoon.



And by the end of 1942, they made it impossible for the Japanese to base any aircraft in Burma. Planes that were there for more than a couple of days would be found and destroyed on the ground.

The Japanese held airfields in Burma were under repeated attack. By the end of 1942, the Japanese Air Force based all of its planes for Burma-India operations in Thailand and Indochina.

They would have to fly to a Japanese airfield in Burma, refuel, fly the assigned mission, refuel and return to their base in Thailand or Indochina. Remaining on the ground in Burma for repairs or to fly additional missions often meant the planes would be destroyed on the ground.

Burmese agents made sure the Allies knew if Japanese planes remained long enough for a bomber raid to get them.

The Japanese were still a threat to air operations in India and north Burma, but not one that truly impaired allied operations.

Preventing the Japanese from building up air power based in Burma was critical to one of the initial missions of the Air Forces based in India.

British strategic policy had been to defend their far eastern empire. By June of 1942 they had lost Singapore, Malaya and Burma to the Japanese and were proving unable to defend their Pacific dominions.

The goal for now was to defend India. The Japanese carrier strike had convinced Churchill and others in London that India was next just as that same Japanese carrier task force strike against Darwin Australia on Feb 19, 1942 convinced the Australians they were next.

The truth was the Japanese were mostly done for now. The Army had considered India years earlier in their plans but the Navy would not support it and the Army needed the Navy to make an offensive practical. The Navy had considered Australia lest it become a base for the British and Americans. The Army would not support that plan – Australia was too big and not worth the effort.

The Allies were unaware that there were limits to the Japanese plan. Australia had screamed for the return of their troops. In Nov. 1941 it had four divisions overseas: three in North Africa and one in Singapore. The Singapore division had been surrendered.

Churchill refused to release the Australians. Gen. MacArthur – who had commanded U.S. Forces in the Philippines but now was in command of the Southwest Pacific Theater tasked to defend Australia insisted on the return of the divisions and Roosevelt backed him.

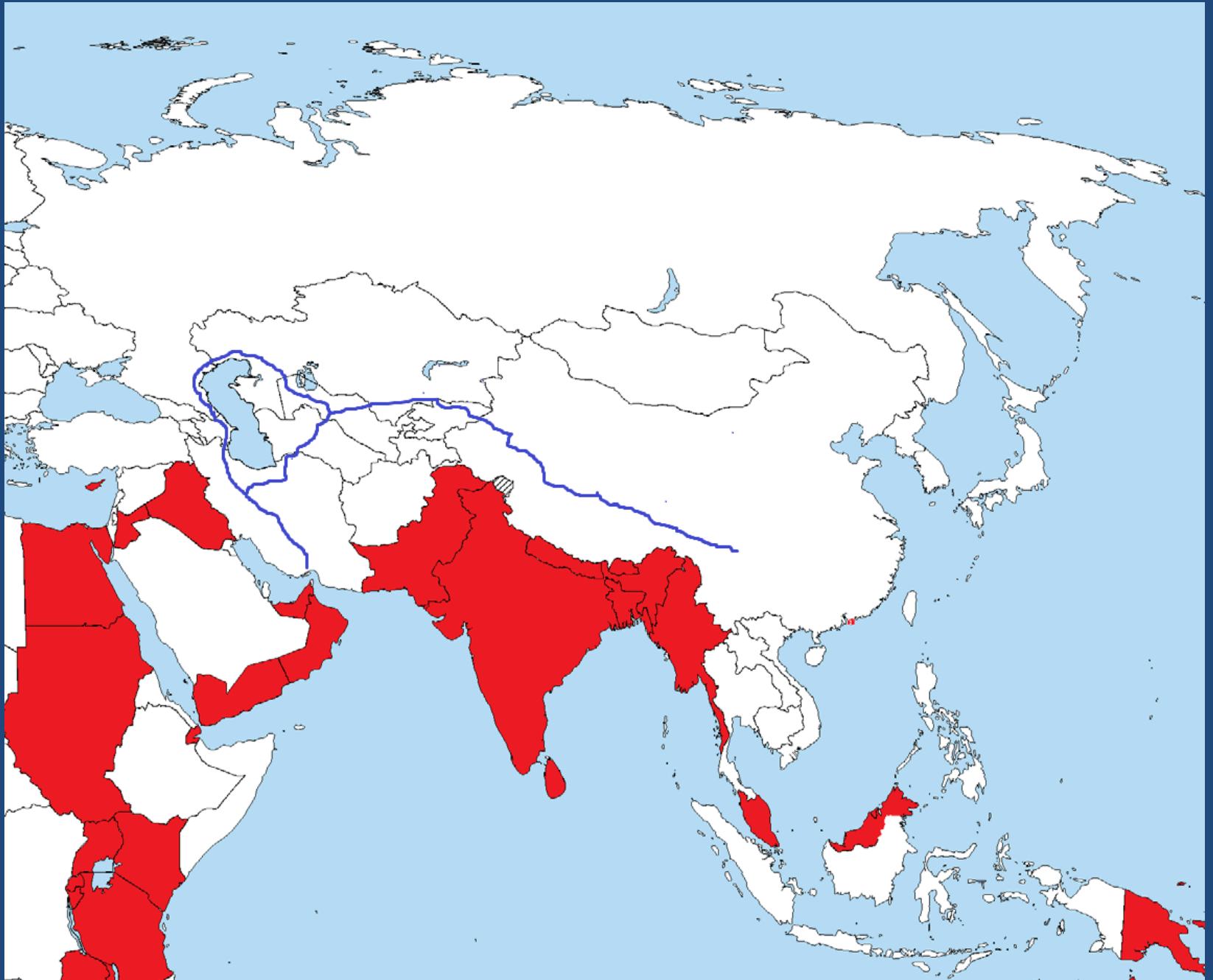
Churchill offered a compromise. He would send two divisions back to Australia and this was considered acceptable. But once the ships carrying those divisions entered the Indian Ocean, he diverted them to India.

Roosevelt threatened to reduce Lend Lease to Britain unless those troops were returned to Australia and the ships turned again. Churchill was both furious and powerless.

For the Americans, their strategic goal remained the same in Asia: keep China in the war.

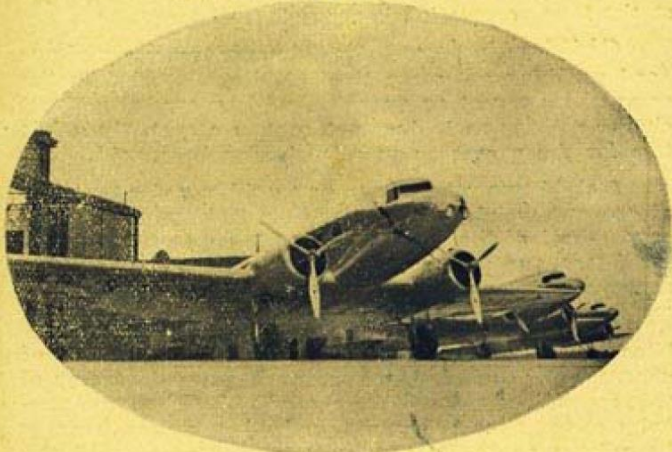
To do that they had to keep China supplied.

As early as late December 1941, the U.S. was convinced that it was likely that the Japanese would succeed in closing the Burma Road somehow.



民國二十八年十月三十日起實行
Effective: Oct. 30th, 1939

中國航空公司
CHINA NATIONAL AVIATION CORP.
CHUNGKING CHINA



飛行時刻及客票價目表

TIME TABLES & TARIFFS

HONGKONG TO:

KWEILIN
CHUNGKING
CHENG TU
KWEIYANG
KUNMING
RANGOON
LASHIO
HANOI
LUCHOW
SUIFU
KIATING

FLY

THE MOST DIRECT
SERVICE

GENERAL TRAFFIC AGENTS

C. N. A. C.
RANGOON,
IRRAWADDY FLOTTILLA CO., LTD.
AGENTS.

The Pentagon planners (by now there was such a place) had considered a land route from Persia through the Soviet Union but deemed it too impractical.

The White House and War Department suggested an air route to the horror of the Air Corps. The Air Corps did not have the planes and were not planning on diverting that much effort into air transport.

The Air Corps did plan on transports – mostly to support priority military travel and the Air Corps. It had not planned to support more than that.

But even before Stilwell left for the Far East, the decision was made to resupply by air. The Air Corps planners suggested it was impossible. Civilians would prove them wrong.

C N A C

中國航空公司

CHINA NATIONAL AVIATION CORP.

CHUNGKING, CHINA.



TIME TABLES

PASSENGER FARES, FREIGHT RATES
GENERAL INFORMATION

REGULAR SERVICES:-

HONGKONG TO:—

RANGOON	KWEILIN
LASHIO	HANOI
KUNMING	LUCHOW
CHUNGKING	SUIFU
CHENG TU	KIATING

BOOK YOUR PASSAGE THRU:

EFFECTIVE: FEBRUARY 15th, 1940.

In the early 1929, China decided to set up a state run airline.

Unfortunately, they had no planes, no pilots and no experience so they decided to contract it out. They entered a contract with Clement Melville Keys who owned Curtiss-Wright Aircraft, North American Aviation (two airplane manufacturers) and TWA. Keys would own 45% of the Chinese air service.

In 1933, he retired and sold his interests to Pan American Airways. Aside from ownership, CNAC was essentially a subsidiary of Pan-Am. Most all its pilots and mechanics were Americans.

C N A C

中國航空公司

CHINA NATIONAL AVIATION CORP.

CHUNGKING, CHINA



TIME TABLES

PASSENGER FARES, FREIGHT RATES
GENERAL INFORMATION

REGULAR SERVICES:

RANGOON TO:

LASHIO	KWEILIN
KUNMING	HANOI
CHUNGKING	LUCHOW
HONGKONG	SUIFU
CHENG TU	KIATING
KWEIYANG	SHANGHAI

BOOKING OFFICE AND AGENTS

IMPERIAL AIRWAYS LTD.

represented by

Irrawaddy Flotilla Co., Ltd.

50, Phayre Street; Tel. No. Central 7
RANGOON.

