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OPERATIONS IN THE INDO-BURMA THEATRE BASED ON INDIA FROM 21 JUNE 1943 TO 15 NOVEMBER 1943.

The following Despatch was submitted to the Secretary of State for War on the 22nd November, 1945, by FIELD MARSHAL SIR CLAUDE J. E. AUCHINLECK, G.C.B., G.C.I.E., C.S.I., D.S.O., O.B.E., A.D.C., Commander-in-Chief, India.

INTRODUCTION.

This Despatch covers the period between my appointment as Commander-in-Chief of the India Command on the 20th June, 1943, in succession to Field Marshal Viscount Wavell and the 15th November, 1943, the date on which I handed over responsibility for the conduct of operations against the Japanese in the Indo-Burma Theatre to Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten on his appointment as Supreme Allied Commander of the newly created South East Asia Command.

In his Despatch covering the operations in the India Command from January to June, 1943, Field Marshal Viscount Wavell describes how he planned to capture Akyab and establish our forces on the line of the Chindwin River between Kalewa and Sittaung with the Eastern Army under General Irwin. He goes on to show how the Eastern Army failed in its objects owing to lack of resources, the inexperience of the troops engaged, and the fact that the Japanese were able to bring up substantial reinforcements. At the beginning of the monsoon our forces in Arakan and the Japanese forces opposing them were generally speaking back in the positions they had held at the start of the operations.

As Field Marshal Wavell says, the greatest gain from the campaign was experience; the serious loss was prestige and morale. It became my most urgent task to rectify defects in training and equipment, and to restore the morale and prestige of the Army which had no

doubt suffered a severe shock, so much so that commanders and men were apt to place the need to protect themselves against the Japanese before the need to seek him out and destroy him. There had been neither time nor opportunity to give the troops that specialised training in fighting in the jungle in which the Japanese were adept, having trained their troops to this end before they entered the war. The disastrous campaigns in Malaya and Burma had invested the Japanese Army with a reputation for skill and invincibility, far removed from reality, and this had to be destroyed before the offensive spirit could be fully re-established throughout our own Army.

Internally India had remained quiet after the disturbances of August, 1942. The Congress Party, which had been responsible for this outbreak, was made powerless for the time being by the internment of its leaders and by other measures, and unrest subsided. There were, however, other causes giving rise to anxiety. Various factors, including the unfavourable course of the war against Japan, had shaken public confidence and caused a sharp rise in the prices of food, cloth and other basic commodities towards the end of 1942. The impracticability of setting up any satisfactory system of rationing of essential articles in a country so administratively undeveloped as India led to widespread hoarding, and an economic crisis ensued. This persisted throughout the period covered by this Despatch, hampering the war effort, embarrassing the internal administration and giving rise to famine conditions in Bengal and parts of Southern India.

Nevertheless in spite of an almost unrelieved tale of failure in the Indian Theatre, the turn in Allied fortunes in Europe and Africa at the end of 1942 and the entirely changed aspect