

REPORT TO THE COMBINED CHIEFS OF STAFF
BY THE SUPREME ALLIED COMMANDER
SOUTH-EAST ASIA

1943—1945

VICE-ADMIRAL
THE EARL MOUNTBATTEN OF BURMA
K.G., P.C., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., G.C.V.O., K.C.B., D.S.O.



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IN the Autumn of 1943, the situation in South-East Asia was not encouraging. The Japanese were in firm possession of the whole perimeter from Northern Burma to New Guinea through Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies.¹ Their forces dominated the Bay of Bengal; ours were clinging precariously to the north-eastern approaches to India, with lines of communication that were barely adequate for purposes of defence, let alone for attack.² In Burma, the Japanese had at this time five divisions, consisting of some 135,000 men: the normal composition of a Japanese Army. But a "Burma Area Army" Headquarters had been raised in Rangoon, and since an Area Army Headquarters would not have been set up to control only one Army, this fact indicated that a considerable increase of strength, and probably of offensive operations, was being contemplated. Elsewhere in South-East Asia, our forces were not even in contact with the enemy, being based far from his perimeter. The establishment of initial contact in these other areas could only be achieved with ample amphibious resources; subsequent offensives would have to depend for maintenance on long sea communications.

2. At the Quebec Conference it had been decided to carry out operations for the capture of Upper Burma in order to improve the air route and to undertake, in the early Spring of 1944, amphibious operations based on India. There were two divergent conceptions of strategic policy in South-East Asia. The Americans, on the one hand, regarded Assam and Burma primarily as part of the air and land line to China; the British, on the other hand, saw the liberation of Burma as an end in itself, and as a step on the road to Malaya and Singapore. It seemed necessary to establish the fact that, although the two conceptions were divergent in motive, in execution they were complementary and inseparable. The land line to China could not be re-opened without the reconquest of Northern Burma; and the conquest of the whole of Northern Burma was essential if air-supply to China (over mountain ranges colloquially known as "the Hump") was to be adequately protected against air attack from the south.

Northern Burma could not be permanently secured unless Burma were occupied as far down as Rangoon; and this in turn could not be done without a comprehensive system of air-supply to the troops engaged in the overland advance; while a seaborne and airborne assault from the south would greatly help the advance from the north—and indeed, at this time, seemed an essential part of the campaign.

3. It was clear, not only that considerable forces of transport aircraft would be required for land operations in Burma, but that it might be found necessary to withdraw resources from the air route to China, in its own ultimate interest. So far as amphibious operations went, our resources were sufficient for an assault on the Andaman Islands; but more landing ships and landing craft, as well as additional army formations, would have to be made available before anything on a larger scale could be undertaken. Unfortunately, however, the South-East Asia Command was starting at the bottom of the priority list, and was likely to remain there for a long time. Having been a member of the British Chiefs of Staff Committee for some eighteen months before going to South-East Asia, I fully appreciated the effect that the world shortage and the exigencies of operations in Europe and in the Pacific must have on our being allowed to retain what meagre resources were at our disposal—not to speak of their effect on our chances of obtaining more in the future.

4. But this over-riding factor condemned our strategy to being planned against a background of perpetual uncertainty about higher policy. Allocations which appeared to be "firm", were often to be revoked soon afterwards; and even from our slender resources, we were occasionally ordered to divert landing craft and ships, transport aircraft, artillery ammunition, and other materials, to theatres with a prior claim. More than once, when our detailed plans were cancelled at the last moment, we were to be compelled to improvise; and it was not easy to decide, at short notice, how to make the best use of what remained.

5. Before joint British, American and Chinese military and air operations in Burma, as well as amphibious operations in the Bay of Bengal, could be planned for the 1943–44 dry season, it would be necessary to decide how the available air resources could best be shared among the three nations concerned. The first essential was to find out to what extent the Generalissimo was prepared to co-operate

¹ See Map 1 (before page 1).

² See Map 8 (facing page 28).

in the coming campaign; and I therefore went to visit him personally, nine days after my arrival in South-East Asia. On arriving in Chungking, I held an informal conference attended by senior members of the British Military Mission; by the American Lieut.-Generals Stilwell and Somervell; Major-General Wheeler, my new P.A.O.; and by the two American Air Commanders, Major-General G. Stratemeyer¹ and Major-General C. Chennault.² We discussed the co-ordination of British-American air effort in South-East-Asia; air-supply over the Hump; and the support which air operations would give to the land operations in Burma.