Effective: March 1st, 1940



(There were some Chinese pilots – paid half the salary as their white counterparts. “Chinese” was based on ethnicity and not place of birth.)

By 1939, CNAC was flying to and from Rangoon. In November 1941 – before Pearl Harbor – CNAC began flights over the Himalayas from Kunming China to India.



Pan Am told the Air Corps that while the route was difficult, it was not impossible even with a heavy load. CNAC would fly with or without the Air Corps.

Thus, by the time Stilwell was sent to the Far East, the plan was for the Air Corps to fly supplies to China from bases in India.

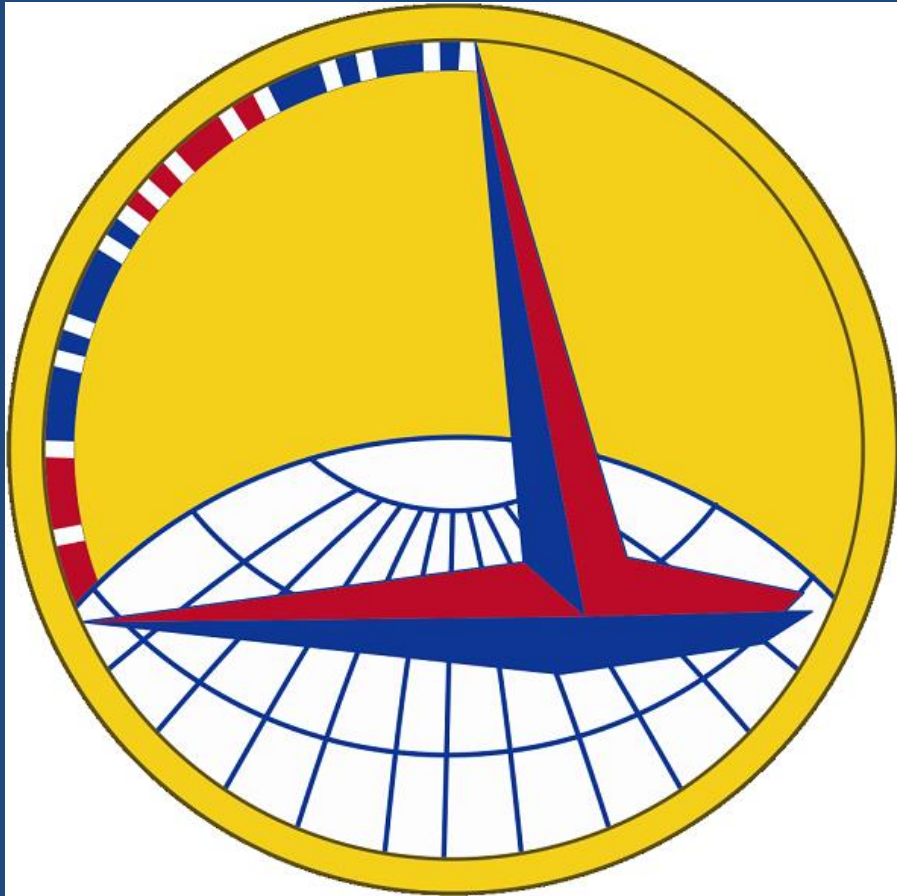
In January 1939 the USAAC had about 1,700 planes of all types and about 28,000 men. The Navy and Marine Corps had a little over 2,400 planes.

In June of 1940, Congress passed an expansive Defense appropriations bill meant to triple the size of the Air Corps by the end of 1941. (It would also call for a “two ocean” navy and an expansion of the Army, Army Reserves and National Guard from around 250,000 (in all three) to over 1,000,000 on active duty by the end of 1941.

Despite this, the Air Corps was not building transport planes. In 1940, U.S. manufacturers built 164 of all such types and most were Lend Lease.

The Air Corps had no notable transportation service in 1940. It had a handful of passenger planes for VIP and high priority transport and a handful of cargo planes operated by the Air Corps Maintenance Service to move supply parts to where they were needed.

Air cargo and passenger service was mostly civilian airlines. Most military personnel and cargo moved by rail or ship and the Army did not see that changing.



In 1940, 3,611 military planes were built – slightly more than in 1939. In 1941, 18,466 were built. The military had flown the planes from the factories to the bases or where they were needed for years.

This had been an additional duty for most pilots and when so assigned they were not available for their squadrons. (In no small part as about half of all such ferry flights were to airfields in Canada.)

With the huge increase in production, ferrying was becoming a full time job. In June 1941, the Air Corp Ferry Service was created. Pilots assigned had but one job – ferrying aircraft. The rest of the Air Corps could concentrate on training.

However, there was still no formal passenger or cargo transport. It was still the small number of VIP planes and the small number of cargo planes dedicated to flying spare parts to the major aircraft repair depots.

The demands in the Pacific even before Dec. 7th, saw an increased need for cargo and passenger air service. The need would soon exceed the ability of the civilian airlines. And to add a touch of horror (for the Air Corps), the Navy seemed willing to provide such service if asked. (At the beginning of 1941, the Navy had more cargo and passenger capable aircraft – mostly seaplanes.)

In January 1942, the Air Corps Transport Service was formed to fly high priority passengers and cargo. At first these missions were mostly within the U.S., to U.S. bases and to support Allied staff meetings between Britain and the U.S. Moving cargo and passengers elsewhere was assigned to the Ferry Service as they were moving the planes anyway.

It was this fledgling organization that was tasked to fly supplies to China. The mission did not truly fit in with either organization but fell under the Ferry Service at least for support. (Command was with the Far Eastern Air Force – later 10th Air Force).



One solution suggested as early as the summer of 1941 was women pilots for non-combat flying. Ferrying aircraft tied up pilots needed for combat. Since women could not serve in combat, why not give them the job?

The government (and Air Corps) balked but by mid 1942 the idea made sense as too many pilots were tied up in ferrying aircraft and other non-combat roles.

There were actually two competing recommendations. One would recruit current female pilots. About 300 would be recruited and they entered with an average of 1000 hours of flight time.

The other would train women to fly following Army training methods. Over 1,500 would enter training.



Over 20,000 women applied for the two programs. Over 1,800 were accepted.

They were all civilians. They had to pay their own transportation expenses to get to the training center or report for their first assignments. They had to pay for housing (not in all cases but housing was 'space available' and if there was no space they were on the economy.) They had to pay for their own medical care.

1,074 were qualified as pilots and assigned to ferrying aircraft and other non-combat missions. Of those who were not qualified, some joined the military. Many were medically disqualified for one reason or another. Only 4 were dropped from the program for disciplinary infractions.

As they were not in the military, they could quit at any time and some of those who did not qualify as pilots had quit. None of the pilots would.

38 died in service.

The two programs merged in 1943 into the Women's Air Pilot Service (WASP) which was military in name only. They had no benefits. Their director began lobbying for commissions – for that reason.

Gen. “Hap” Arnold had opposed women pilots at first. (He had also opposed any air transport mission.)

By 1944, he was a supporter and submitted a bill to Congress to commission all the WASP pilots into the Army Air Force.

But there were others – mostly outside the military – who vehemently opposed. The program had the firm backing of Eleanor Roosevelt which automatically cost it several votes (there were Senators and Congressmen in both parties who voted against anything she supported.)

Civilian aviation complained loudly. The Airlines did not want to hire them. There were civilian flight instructors who claimed the WASP program cost them their jobs. And the military now had more pilots than it had planes. In the end, the bill was narrowly defeated.

The WASP program was deactivated in December 1944.

Half of all the planes built between September 1942 and the end of the war were ferried by WASP pilots – over 120,000 of them.



The details of the program were classified for decades. Around 1974, Newsweek published an article about the U.S. Air Force training women to fly combat aircraft for the first time.

The former WASPs and a fair few of the Air Corps pilots who served with them publically disputed the article. WASPs flew every aircraft. Paul Tibbets had WASPs on staff training B-29 crews because if women could fly the thing, the men had no excuse.



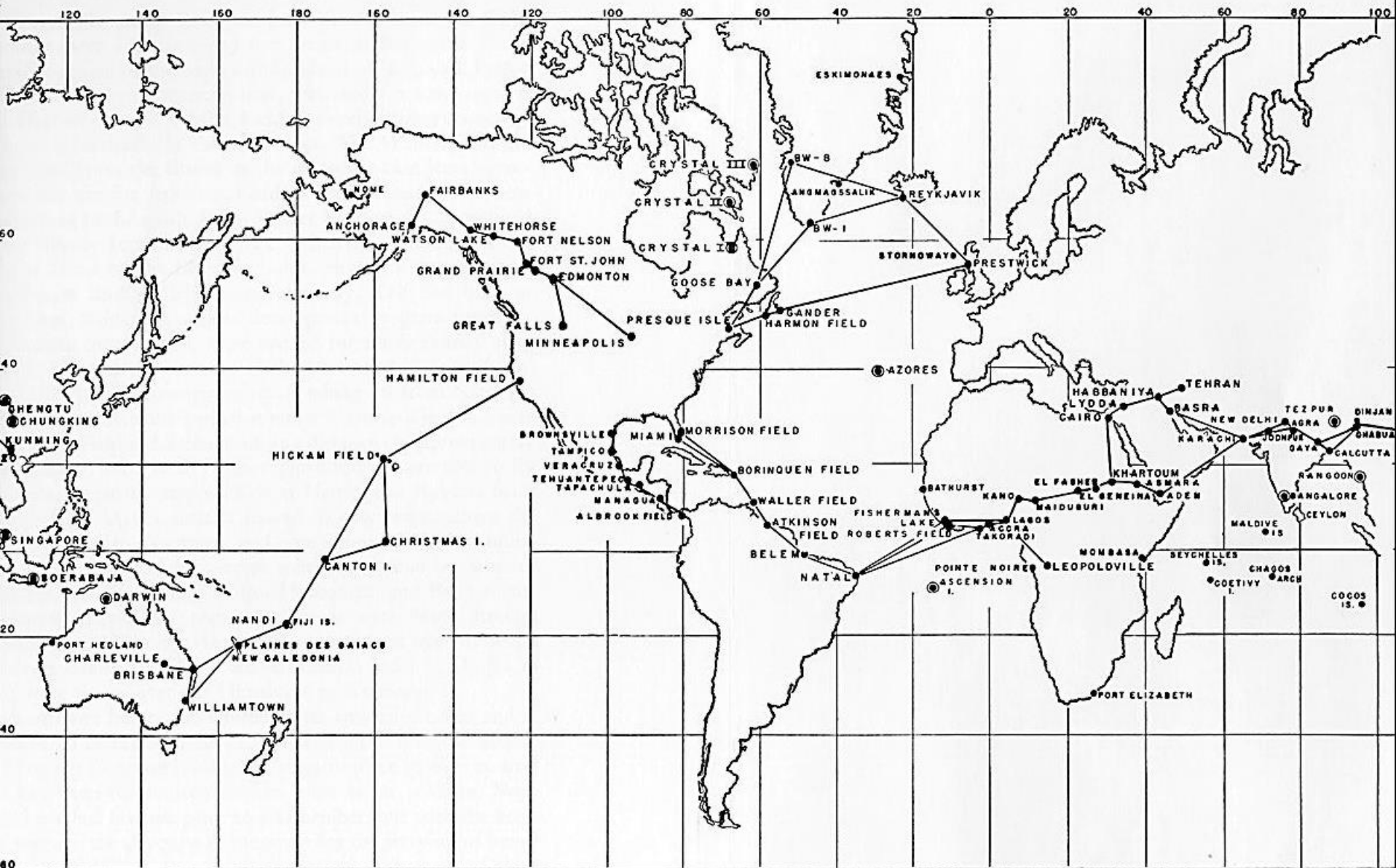
In the late 1970's, the WASPs received military benefits. Among the loudest supporter in the Senate was Barry Goldwater – who had been a ferry pilot during the war and had served along side WASP pilots.

