

resources were quite insufficient to develop the lengthy Tiddim route in time, and that it was in fact unlikely that it could ever be made into a serviceable line of communication owing to the engineering difficulties. It seemed likely that the monsoon would find us with no reliable road into Burma at all. I therefore ordered the diversion of our road-making effort to the improvement of the Tamu road, which was at least known to be practicable.

23. The lack of transport, of road-making material and of other administrative resources, which are referred to elsewhere in this despatch, made it necessary to postpone operations against Kalewa and Sittaung. When it was found that the Chinese troops in Yunnan had no intention of making a move, the strategical basis of our advance disappeared; and in the end operations in the Kabaw Valley were confined to strong offensive patrols.

OPERATIONS OF 77TH INDIAN INFANTRY BRIGADE.

(WINGATE'S FORCE.)

24. Early in 1942, while operations in Burma were still being conducted, I had asked for the services of Lieut.-Colonel O. C. Wingate, D.S.O., who had served under my command in Palestine in 1938 and in Abyssinia in 1941, to organise guerilla activity in Burma. He arrived too late to effect anything in Burma; but on the withdrawal from Burma in May 1942 he put before me a proposal to train a brigade for long-range penetration behind the enemy lines. The brigade was to have a special organisation and was to be independent of the normal lines of communication and to be supplied from the air. I approved Colonel Wingate's proposals, and placed him in command of a Brigade formed of the 13th Battalion of the King's Regiment, the 3/2nd Gurkha Rifles, 142nd Commando Company and 2nd Battalion of Burma Rifles. These were not picked units in any way, but were the only ones easily available at the time. The formation was known as 77th Indian Infantry Brigade and began jungle training in the Central Provinces in July 1942. Its original rôle in the reconquest of Burma was to penetrate into Central Burma at a time when both Upper and Lower Burma were being attacked by large forces. When our restricted resources permitted only a very limited advance in Upper Burma, I considered whether I should employ the Brigade at all during the winter of 1942-43. With a view, however, to giving the maximum possible assistance to the Chinese advance which was due to take place on March 1st (see paragraph 2 above), I decided to use the Brigade in Upper Burma to cut the enemy line of communication to Mvityina and if possible also to Bhamo and Lashio. It was accordingly moved to Imphal early in 1943. At the beginning of February I learnt from General Stilwell that the Chinese in Yunnan had no intention of advancing. The operations of the 77th Brigade would thus have no support and no strategical purpose. I had therefore to decide whether it was wise to employ the Brigade at all. I went to Imphal and had a long discussion with Brigadier Wingate on the evening of February 6th, as a result of which I decided to let the operation continue, in order to gain experience of the working of these

columns. I inspected the Brigade, which was organised into seven columns, on February 7th; and it began its move next day. Each column was self-contained with pack transport, and had machine-guns and mortars. There was no artillery, and supply was by local purchase and air.

25. The directive given to the Brigade was to enter Burma through the front held by the 4th Corps; to cut the main North and South railway line between Mandalay and Myitkyina; to harass the enemy in the Shwebo area; and then, if circumstances were favourable, to cross the Irrawaddy and cut the railway line Maymyo-Lashio.

To assist the main body to cross the River Chindwin (about Tonhe) and reach the railway some 150 miles distant without opposition, two of its Gurkha columns were sent to cross the river 50 miles to the South, and to co-operate with movements by the 23rd Division in that area, who were to simulate an attack on the enemy position at Kalewa. These two columns were to cross the river three days before the main body of the Brigade, and then, after moving south to attract the attention of the enemy, to move quickly to the east, cross the river Irrawaddy at Tagaung, and await the arrival of the main force in the mountains around Mongmit. Supply dropping for these columns during this period was to be by day so as to attract attention; otherwise the normal practice was to drop supplies by night.

So far as can be judged the deception was successful; at any rate the main body had crossed the Chindwin without opposition by the 18th February, and succeeded in reaching the railway unopposed.

Two columns fell out of the enterprise at an early stage. One of the two southerly columns was trapped in an ambush, broke up and returned to Assam in small parties; and one column of the main body, in a brush with some enemy, became scattered, lost much equipment and was cut off from the other columns; as this column had shown poor fighting qualities its commander decided to march it back to the Chindwin.

26. The main body reached the railway and successfully carried out a series of demolitions; four bridges were destroyed, the side of a gorge blasted to bring down thousands of tons of rock on the line, and the track was cut in 70 other places.

I had given Brigadier Wingate a free hand to decide whether after cutting the railway he returned to Assam or crossed the Irrawaddy and raided further east. As one of the main objects of the expedition was to gain experience, he eventually decided to cross the Irrawaddy, largely in order to ascertain whether the equipment and methods of river-crossing evolved during training were practical. The crossing of the Irrawaddy by the various widely separated columns was accomplished between March 9th and 18th.

27. Across the Irrawaddy the Brigade began to encounter difficulties. It was hot, water was not easy to find, and the health of men and animals began to suffer. There were more Japanese in the area than had been expected, and many M.T. tracks which gave the enemy mobility, hence it became difficult to