6. Formal conferences were then held with the Generalissimo and Madame Chiang, the Minister for War (General Ho Ying Chin), and various members of the Chinese General Staff. The parts which British, American and Chinese forces would take in the coming campaign were discussed; and it was agreed that no major operations could be undertaken until after January. It was decided, in principle, that two Chinese forces, one based on Ledo and the other in Yunnan, should undertake operations to clear the Japanese from North-Eastern Burma. The Ledo Force would be under the direct operational control of Lieut.-General Stilwell. The Yunnan armies were to be directly under a Chinese commander-in-chief, General Chen Cheng.³ Both these forces were to come, through Lieut.-General Stilwell, under my over-all command—but in the case of the Yunnan Force, not until it had crossed the frontier into Burma.

7. I made it clear that no date could be guaranteed for achieving the first target of 10,000 tons a month of air-supply to China over the Hump; for if operations were undertaken which largely depended on air-supply, Hump tonnage could not be given over-riding priority. British operations would include an advance into Central Burma from Imphal, and one on the coast of Arakan; an operation by six Long-Range Penetration Brigades; and an amphibious operation, the exact nature of which would be decided later. The Generalissimo, who laid great stress on the need for a successful amphibious operation, and a decisive naval victory, said he hoped we would have a superior fleet in the Bay of Bengal. I replied that I had not yet received specific assurances of a big build-up for the fleet, but that I expected naval reinforcements to arrive very soon. The Generalissimo accepted this; but made his support contingent on an amphibious operation being carried out, supported by an adequate battle-fleet.

¹ Commanding the 10th U.S. Air Force in South-East Asia.
² Commanding the 14th U.S. Air Force in China.

8. On the 24th October, the day after my return from the discussions at Chungking, I received my first directive from the Prime Minister.⁴ This confirmed the instructions concerning my appointment; and repeated the strategical decisions which had been taken at Quebec, by which I was given two main tasks to perform. Firstly, the enemy was to be engaged as closely and continuously as possible, and his forces (especially his air forces) worn down so that he would be compelled to divert reinforcements from the Pacific theatre. Secondly, but of no less importance, I was to maintain and enlarge our contacts with China, both by the air route, and by making direct contact in Northern Burma by the use (amongst other methods) of suitably organised, air-supplied ground forces of the greatest possible strength. Full use was to be made of the advantage which the sea-power and air-power at my disposal would give me. In putting forward my proposals for amphibious operations in 1944, I was to choose a point, or points, of attack, whose seizure would induce a powerful reaction from the enemy; and this point, or points, must provide options for a further stroke planned in the light of this reaction.

9. The Prime Minister's directive specified that, at least four weeks before my first major amphibious operation, H.M. Government would provide me with a battle-fleet, based on Ceylon; and that this would be sufficiently strong to fight a general engagement with any force which it was considered the Japanese could afford to detach from the Pacific. The directive further specified that for this purpose the Eastern Fleet would be equipped with at least ten escort carriers, as well as with such armoured fleet carriers as might be available. In view of the Generalissimo's attitude, this news was extremely welcome; for I knew that it would clinch his participation in the coming Burma campaign.

10. The Commanders-in-Chief, and Lieut.-General Pownall and Major-General Wedemeyer, who were jointly examining plans for the Burma campaign, had been instructed to make a particular study of CULVERIN—an amphibious operation which the Prime Minister particularly wished carried out in Northern Sumatra. The only resources at our disposal for this were those which at the Casablanca Conference had been allotted to India Command and the Eastern Fleet for amphibious operations against Akyab and Ramree Island; and we had been given to understand, in previous discussions in London, that it was unlikely that we should obtain any more. It was estimated that it would not be possible to carry out the operation

³ Subsequently replaced on account of sickness.

⁴ See Appendix C.

with these resources alone: this conclusion was communicated to the Chiefs of Staff on the 17th October and they were asked for a decision. On the 28th October, the Chiefs of Staff telegraphed that no further resources would be available to the theatre; this made the projected assault on Sumatra out of the question, and CULVERIN was cancelled at once.