The two organizations (Ferrying and Transport) often were redundant. And the Air Corps (now Army Air Force) soon saw global air transport as something that supported what they wanted all along – an independent Air Force. In June of 1942, the Ferry Service and Transport Service merged into the Air Transport Command (ATC) whose mission was to move planes, personnel and cargo anywhere they were needed anywhere in the world.

(That service changed its names over the decades. After the war it would become the Military Air Transport Service (MATS) in 1948, the Military Airlift Command (MAC) in 1966 and then the current Air Mobility Command (AMC) in 1992.)

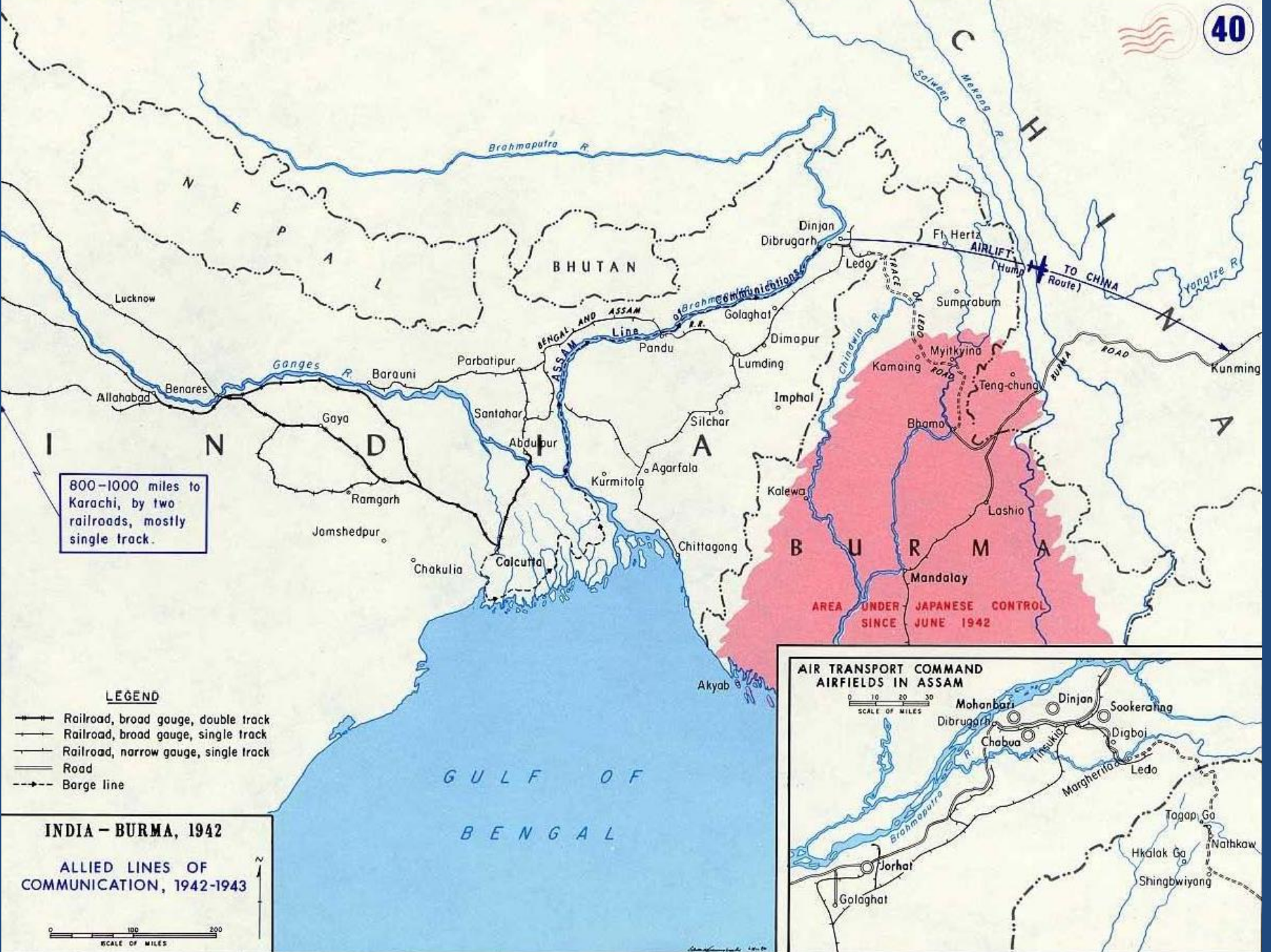
The organization change meant the air supply of China was now under the ATC. A subordinate command stood up in India for the specific mission. While it was expected to coordinate its efforts with the U.S. and allied air commands, it was not subordinate to either. (This was of little concern to the allies in India but infuriated Chiang and Chennault.)

At the time of the change over there were 27 aircraft and 1,100 men assigned to “Flying The Hump.” CNAT had more planes.



PRINCIPAL FOREIGN TRANSPORT AND FERRYING ROUTES

ARMY AIR FORCES - 30 JUNE 1942



800-1000 miles to Karachi, by two railroads, mostly single track.

LEGEND

- +—+—+ Railroad, broad gauge, double track
- +—+—+ Railroad, broad gauge, single track
- +—+—+ Railroad, narrow gauge, single track
- +—+—+ Road
- - - - - Barge line

INDIA - BURMA, 1942

ALLIED LINES OF COMMUNICATION, 1942-1943

0 100 200
SCALE OF MILES

AIR TRANSPORT COMMAND AIRFIELDS IN ASSAM

0 10 20 30
SCALE OF MILES

Mohanbari, Dinjan, Sookerating, Dibrugarh, Chabua, Digboi, Ledo, Margherita, Tinsukia, Jorhat, Golaghat, Tagap Ga, Hkalak Ga, Nathkaw, Shingbuiyang



The first aircraft to arrive were the work horse of air transport – the C-47. This was a stripped down version of the DC-3.

The plane was rugged – a must in the turbulence over the Himalayas. It could be flipped on its back and pull out and take a beating, which it often did.

It had some drawbacks. It could carry a fair number of people – if one had no concerns about passenger comfort, but not a lot of heavy cargo. It could not outrun enemy fighters.



It also had a service ceiling of around 24,000 ft. with a full load and an ideal cruising altitude of not more than 22,000 ft. and there were mountains along the route higher than that.

Visibility was often zero and the joke was to be wary of “Granite Cumulus clouds.”



The C-87 and C-109 were two other planes that arrived later in 1942, never in large numbers. They were cargo versions of the B-24 bomber (below).

The C-87 flew higher, faster and with a heavy cargo than the C-47 but was more like to come apart in mid-air in the Himalaya turbulence. That and most pilots were trained for two engines, not four.



The C-109 was a fuel transport. It was considered fairly safe when fully loaded with fuel but it could blow up in mid air when its storage tanks were empty. Most Hump pilots hated the very idea of flying one.

One who did not and flew most of his missions in the C-109 was a guy named Gene Autry.



The primary bases were in India. Conditions were primitive. The men lived in bashas (bamboo native huts). Food was local and considered terrible. Assam was the middle of nowhere. China was nicer – but for the Japanese air raids.

Pilots looked forward to overnights in China where they could get a decent meal, a bath and maybe have some fun – none of which were possible in India. And duty in China meant one was not worried about malaria.

For the first two years of Hump operations, the men complained the planes were treated better.

But the reality was the planes were no better. Spare parts were few and long in arriving. Maintenance suffered and that led to lost airplanes and crews.





ATC India received its specific workhorse beginning in early 1943: the Curtiss C-46 Commando. The plane was larger than the C-47 and could carry twice the cargo load (which was also more than the C-87). It was also faster and could fly high enough to clear the mountains.



But it was brand new and was rushed into service without more than rudimentary flight testing (they knew it could fly but little else). They learned it had an annoying tendency to lose a wing in heavy turbulence.

Its engines were not as reliable and had a habit of failing.

Both situations never ended well.

The bugs would be worked out within six months but the plane retained the reputation of being a widowmaker.

CNAC did not have the same complaints as the ATC about either the C-47 or C-46. They had fewer losses due to equipment failure – a fraction of that of the ATC. They flew heavier cargos – over what the ATC considered safe. And in the first year they flew more missions, delivered more cargo per mission and more cargo overall.

