

held command of the sea, advance beyond Moulmein by the Japanese would be open to a British flank attack.

Continuing north, there were again only tracks until reaching the road leading from the Bangkok-Chieng Mai railway, through Chieng Rai and thence via Kentung to Taunggyi. On the Siamese side of the frontier this road was good; on our side it was fair-weather only for part of the way.

There were only tracks leading from Burma into Northern Indo-China, and these involved the crossing of the River Mekong. Into China itself there was a fair track from Kentung to Puerhfu, and, secondly, the main road from Lashio to Kunming. A road from Bhamo joined the latter near the frontier.

Westwards, a start had been made on a road communication with India, but this was by no means complete when war broke out.

Landing grounds had been established in the Tenasserim Peninsula with the object of facilitating the movement of aircraft between Burma and Malaya; the main ones were at Tavoy, Mergui and Victoria Point. The last was very isolated, and it was realised that it probably could not be held for long if war with Japan broke out.

19. It was estimated that the total force which the Japanese could bring against Burma, using land communications only, would be about two divisions, of which one division would be on the road running through Chieng Rai. The Chiefs of Staff considered in January 1941 that, although four enemy divisions could be maintained at railhead on the Bangkok-Chieng Mai railway, it was unlikely that even one division could be maintained on the Burma side of the frontier, owing to the limited road communications. The situation would, however, be completely altered should the Japanese get control of sea communications in the Bay of Bengal. In that case, their capture of Mergui, and possibly Tavoy, would only be a question of time. They would be able to outflank our positions at Moulmein, and our line of communication thence with Rangoon; and, should Singapore fall or be invested, would be able to bring by sea against Burma a force much greater than two divisions.

20. Turning to the Chieng Rai line of advance, owing to the indifferent road on our side of the frontier and the shortage of Mechanical Transport, it was impracticable to maintain a big force east of the Salween. The policy, therefore, was to fight delaying actions as far forward as possible, and to make the Salween the main line of defence.

Owing to the heavy growth of trees along the Japanese lines of advance, conditions were not generally favourable for air reconnaissance. On the other hand, there were certain open defiles against which air bombing would probably have been very effective, and it was hoped that sufficient air force would be available to deter the Japanese advance to a great extent. For this purpose aerodromes were constructed with the object of being able to concentrate either on Central or South Burma, and against either the Mesod road or the Chieng Rai road.

Demolitions were prepared along the enemy lines of advance, especially on the Chieng Rai road.

### *Engineering Programme.*

21. There was a great shortage of engineers, both civil and military. In planning the engineering programme, priority was given first to aerodrome construction and accommodation for the Royal Air Force; secondly, to road construction for strategical and tactical purposes, including ferries; and then accommodation for troops and stores, including ammunition.

In the time available there was no opportunity to complete elaborate concrete defence lines; all that could be done was to construct field defences on the probable lines of approach. There were limitations even to this: first, the difficulty of working and the prevalence of malaria in the rainy season; secondly, the number of troops available; and thirdly, the lack of Mechanical Transport, until the Autumn of 1941, which severely limited the number of men that could be maintained near, and east of, the Salween River.

### *Strength of Forces.*

22. The composition of the military forces in Burma when war broke out is shown in Appendix G, and the situation regarding Anti-Aircraft guns in Appendix F.

As will be seen, the organisation was somewhat complicated from the desire to make every possible use of local resources. Originally, the Burma Frontier Force had been independent of the General Officer Commanding in peace, and only came under him in time of war. His Excellency Sir Reginald Dorman Smith decided to put the Burma Frontier Force under the General Officer Commanding's control in peace as well, thus simplifying the organisation. The change was effected on the 10th November, 1941.

The Independent Company was abolished before war with Japan broke out, the British portion being used mainly for additional squads for Chinese guerillas, and the Burmese returning to their original units.

23. In the Singapore Conference of October 1940 it was recommended that as regards the Army, the force immediately required for the defence of Burma was as follows:—

- 5 infantry brigades and two additional battalions;
- 1 field regiment and 1 battery;
- 2 mountain batteries;
- 1 anti-tank battery;
- 1 heavy A.A. regiment (24 guns);
- 1 light A.A. battery, non-mobile (16 guns);
- 1 light A.A. battery, mobile; and
- 1 company light tanks.

This was exclusive of the Burma Frontier Force and of the Territorial and Auxiliary forces allotted to internal security duties. It was also stated that an additional requirement for the long-term problem was: one Division, less certain units, which made the fighting portion of this Division as follows:—

- 2 infantry brigades, each of 3 battalions;
- 1 reconnaissance unit;
- 1 field regiment (24 guns);
- 1 medium regiment (16 guns);
- 1 light A.A. regiment (48 guns);
- 1 anti-tank battery; and
- 1 machine gun battalion.

In their comments of January 1941, on the Conference, the Chiefs of Staff stated that they considered both the threat of attack, and the demands for land forces, had been overstated.