11. The next best objective, and one which was within the scope of the resources actually in South-East Asia, or definitely allocated to the Command, appeared to be the Andaman Islands. These lay in the middle of the enemy's outer perimeter of air and naval bases,¹ which stretched from Southern Burma to Sumatra; the seizure of the airfield at Port Blair would breach this perimeter and afford shore-based fighter cover for amphibious convoys passing through it. It would also provide a base for reconnaissance of the Kra Isthmus, Malaya, and Sumatra; and, more important, for bombing the recently completed Bangkok-Moulmein railway, and shipping in the Gulf of Siam. Port Blair harbour would also provide a valuable advanced naval base for light forces and landing craft. This operation was unlikely to induce a powerful reaction from the enemy; but, since it would provide a good base for future operations as soon as new resources became available, it would at least give several options for a subsequent amphibious stroke; and would therefore partly fulfil the terms of my directive.

12. Through November, intensive planning was carried out by all the staffs; and by the third week in November seven separate, but related operations had been decided on:—

- (a) the capture of the Andaman Islands by amphibious assault (BUCCANEER) by 33 Corps, with naval, and naval air support ;
- (b) on the Arakan front², an advance by 15 Corps, supported by 224 Group, R.A.F., and naval coastal forces, to secure positions further south on the Mayu Peninsula and along the Arakan coast. (This involved an advance up to and including the Maungdaw-Buthidaung road and, eventually, the capture of Akyab with amphibious forces);
- (c) on the Central front,³ an advance by 4 Corps supported by 221 Group, R.A.F., across the Chindwin river;
- (d) on the N.C.A.C. front,⁴ an advance by Lieut-General Stilwell's Chinese Army in India, supported by the Northern Air Sector Force,

down the Hukawng Valley to the Myitkyina⁵–Mogaung area to secure the trace of the Ledo Road into China.

The operations on the N.C.A.C. front were to be supplemented by:—

- (e) an advance by the Chinese Expeditionary Force from Yunnan supported by the 14th U.S. Air Force from Paoshan to Bhamo and Lashio, to secure the China end of the Ledo Road;
- (f) operations in support of (d) and (e) by Major-General Wingate's Special Force, supported by No. 1 Air Commando and the Third Tactical Air Force; and
- (g) the capture, by 50 Indian Parachute Brigade, of the airfield at Rail Indaw, with the subsequent fly-in by Troop Carrier Command of 26 Indian Division, who were to hold the town until Lieut-General Stilwell's forces could reach Mogaung—when the two were to join forces along the railway.

13. It was important that early approval for operations should be obtained from the Combined Chiefs of Staff; for Lease-Lend equipment was only released in the United States for operations which had been approved. Owing to our low priority we were not in a position to accumulate stocks; and we were also at the end of a very long line of communication—which meant that it took a long time for stores from the United States to reach the theatre, be sorted out, and finally be delivered to the troops.

14. I had been invited to attend the Cairo Conference (SEXTANT); and arrived in Cairo on the 21st November. The Generalissimo had been invited to arrive at the same time as myself; there was therefore no time for me to lay my plans before the British Chiefs of Staff, let alone the Combined Chiefs of Staff, before the first plenary meeting of the Generalissimo with the President, the Prime Minister, and the Combined Chiefs of Staff, took place. At this meeting, those South-East Asia plans which concerned the Generalissimo were formulated and approved; but he made the participation of the Yunnan Expeditionary Force conditional on my carrying out an amphibious operation concurrently. I had told him at Chungking that I intended to do this; and the President and Prime Minister now gave him an assurance that the operation would take place, and that a large Allied fleet would be in the Bay of Bengal. The Generalissimo objected to any reduction of the monthly air-lift into China; but it was made clear to him that the target

¹ See Map 21 (on page 93).

² See 'A', paragraph 71; and Maps 5 and 7 (before page 1).

³ See 'A', paragraph 72; and Maps 5 and 7.

⁴ See 'A', paragraph 73; and Maps 5 and 7.