In August 1943, Col. Hardin took over command of the Hump operations. He had been a Army reserve officer and an early airline pilot. By 1930 he was GM of American Airlines. In 1938, he was appointed as chairman of the Air Safety Board (forerunner of the NTSB). In 1940, he became VP at TWA. He was called to active duty after war was declared.

He assessed the situation and determined that the poor performance of the ATC pilots was due to inadequate training. They were not trained for instrument flying or navigation or flying in adverse weather conditions. (Army training programs did not fly if the weather was bad and that was generally true throughout the Army.)

He brought in over 50 airline pilots to train the Army pilots about how to fly blind and in bad weather (5 would die in an accident.)

The result was a drop in accident and loss rates and an increase in monthly tonnage delivered to China from less than 5,000 tons to more than 12,000 tons (and increasing every month).

Hardin did next to nothing about the pilot's living conditions and little about maintenance. Moreover unlike the rest of the Air Force, there was no leave and no standard for end of tour – no time in theater, # of missions etc. Pilots flew with no end in sight. Morale – which was never great – soon plummeted and accident rates again climbed.

Hardin was promoted to command ATC operations throughout Asia and was replaced by William Tunner. Tunner was a career army aviator – bombers. He was on the Air Corps staff when the ATC was developed and had been a leading proponent of what would become the Women's Air Service Pilots.

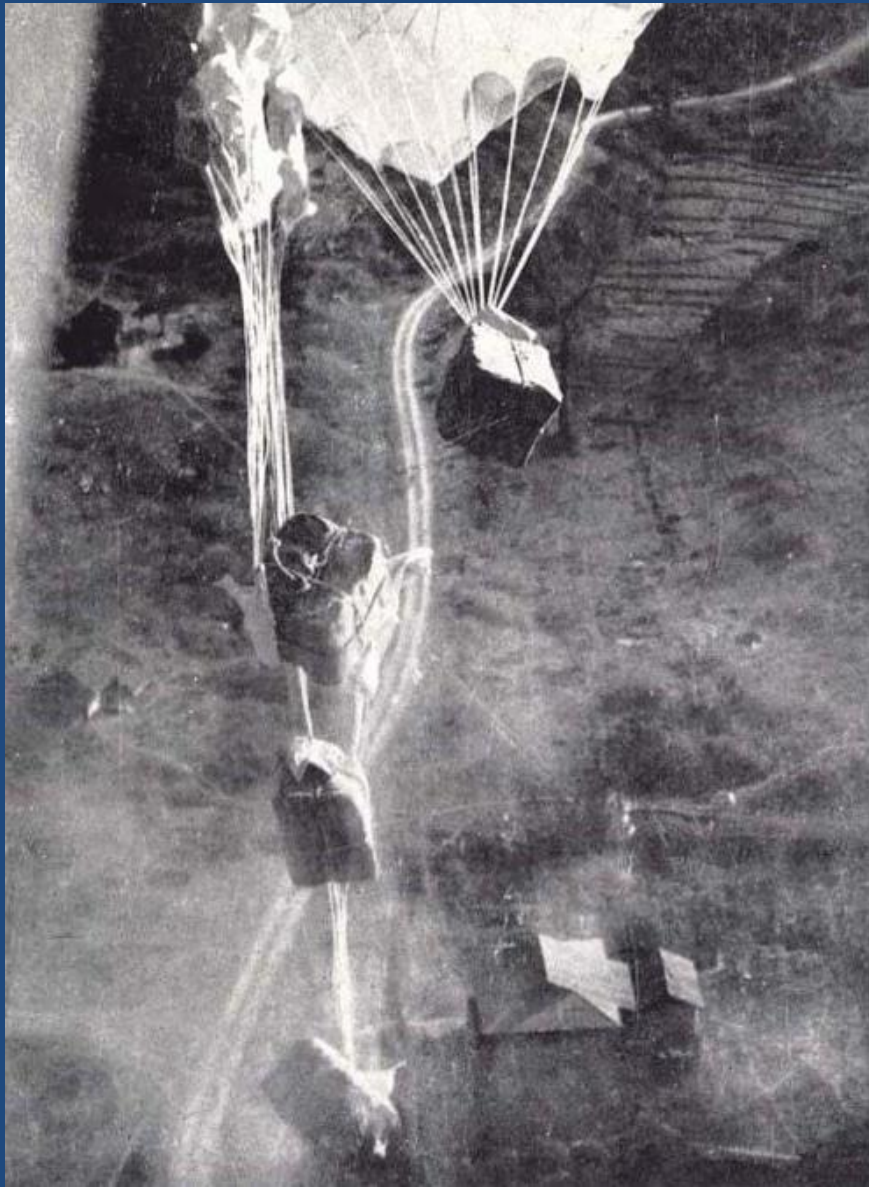
He immediately set about changing things. Pilots would now be eligible for re-assignment after 750 flight hours. (Later changed to 750 hrs and one year in theater when pilots tried to fly as many times as possible as quickly as possible and accidents soared again.) Tunner also set up a depot level, assembly line style maintenance operation that improved aircraft performance. And he did something about the food, medical and living conditions.

ACT India did set up one thing the pilots appreciated fairly early on – air search and rescue teams.



The team was led by a scout – often operating alone behind enemy lines. His job was to jump in to a suspected crash site and find any survivors. Scouts were non-flying officers and NCO's picked somewhat at random. They had little real training aside from on-the-job. Their first parachute jump was usually their first real mission.

After they found survivors, they would do what first aid they could (often not much, but they carried medical supplies) and somehow contact the squadron about their location. A medical team followed (a doctor and medic).



Once the survivors were stable enough, the team would get them out. Where possible, the survivors were flown out in small planes but otherwise they walked. The team usually walked out.

Most missions took at least a month from the jump in until they walked back to “civilization.”

But the effort made helped morale immensely and had results.

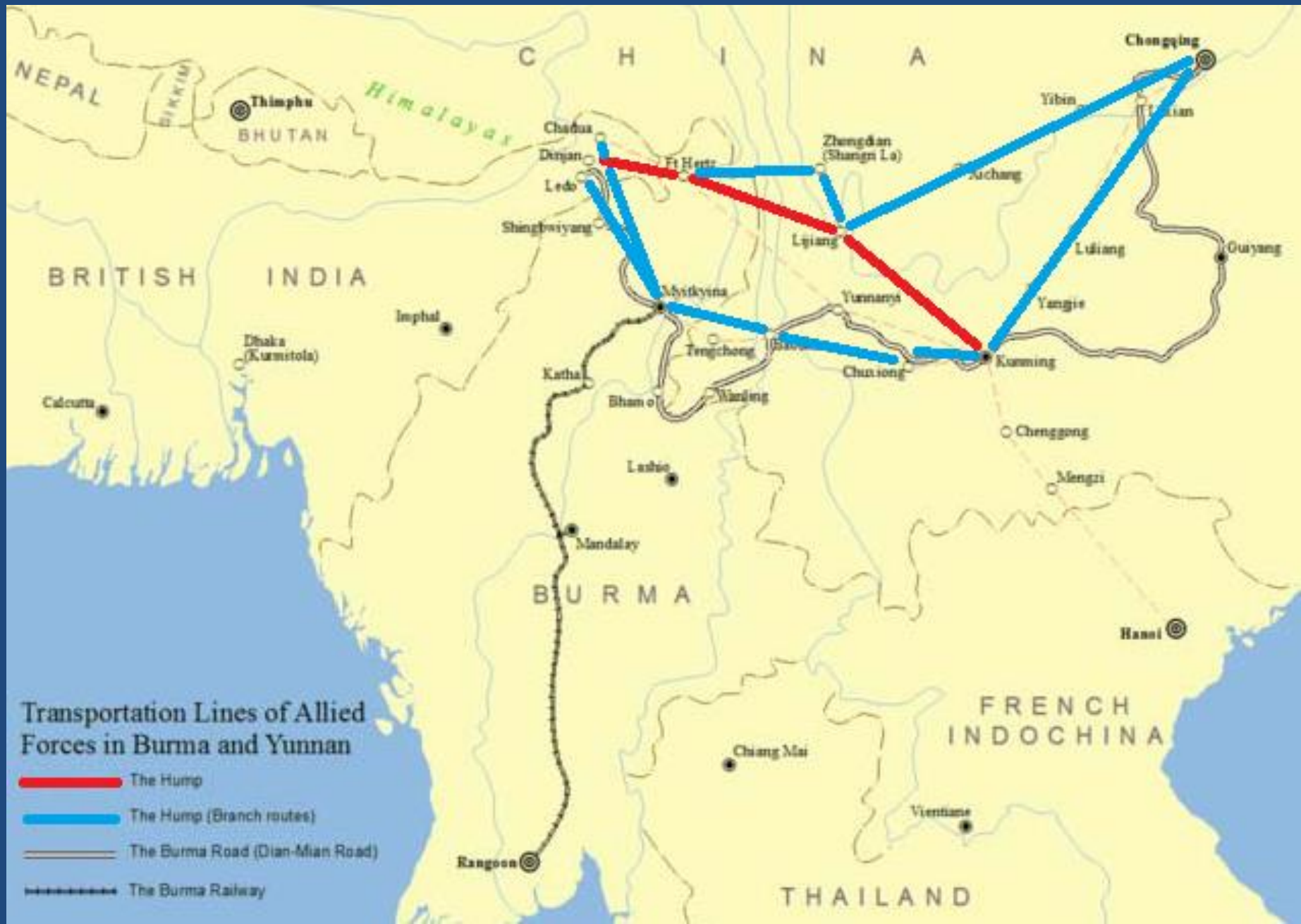
Among those rescued was the reporter Eric Sevareid. He was on a C-46 flight to Kunming to report on China. The plane’s engine failed and it could not maintain altitude. The cargo was dumped. All the passenger luggage was dumped then the crew asked for volunteers to jump (they all had parachutes).



Servareid did not volunteer but others did. It still was not enough but Sevareid did not believe it was serious until the pilot walked by and jumped.

He was one of the last out. Of the passengers and crew only one failed to get out in time (and was the only fatality). The scouts from the rescue service arrived at a nearby village within a day and the doctors soon after. A few had been injured in the jump (Sevareid was not). The uninjured were led out by local guides – a trip that took about two weeks.

Although the plane crashed in what was then Japanese held territory, they never encountered the Japanese.



Transportation Lines of Allied Forces in Burma and Yunnan

- The Hump
- The Hump (Branch routes)
- The Burma Road (Dian-Mian Road)
- - - - The Burma Railway

It was called the aluminum trail – one could fly from Assam to Kunming by following the wrecks. But it had been a success.

May 1942	27 aircraft	1,100 men
July 1945	640 aircraft	34,000 men

590 aircraft lost, 328 ATC
1,314 men killed. 345 MIA.
1,171 walked out.

Over 600,000 tons of supplies were delivered, most in the last year of the war. The monthly tonnage over the last year was over 40,000 tons per month with the record of around 90,000.

The last year's operations exceeded all other supply routes including the Burma Road and the Hanoi Railroad when they were in operation.

ATC was not considered combat duty. The men did not receive combat pay. Yet they became the only unit in the military to earn the Distinguished Unit Citation without serving in combat (now the Presidential Unit Citation.)

By late 1943, It was the only air operation that flew in all weather and day or night. Many pilots rarely saw anything from moments after take off until moments before landing.

It was the first use of radio navigation (LORAN).

It was the first use of instrument landing systems and radar approach control.

These technologies would make air travel reliable and the safest method of travel.

And it arguably trained a generation of airline pilots as many of those who flew the Hump were hired by the airlines after the war – they were preferred as they were already trained in the new systems.

But it also perfected the annoying practice known as “stacking” where planes circled the air field waiting to land.



William Slim walked out of Burma convinced he could do better. His army had not broken and run and had never given up but they had not held anything for long.

Slim saw a well dressed officer watching his ragged troops enter Imphal in disgust. The man was a Lt. General – senior to Slim – and called the soldiers disgraces and an embarrassment to the empire and whomever their commander was, was no better. Slim took offence, called the man insulting and disrespectful.

“I cannot be,” he replied, “I am senior!”

The man was Lt. Gen. Noel Irwin.



Lt. Gen. Noel Irwin was British Army and had never served in India before and had just been assigned as Commander Eastern Army, India which was responsible for defending against the Japanese and for any offensive action against the Japanese.

He had several key postings in his career, not in the least of which was as the Senior Instructor and Sandhurst Military Academy.

He was a man who blames his subordinates for his failures and took full credit for his subordinates success.

Joe Stilwell hated the man and as at this point in the war he did not have to answer to a lowly Brit Army commander was openly insulting.

Slim was given command of XV Corps under Irwin and could not be so critical.

XV Corps was supposed to have at least two divisions but in July of 1942 it had one: the 26th Indian. Another was still in training.

Slim wanted to pull the division back and send it through jungle training. Irwin refused. Fortunately, Irwin did not consider a division in training worth anything so Slim was able to begin jungle training with two divisions.

But training had to wait. In August 1942, the Quit India Movement began.

As a result of the loss of Malaya, Singapore and Burma, Gandhi and the National Congress Party felt the time was right to force Indian independence. The British Empire was collapsing – in their opinion.

General strikes and demonstrations erupted throughout northern India from Bombay to Calcutta. The Viceroy had Gandhi and other leaders (about 3,000) rounded up and thrown in prison. Then the movement became violent. Railroads were damaged, trains stopped and in some cases “European” passengers were pulled off and killed.

The movement had presumed the India Army was as tired of the British as they were.

They were wrong.

There was no mutiny.

The Army did not join them moreover the Army broke up demonstrators, arrested ringleaders and shot those who resisted. The British troops remained in garrison and Slim – tasked to deal with the eastern region – used only Indian troops who saw the movement as treason.

Many believed the movement was Japanese in origin and those who had been in Burma had seen what the Japanese were like and were not about to let them in or see them with any support. Others had heard from relatives in the occupied territories. While the Japanese generally were careful with the Indians, they were brutal with all others.

The opinion in the army was the Japanese would be careful – right up until the moment they took over and any who believed otherwise were fools.

The movement mostly died without the Army and after the violence of the protest caused Ghandi to condemn the movement and its leadership.



By the time Stilwell returned from Burma, he was fed up with Chiang. Chiang's code name had been "Peanut." Stilwell now used the name openly believing the man had the brains of a...

Chiang was unable to make a promise that anyone could trust, in Stilwell's opinion. Chiang had refused to "seal" Stilwell's appointment as Chief of Staff for the Army until there was no army in Burma for him to command. The "seal" was issued but only for Chinese troops in India – the remnants of 38th and 22nd Divisions.

Moreover, Chiang had countermanded almost every order Stilwell had issued often to the detriment of the Chinese soldiers in the field – something Stilwell could never forgive.

As tempting as it might have been, Stilwell would not quit. And both the Army and State Department believe that unless and until Chiang and the Chinese became irrelevant, Stilwell was indispensable. No one else both knew how to stand up to Chiang and would not hesitate to do so.

And Stilwell had ambitions. Not political ones.

Stilwell still believed in the Chinese soldier. He still believed that well trained and well equipped, the Chinese would be better than any Japanese. But unless the Chinese soldier was American trained and supplied, he would be at the mercy of the corrupt Nationalist Government and personal whims of its leader.

He wanted to train at least three divisions in India – divisions under his direct command with no back channel to or from Chiang. He wanted to send advisors to China to train and ultimately equip six divisions in the coming months and 90 divisions in the next couple of years. With that force and two American Corps, he felt he could not only take and hold northern Burma and reopen the Burma road, but drive the Japanese in China into the sea.

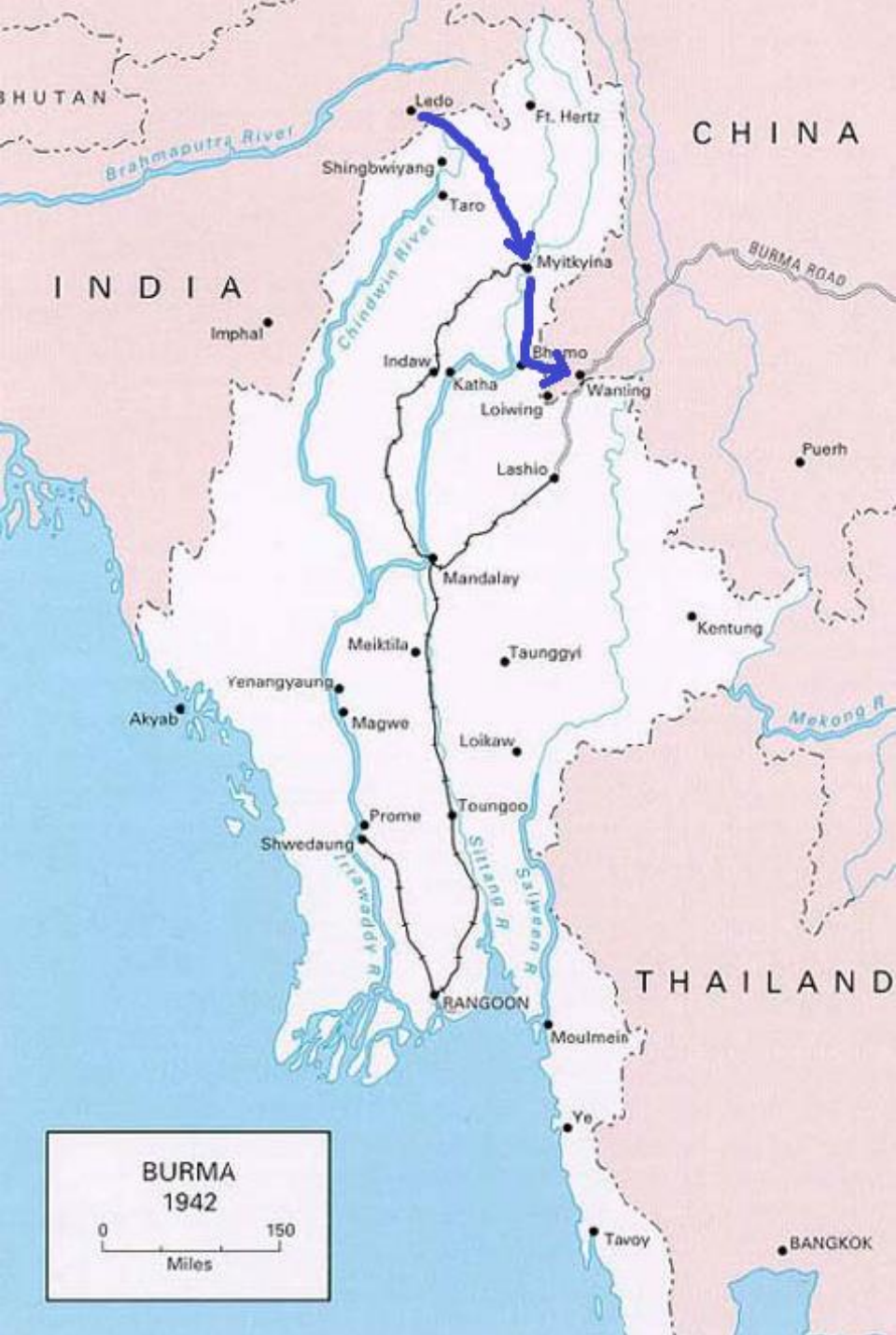
But winning the war was not in the immediate picture.

At first, Chiang would have no part of his plan to train more troops. (Chiang had no say on those already in China). Moreover the British were concerned about letting any more Chinese in lest the Indians get any ideas. (The British attitude changed once it was clear the Army was loyal to the allies and the Quit India movement would be suppressed.)

But Stilwell made it clear to Chiang. Chinese troops in India would be U.S. supplied with everything – weapons, ammunition, food and even uniforms and they would be U.S. paid. Moreover, if this were allowed those supplies would not be given to the British.

The one thing Chiang had in abundance was manpower.

He agreed. The U.S. would have to fly the recruits themselves but otherwise he had no objection. Ultimately, five divisions would train in India but for now replacements would arrive to bring the two divisions back up to strength.