⁵ Pronounced "Mitchinar".

figure could not be guaranteed while land operations were in progress. After the President had explained that no more U.S. transport aircraft could be spared for our two theatres, the Generalissimo agreed to accept a reduced figure if diversions became necessary. But he asked that all possible steps should be taken by the U.S. Air Transport Command to maintain a lift of at least 10,000 tons; and this was agreed to.

15. At subsequent meetings of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, all the South-East Asia plans for early 1944 were approved, and the necessary resources allocated. I was given an assurance that additional resources would be sent to my theatre on the defeat of Germany, which was then expected to take place before the Winter of 1944. The Royal Air Force target alone was to be 154 squadrons by October, 1944. The Eastern Fleet was to be built up to a size capable of engaging the largest battle-fleet the Japanese were likely to be able to send to Singapore; and was eventually to include an amphibious lift for three divisions. It was decided that six more aircraft carriers would be required for BUCCANEER, to meet the Japanese air threat; but these could not be spared from British resources. I reminded Admiral King that he had told me, when I reported to him officially in Washington, to call on him if I ever needed U.S. men-of-war; and he at once generously offered to place six aircraft-carriers at my disposal for this operation.¹

16. I returned to Delhi on the 27th November; and flew to Ramgarh on the 30th to meet the Generalissimo on his way back to Chungking. After we had together inspected 10,000 Chinese troops of Lieut.-General Stilwell's command, and had both addressed them on parade, he formally placed all the Chinese forces in India and Burma under my command.² It had been difficult, at Cairo, to obtain a precise statement from the Chinese on any major point; for, unlike the President and the Prime Minister, the Generalissimo did not delegate authority to members of his staff; with the result that points which were understood to have been agreed on by all the staffs concerned, were subsequently challenged by the Generalissimo in person. I now took the opportunity of clearing various points with him concerning the operations in Northern Burma which we were to carry out jointly.

17. I also notified him of the fact that the political paragraph which he had added to the "gentleman's agreement",³ after I had agreed the military paragraph, was not acceptable to the Prime Minister. I was able to confirm, however, that the Generalissimo

regarded the military paragraph itself as binding; and that, as well as operations in Siam and French Indo-China, the agreement covered the introduction into those countries of Intelligence officers. I communicated my clearance of this point to my Deputy Chief of Staff, who had remained in Cairo with other senior members of my staff, so that they could take up any outstanding points with the British and U.S. Chiefs of Staff on the latter's return from the Teheran Conference.⁴

18. At Cairo, I had taken up the question of integrating the British and U.S. air forces in South-East Asia, which I considered an essential condition for air planning and future operations. But it had not been brought forward on the agenda; since General Arnold had told me that in my place he would certainly do this, while Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Portal (later Marshal of the Royal Air Force the Viscount Portal of Hungerford—the Chief of the British Air Staff) and General Marshall, had agreed—the last-named adding that it was within my competence as Theatre Commander to reorganise the Command as I saw fit. On my return from SEXTANT, I found that an incident had occurred which will indicate the unsatisfactory situation which existed. Before going to Cairo, I had ordered that reinforcements should be flown to Fort Hertz; and since the Fort Hertz garrison was primarily engaged in protecting U.S. airfields, I had ordered that the 10th U.S. Army Air Force should fly them in. While Lieut.-General Stilwell and I were in Cairo, his Headquarters had cancelled this order without informing my Headquarters; and as a result the first elements of the Burma Regiment had actually been turned back in the air, and landed at the airfields they had started from.

19. When I heard of this, I promptly drafted orders for the integration of the two air forces⁵. When I showed the integration order to Lieut.-General Stilwell on the 11th December, he objected very strongly—but I signed it and issued it on the same day, while forwarding his written protest to the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. All the Allied air forces throughout South-East Asia were now put under Air Chief Marshal Peirse, who became the Allied Air Commander-in-Chief. Major-General Stratemeyer was appointed as his second-in-command; and was given direct command of Eastern Air Command, which was formed to control those Allied air forces fighting in the Burma campaign. The new Eastern Air Command Headquarters, which controlled all the operational air units in Assam and Bengal, consisted basically of the Operations Section of the old 10th U.S. Army Air

¹ Operation BUCCANEER was cancelled (see 'B', paragraph 21); so the need for them did not arise.

² See 'B', paragraph 6.

³ See 'A', paragraph 17 and Appendix D.