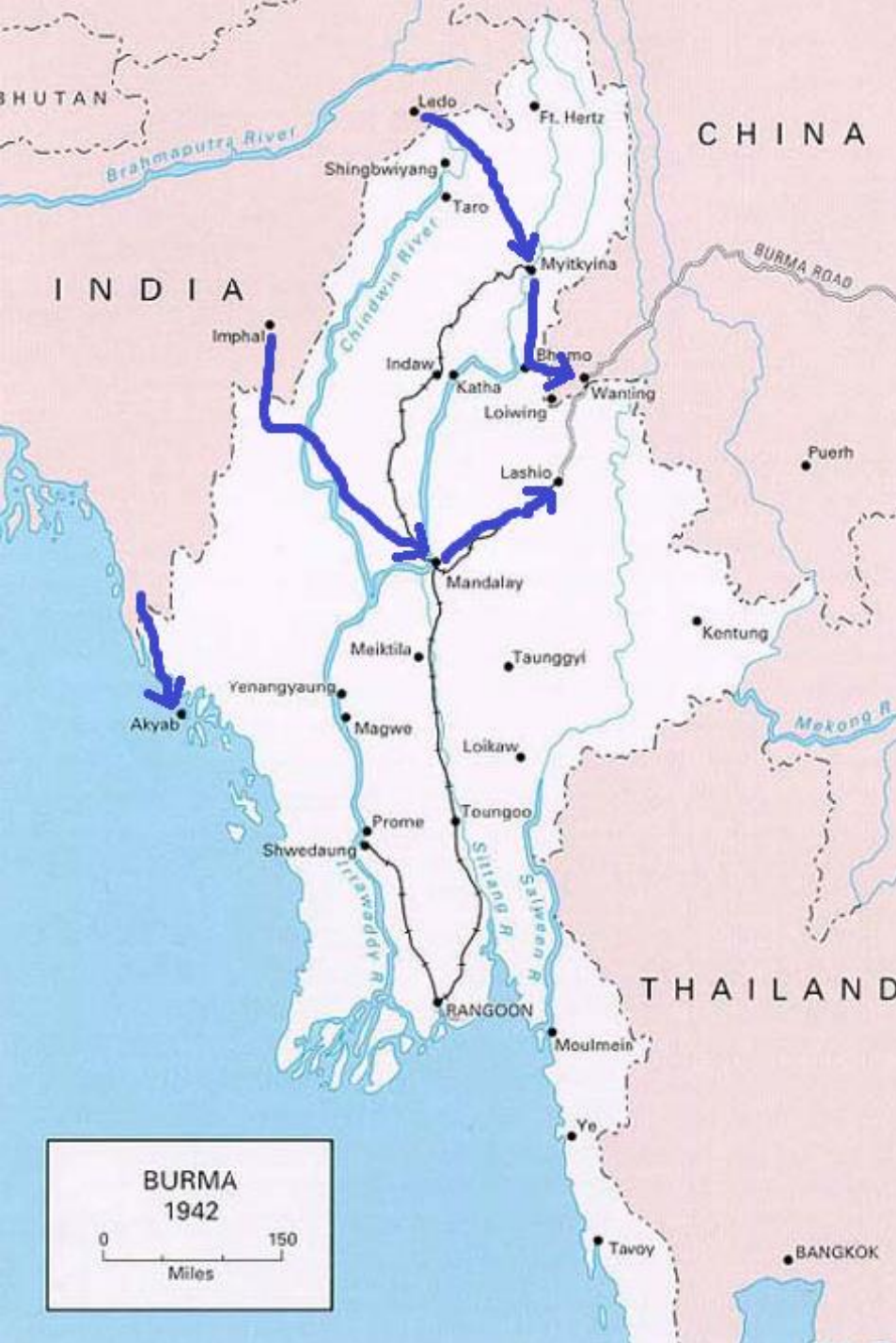
Stilwell (and Washington) did not want to waste a dry season doing nothing. The two Chinese divisions then in India would be ready to fight by the 1942 – 1943 dry season.

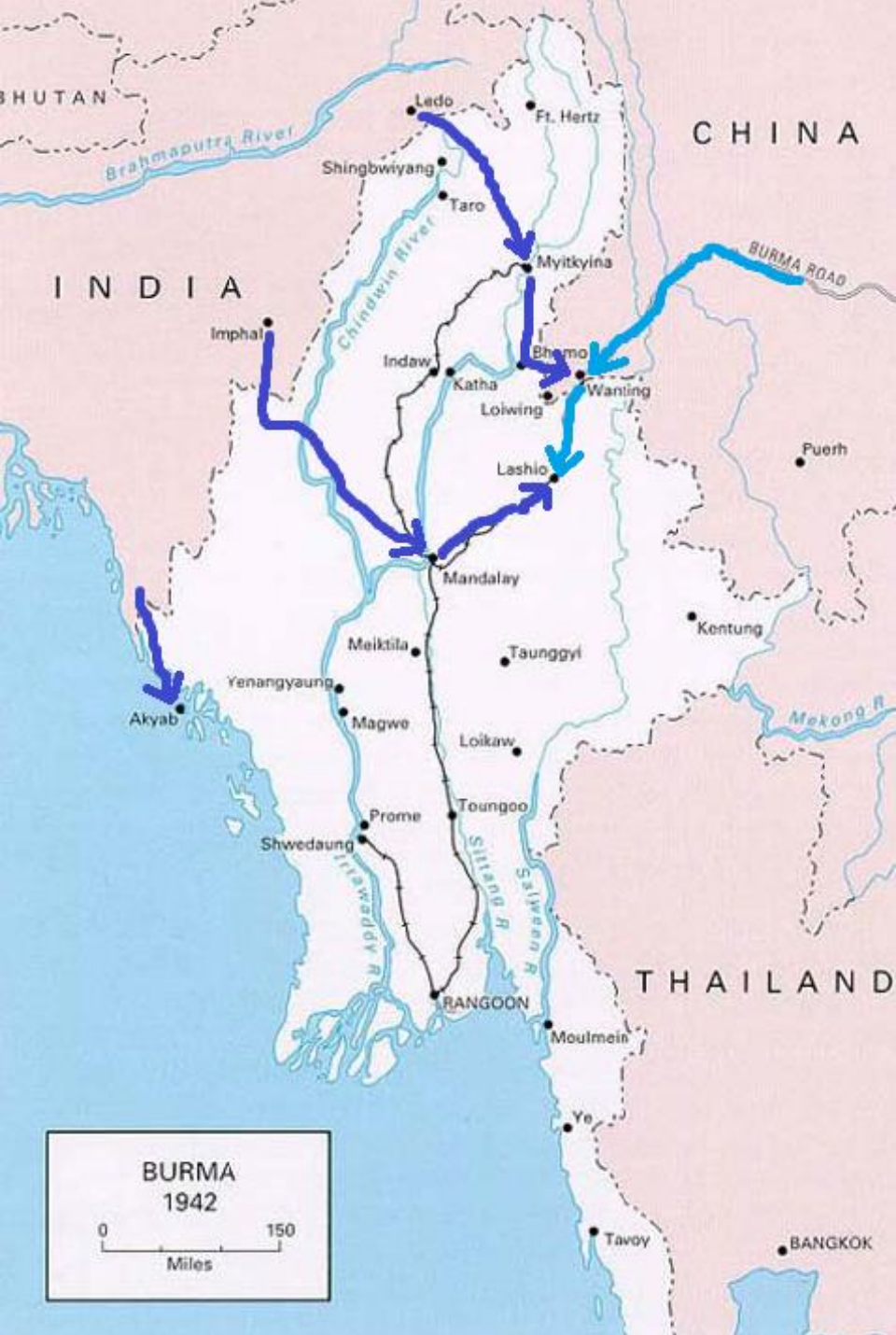
Stilwell proposed a plan to retake northern Burma securing a route for a road from India to link up with the existing Burma Road.

The British were lukewarm – China was of no importance. But the India Army would agree to support the plan.

The plan called for Stilwell's two Chinese Divisions to invade from the north moving along the eventual route of the road.

The British would launch a diversionary attack in the west on what was known as the Arakan Peninsula. A full Corps would then invade Burma following the later route of the retreat and ultimate move towards Lashio.