⁴ This conference (EUREKA) had followed immediately on the one at Cairo.

⁵ See Appendix E.

Force organisation in the India-Burma sector, but now also included a Royal Air Force element. The forces under its command were divided into four main components: the Third Tactical Air Force,¹ a Strategic Air Force;² a Troop Carrier Command;³ and a Photographic Reconnaissance Force.⁴

20. Major-General Stratemeyer reorganised the combat squadrons of 10th U.S. Army Air Force (excepting the heavy bombers) into the Northern Air Sector Force,⁵ which was put under the command of H.Q. Third Tactical Air Force (Third T.A.F.). It was responsible for air support to the N.C.A.C. forces, and for the air defence of the air-ferry route over the Hump. 224 Group (which was responsible for air support to the Arakan front) and 221 Group (which was charged with air support to the Central front), were similarly put under the command of H.Q. Third T.A.F.; 221 Group moving their Headquarters from Calcutta to Imphal in December, so as to be alongside 4 Corps Headquarters. In due course, the Combined Chiefs of Staff approved the action I had taken; but the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff stipulated that, in view of their commitments to China, they reserved the right to transfer units from the 10th U.S.A.A.F., under Major-General Stratemeyer, to the 14th U.S.A.A.F., under Major-General Chennault, in China. Apart from the compromises which this entailed, the final arrangements proved to be simple and efficient.

21. On the 5th December, the Chiefs of Staff telegraphed that, as a result of the Teheran Conference, operations against the continent of Europe might be given over-riding priority; and that the bulk of my landing-craft might be withdrawn during the next few weeks. Since this would make BUCCANEER impossible, I was asked to suggest an alternative operation, on a smaller scale, which could be carried out in conjunction with the agreed British-American-Chinese land and air operations in Burma. I replied on the 6th December that no considerable operations in support of our amphibious strategy now appeared possible. In order to keep faith with the Generalissimo, however, and to use our few remaining amphibious resources to the best advantage, immediate investigations were begun into the feasibility of a reduced amphibious operation on the Arakan coast.

22. On the 7th December, I was ordered by the Chiefs of Staff to send back to Europe Force "G", which comprised more than half my amphibious resources; and since any operation against the Andamans was now also impracticable, the plan to

breach the Japanese perimeter had to be postponed. I hoped, however, that the situation in Burma might still be retrieved, and I decided to employ Force "F" (which contained my few remaining amphibious resources) in a reduced amphibious operation (PIGSTICK), which the Commanders-in-Chief regarded as feasible with the resources that remained to us. It was planned to land 20,000 men (including the whole of 2 British Division) on the southern part of the Mayu Peninsula, behind the enemy dispositions in the northern half of the Peninsula, where they were facing 15 Corps; so as to cut off the greater part of 55 Japanese Division. This operation (if the Generalissimo could be induced to accept it) would at any rate keep the rest of my plans alive. And since neither the target for BUCCANEER, nor the number of troops involved, had been disclosed to the Generalissimo, I felt that an amphibious operation against the actual coast of Burma (even if it was on a smaller scale than the one which had been projected against the Andamans) would prove acceptable to him. I therefore instructed Lieut.-General Carton de Wiart to request him to accept it as the amphibious operation he had postulated.

23. The President had telegraphed to the Generalissimo, however, expressing his regret at the withdrawal of part of my amphibious resources; but stating that I would still carry out a reduced amphibious operation with what I had left, and that, as promised, we would keep naval control of the Bay of Bengal. Unfortunately, the President's telegram appears to have been taken by the Generalissimo as a breach of faith, although the transfer of the amphibious operation from the Andamans to Burma could hardly have affected the immediate operations of the Chinese forces. He replied that in cancelling BUCCANEER the President and Prime Minister were not keeping their part of the Cairo agreement; and that, though he was prepared to leave the Chinese Army in India at my disposal, he now considered himself released from his promise that the Expeditionary Force would advance from Yunnan. The fly-in of 26 Indian Division to Rail Indaw⁶ was now cancelled; for it would have been difficult in any case to find sufficient transport aircraft to fly them in and maintain them there—but now that the Yunnan Force was not to advance, there was little point in expending any of our limited air transport on maintaining an isolated garrison at this point.