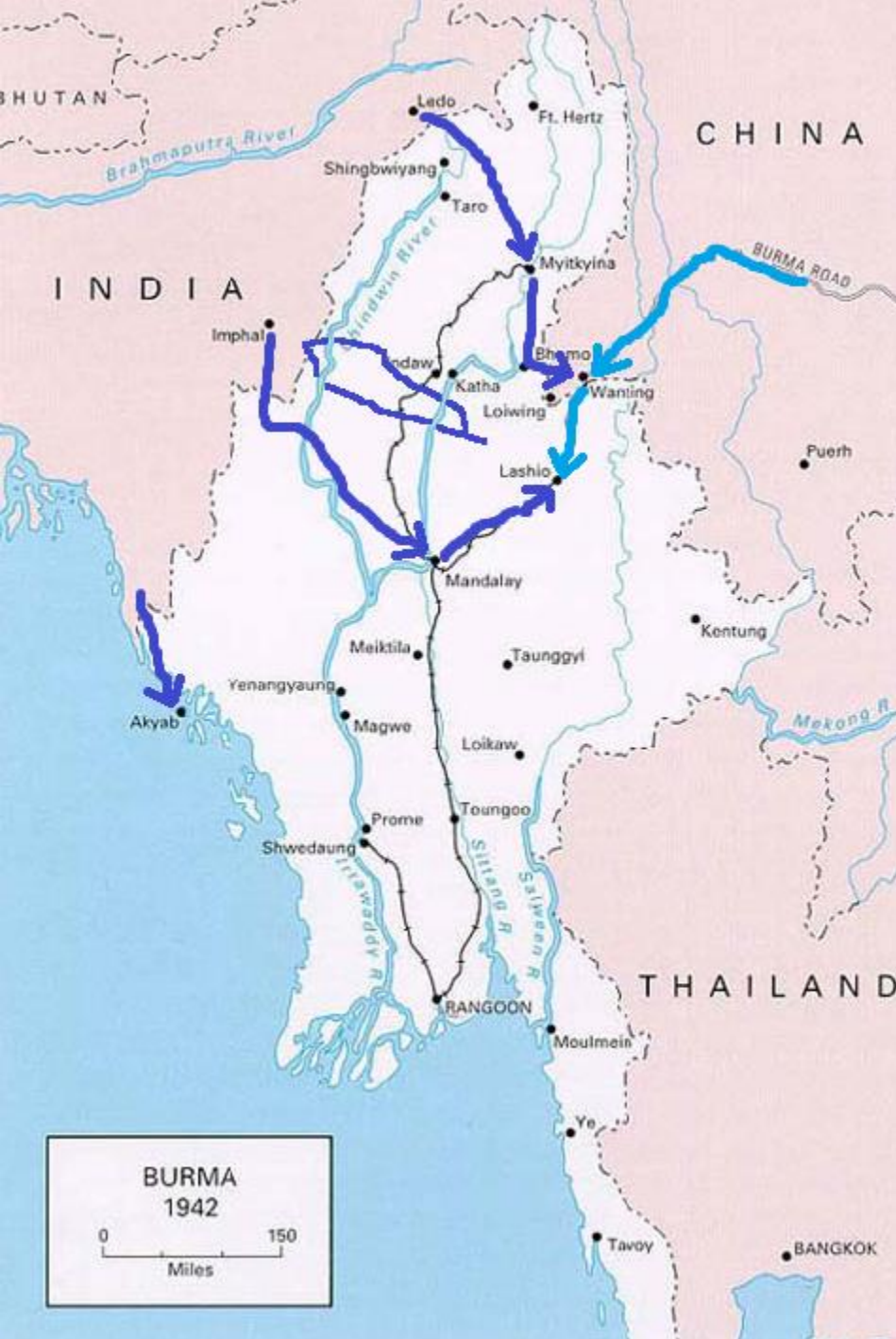




Six Chinese Divisions would move west from China along the Burma road with the goal to link up with the divisions coming east from India.

The total offensive force would be more than twice as large as the Japanese forces stationed throughout Burma.

Moreover, they knew only one division was north of Mandalay.



Near the last minute, the British added another force. This was a force of specially trained soldiers prepared to operate behind enemy lines without a cumbersome supply train.

It would cut Japanese supply lines and act as another diversion before the main armies began their offensives.

However, if Chiang balked, the deal was off.

Chiang demanded an amphibious assault on the coast of Burma as a diversion and an increase in air supply to 10,000 tons a month. If he got that, then he was in.

What Chiang asked was not possible in 1942 and would not be possible for another two years at least.

Landing craft were in scarce supply and the Burma operation would not get priority over the amphibious operations then underway at Guadalcanal in the Pacific or the already scheduled invasion of North Africa. There could be no effective amphibious operation.

(Slim had some vessels at Calcutta – civilian crafted drafted into a coastal patrol but at best they could land a very small force provided there was absolutely no resistance.)

And at this time, 10,000 tons per month was not possible and even if it was, at least a third of it was needed to supply Chennault's Air Task Force and he was not willing to cut his supplies – he wanted more as well.

Chiang refused to participate and Stilwell's plan collapsed.

For the most part...

Anti-Authority
Articulate
Bi-Polar
Brilliant
Charismatic
Eloquent
Exhibitionist
Impossible
Mad
Moody
Scruffy
Stinky
Uncouth
Unprofessional
Zealous

Arrogant
Assertive
Bloody-minded
Brutal
Disrespectful
Excitable
Genius
Intense
Manic
Ruthless
Strange
Uncompromising
Unorthodox
Un-soldiery



Above are words used by his contemporaries to describe one of the most controversial officers of World War II – Orde Charles Wingate.



The last minute addition to the plan – that of the mobile light force operating behind Japanese lines – was the brainchild of Col. Orde Wingate.

Wingate is arguably one of the oddest soldiers in recent history.

He was born in India – his father a Colonel in the India Army. His father was hardly the first Wingate in the British forces. Wingates had been serving the crown since at least the 18th Century.

Wingate's mother almost died giving birth to him and his father had been told that was what was probably going to happen. But the mother survived.

Wingate's father saw it as a miracle and a sign from God and overnight became more Christian than any member of the clergy or anyone else. He did not follow any particular denomination save his own and was "asked" to retire when the India Army learned he was trying to convert his soldiers.

If he wanted to do that he should be a minister and not an officer in the Army.

Wingate's father retired and became a preacher back in England – one particularly hellfire and brimstone type and one convinced most everyone not named Wingate was destined to burn in hell. (He never studied divinity.)

Wingate and his siblings (he was a middle child) would not attend school until Secondary School nor were they allowed to socialize with any other children lest they be led into sin.

Wingate was clearly "un-socialized" when he was sent off to boarding school. Among other things he was called "Stinky," a reference to his personal hygiene habit (or lack thereof.)

Wingate would go on to the Royal Military Academy at Woolrich – the Artillery School probably out of spite as his father wanted him to go to Sandhurst. He graduated in 1923. He was both an introvert, uncomfortable talking to a person but also one of the best public speakers in his class. He would often quote the Bible – usually the Old Testament – but aside from a great source for quotes he had no regard for the book or religion in general.

He excelled at horsemanship – and at being in debt. In 1926 he was sent to the Equitation School where he out performed the Cavalry Officers – and annoyed them.

He was then encouraged to study Middle Eastern Affairs and Arabic, entering the School of Oriental Studies in London in 1926. In 1928, he was transferred to the Sudan where he led local troops dealing with illegal trade and became an expert at ambush tactics.

After a tour in England he was sent to Palestine as an intelligence officer. Britain had promised to establish a Jewish Homeland as part of the treaties ending WWI. The problem was, Palestine was hardly unoccupied nor was there land available in any abundance. His Commanding Officer was Archibald Wavell.

His mission was to keep an eye on Haganah and keep them under control. He came to believe they had a righteous cause and managed to expand his orders to train a force to defend Jewish settlements. And privately, he believed the best defense was a good offense. He would lead “Special Night Squads” to deal with Palestinians who had attacked settlement – or anyone who looked like them.

He was outspoken about the Jewish cause – and would be relieved for it. (The local ambassador was concerned Wingate was planning a revolt and to set himself up as some kind of dictator.) Among those he trained was Moshe Dayan.

He was assigned to an Anti-Aircraft unit in Britain guarding a place no one would probably ever bomb when the war broke out. Wavell, now in Command of British Forces in the Middle East sent for Wingate for service in Sudan and against the Italians in Ethiopia.

Wingate would train and lead a guerrilla force of Ethiopians with great success in the field, ultimately driving the Italians from Addis Ababa – but to Wingate’s dismay was sent to Cairo rather than be allowed at the restoration of Halle Salasee.



He arrived in Cairo to learn that while he was getting a medal, he was also being demoted (to his permanent rank of major). He wrote scathing reports critical of all his superiors in the Sudan – and came down with malaria and attempted suicide.

He was married and devoted to his wife and it has been argued had he been sent home instead of to Cairo the suicide attempt would never have occurred. There are historians who now believed he suffered from Manic-Depression and it is consistent with his behavior. His wife seems to have been able to curb the worst of his depressions. He was sent home to recover.

Then he received orders to India. He was shocked and angered. Aside from having been born there he knew nothing of the place (his family left when he was little). He was an Arab expert!

But he had been requested by Gen. Wavell. He arrived in March 1942 and was ordered to form guerrilla units – but that was delayed as a result of the ongoing retreat.

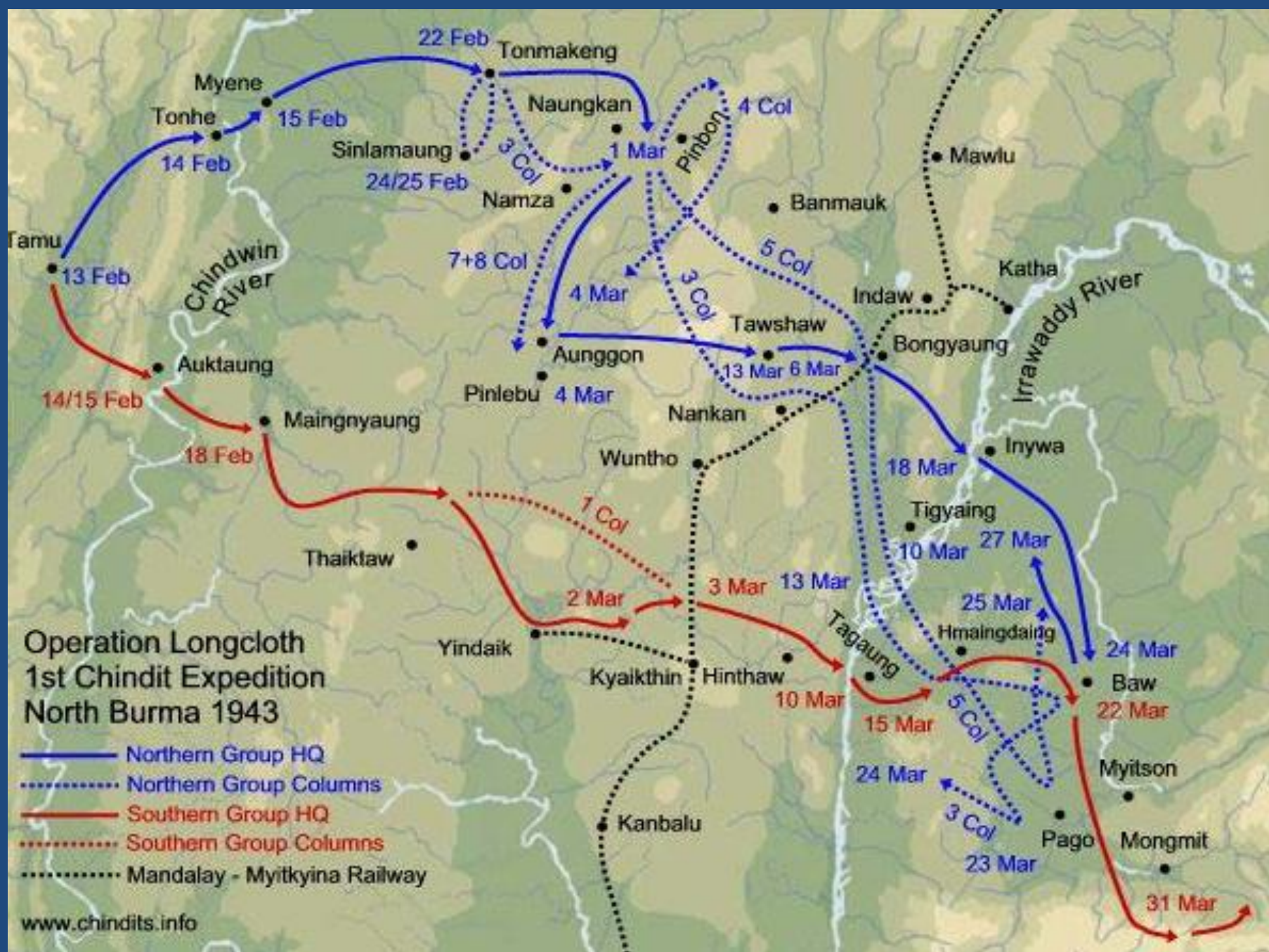
Wingate began in earnest not long after the retreat with troops from the 77th Infantry Brigade. His special force would be highly trained but did not have any special selection criteria.