24. Even though the Generalissimo had not accepted it, planning for operation PIGSTICK went forward early in December. On a visit to the Arakan

¹ Under Air Marshal Sir John Baldwin.

² Under Brig.-General (later Major-General) H. C. Davidson, U.S.A.A.F.

³ Under Brig.-General W. D. Old, U.S.A.A.F.

⁴ Under Group Captain S. G. Wise.

⁵ Under Colonel John F. Egan, U.S.A.A.F.

⁶ See 'B', paragraph 12 (g).

front, on the 13th, I found the Army, Corps and Divisional Commanders greatly in favour of this operation. But on the 27th, the Commanders-in-Chief stated that unless firm approval could be obtained by the end of the month, it would not be possible to catch the favourable period in February; while by March the swell would be too great to enable the operation to be carried out—or at all events for the Army to be maintained across the beaches. I therefore gave them orders to go ahead with this operation, and I informed the Chiefs of Staff accordingly.

25. On the 30th, the Chiefs of Staff telegraphed that, in view of combined operations that were to be carried out in the European theatre—and the fact that the Generalissimo did not in any case regard PIGSTICK as an adequate substitute for BUCCANEER and would not let his Yunnan Force advance—the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff had been asked to agree that all amphibious operations in South-East Asia should be abandoned. On the 7th January, PIGSTICK was definitely cancelled; and I was ordered to return all the fast Landing Ships, Tank, to England, and the remainder of Force "F" to the Mediterranean. No amphibious operation now remained possible before the south-west monsoon.

26. Our projected operations had now been reduced to four: an offensive without landing craft in Arakan, an advance from Ledo, operations by Long-Range Penetration Brigades, and a limited advance across the Chindwin river. None of these could result in a big strategic victory; nor could they achieve any of the major objectives laid down in my original directive from the Prime Minister; since these operations alone could not open the road to China during 1944, and the possibility of our engaging large numbers of enemy troops at numerous points now depended largely on the initiative of the Japanese themselves. I could not help feeling anxious about the possible effects of continued procrastination on our efforts at building up morale. It now seemed likely, however, that our operational effort in the first half of 1944 could not be reduced any further; and it was on this assumption that I issued a final directive to the Commanders-in-Chief on the 14th January, outlining their tasks in the operations to be undertaken.

27. At Cairo it had not been possible for me to give a considered opinion on long-term strategy, because my Headquarters had so recently been set up that there had not been time for a comprehensive survey of the general position. But by the beginning of January, a series of conclusions had been reached which in my

opinion coincided with my general instructions as to strategy for South-East Asia—as well as fitting in with the wider pattern of operations in the Pacific. Moreover, now that only a greatly reduced scale of land and air operations would be possible, it seemed to me that a new conception for long-term strategy was needed for the theatre, and that my directive required modification in the light of recent developments.

28. These conclusions, which were telegraphed to the Chiefs of Staff on the 8th January, fell under four chief headings:

- (a) with regard to China, our first concern must be to maintain the 14th U.S.A.A.F., and to develop the plan for operating Super-Fortresses (B-29) from the Chengtu area of China, with rear bases in Bengal. In the last eight months of 1943, the 14th U.S.A.A.F. had destroyed a large amount of enemy shipping and aircraft; and they had achieved this on an approximate monthly supply-rate by air of 2,500 tons. If this supply-rate could be increased, it would mean the destruction of more enemy shipping and aircraft; but this could not be done so long as 14th U.S.A.A.F. priorities suffered from competition with those for other projects in China and the N.C.A.C. area of Burma;
- (b) the cancellation of the Yunnan offensive and the Indaw operation¹ meant that the Ledo Road could not be extended into China during 1944: and that deliveries by this land route would not be on any appreciable scale, until the overall Pacific strategy was likely to give results. By this time, moreover, far greater deliveries would be possible by sea, if a different strategy were followed. The Ledo Road strategy was likely to become stale before the road had been secured and put into operation; and in any case the reconquest of the whole of Burma, which was essential for the eventual security of the road, would automatically re-open the old Burma Road. It seemed, therefore, that to continue the Ledo Road operation beyond what was required for the defence of the air route, would be to divert a valuable amount of material, labour, and haulage space from more essential objects;
- (c) the main effort in South-East Asia must be co-ordinated with the main Allied thrusts from the central and south-west Pacific; and this could best be done by penetrating the enemy's perimeter in the Malaya-Netherlands East Indies area, and then taking a port in the China Sea. An essential preliminary to this would be the

¹ See 'B', paragraph 12 (g).

capture of Sumatra—which would in any case justify itself as an independent operation; and (d) the main requirements for the ground forces could be found within the theatre; provided that operations in Northern Burma were confined to those moves which were required to secure the air route. But I required a substantial increase in shipping, landing craft, and seaborne air cover—all of which would presumably become available after the collapse of Germany.