Wingate would prove to be an eccentric leader and highly regarded by his men despite how odd he was. He was a tactical innovator.

He was an abysmal subordinate. He preferred to meet with superiors or any officer not under his command naked or wearing nothing but an open bath robe. He refused to bathe – preferring to rub himself with a rubber brush and he ate raw onions all the time – with the attendant effects.

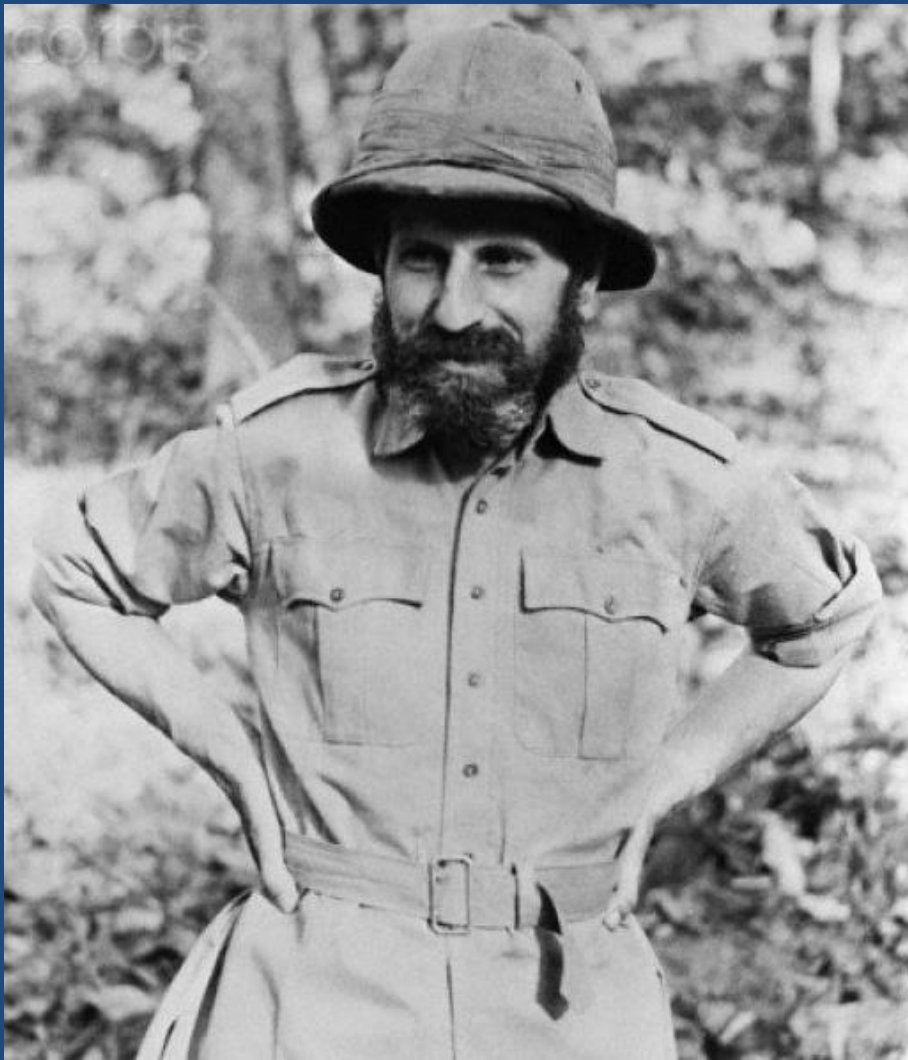
He trained his brigade with the intent of using them to open the 1942 – 1943 offensive into Burma which he called Operation Longcloth. He had his men ready just when the offensive was cancelled. He demanded that his operation go forward as planned. In his opinion his newly christened Long Range Penetration Force was an independent force not a supporting one and the lack of any other activity was irrelevant.

He called them the Chindits – which means nothing but he thought was Burmese for a fierce mythical creature similar to a gryffon.



**Operation Longcloth
1st Chindit Expedition
North Burma 1943**

- Northern Group HQ
- Northern Group Columns
- Southern Group HQ
- Southern Group Columns
- Mandalay - Myitkyina Railway



Wingate's brigade had trained for months in jungle movement and supply, river crossing and navigation in addition to ambushes and demolitions.

The plan was the brigade would walk into Burma with only the supplies they could carry – and a pack train of mules.

Most of their supplies would come by air drop.

They would head in three "columns" for the railroad and blow up bridges and sections of track avoiding any significant encounter with the Japanese and generally wreck havoc on the Japanese supply lines and then return.



With the columns were RAF communications teams to coordinate resupply air drops and when possible call in air support. The latter was not considered necessary as the force would always be on the move in the jungle and identifying a target difficult.

Resupply was absolutely critical as the men only carried two or three days of rations and ammunition. If a drop was missed for any reason, the effects were immediate.

If the radios failed – and some would – it would spell disaster for the column dependent upon that radio.

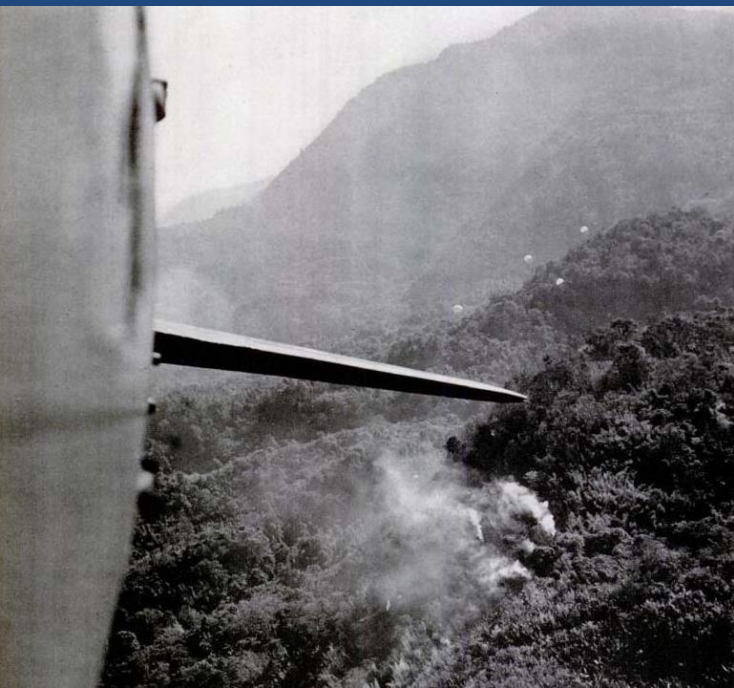
And, if the columns split up – someone would be left without a radio.



There were some problems at first. Weather occasionally made drops impossible and they were behind Japanese lines and in range of Japanese bases that were out of range of allied bombers.

Early on, the drops were not what was needed but they worked out that the RAF radio team would tell the supply group what was essential.

Still, there were misses. Drops were lost in the jungle or critical supplies failed to make it.



But the operation continued. The Japanese were trying to box them in and they managed to avoid disaster – but not some desperate fights and in some cases the Japanese were able to deploy what the Chindits did not have: artillery.

But it came apart when Wingate pushed too far...

Wingate decided to push beyond the Irrawaddy River. Most of his force crossed and once they did they were mostly beyond the range for supply drops.

Now three Japanese divisions were between them and Burma. Wingate was told that the mission was at an end and he needed to pull his men out. He was furious – but complied.

He left the details to his column commanders. They could head back as a group or in small details – or head into China.

By this point, most of the men were physically exhausted and underfed. Most had malaria and dysentery at the very least. One Column chose to make for China. The others broke into small detachments and headed back for India.

It would take weeks for them to return as they had to avoid the Japanese who were desperate to find them and wipe them out. Those too sick or wounded to walk were left behind.



A third of the force never returned.

Of those who made it out of Burma, 80% would be so severely debilitated they were deemed unfit for any military service and discharged on disability.

Only 5% would ever be healthy enough to serve in combat again.



They lost more men than the Japanese – almost twice as many and the damage they did to Japanese supplies and the railroad was repaired in days.

(At the same time, an OSS detachment of 12 men to the north shut the railroad down for 6 weeks losing only one man to a sniper.)

The operation was a strategic failure. It failed to achieve any of its stated objectives and failed with over 90% casualties from combat, disease or starvation.

But it was a propaganda victory. British and Indian troops had entered the Jungle and proved they could operate there against the Japanese and that the Japanese were not truly jungle experts.

Slim and Stilwell considered the mission a waste of assets but there were lessons to learn. While it needed work, the mission showed it was possible to supply a large force from the air. The real failure of the air supply occurred when Wingate first outran his supply line and then broke into smaller units that lacked any ability to communicate with the Air Force.

Wingate felt the failure (to the extent he admitted that there had been one) was with the high command in not understanding what he was doing. That he never truly told them was not his fault. He felt with more troops and more support the mission would have been a success.

But his was not the only abortive offensive in the 1943 dry season...