29. Since it was important that representatives from S.E.A.C. should be available for consultations, at a time when the terms of my new directive were under review, I informed the Chiefs of Staff that I proposed to send a special Mission to London and Washington, which would present a detailed appreciation of my conclusions, and would be empowered to consult with the British and American Chiefs of Staff. The Chiefs of Staff gave permission for a Mission to be sent in a month's time. This month was spent in working out a detailed appreciation of future strategy; and the whole matter was finally considered on the 31st January, at a meeting attended by General Auchinleck, Lieut.-General Stilwell, and my Commanders-in-Chief. Although there was still some divergence of opinion as regards the timing of the operations I wished to carry out, all the commanders, except Lieut.-General Stilwell, agreed that they were highly desirable.

30. Lieut.-General Stilwell opposed a change in our long-term strategy; saying that he did not consider that we could bank on the defeat of Germany in October, 1944; and that even when Germany had collapsed, there might not be the men and the material available that we expected. I pointed out to Lieut.-General Stilwell that, apart from the consideration of Germany's defeat, the amphibious resources used in the invasion of France would in any case be available to us when the invasion had been successfully completed. He considered, however, that it would be better to recommend long-term operations based on the resources in hand, and to plan accordingly. Lieut.-General Stilwell did not accept my view that the route of advance to a port on the China coast was shorter via Sumatra and Malaya than via Burma and Yunnan; pointing out also that, whereas the difficulties of a campaign in Burma were known, those in Sumatra and the Kra Isthmus were still imponderable.

31. On the 5th February, the Mission (AXIOM), headed by Major-General Wedemeyer (one of the originators of the "sea" as opposed to the "road" strategy) left Delhi for London and Washington.

Although I did not agree with the views that my Deputy, Lieut.-General Stilwell, had advanced, I directed that these should be fully and impartially presented to the British Chiefs of Staff and to the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff; but in one of his other capacities, Lieut.-General Stilwell considered it his duty to send his own Mission to Washington, ahead of mine, without informing me of the fact.



In this Report, land operations are set out in greater detail than air operations: not only because, in the last analysis, the progress of a campaign is measured by the army's advance, and by its occupation of vital objectives—but also because air operations are too flexible and varied to fit easily into a chronological narrative. It is important, however, to remember that air operations—striking at the enemy's airfields; at his supply centres; at his ports and shipping; at his rail and road communications; at his forward concentrations, and also at his front-line positions—formed the background and the unceasing accompaniment to the land fighting. Land advances depended for their success on air protection from enemy interference. In most cases, the air forces provided the spearhead of the attack; during the operations they fought the enemy in the air and harried him on the ground; and after the battle, they continued to attack his communications and bases, and to weaken his fighting organisation. It will not be possible to form an authentic overall picture of the land-air campaign if this is not borne in mind.

(i) THE ARAKAN FRONT

33. Throughout the winter, operations had been carried out on the three main fronts, and were being planned for a subsidiary front behind the enemy lines. In Arakan, our aim was to secure positions from which we would eventually be able to capture Akyab with amphibious support.¹ In November, as soon as the ground had dried out sufficiently, 13 Corps had begun to advance from positions covering Cox's Bazaar, against the forward positions of 55 Japanese Division on the Mayu Peninsula. This was dominated by the Mayu Range, which rises very steeply to an average height of 1,000 feet. To the west of the range lies a flat coastal belt which stretches to the sea, and to the mouth of the Naaf river; to the east lies the Kalapanzin Valley. This flat country is mainly paddy, interspersed

¹ See 'B', paragraph 12 (b), Map 3 (before page 1) and Map 11 (facing page 44).