

was a most unfavourable theatre, into which I should certainly not have made a deep land advance on any scale had sea transport been available. I also realised that the troops available had had little opportunity of training in jungle warfare. I hoped, however, that, if the advance in Arakan could proceed rapidly, it would be difficult for the Japanese to reinforce in time; and considered it was better to take the risks involved than to remain inactive on this front during the winter.

Instructions for this operation were issued to G.O.C.-in-C., Eastern Army, on the 19th November, 1942. The progress and results will be described in a subsequent despatch. By the end of the year 14th Indian Division had crossed the Burmese frontier and had occupied Maungdaw and Buthidaung, from which the Japanese withdrew without fighting. The division was preparing to push on down to Foul Point at the southern end of the Mayu Peninsula, from whence it was intended to launch an assault on Akyab. Unfortunately, rain had already delayed the progress of the division.

NORTHERN BURMA OPERATIONS.

32. I had a conference with General Stilwell on the 17th December at which plans for Upper Burma in the early part of 1943 were discussed. General Stilwell was anxious, in spite of the administrative difficulties, to secure as much of northern Burma as possible, in order to cover the construction of a road from Ledo by Myitkyina to Paoshan to join the Burma Road, and also to secure the airfield at Myitkyina. The construction of the Ledo-Myitkyina road had now been undertaken by the Americans. It was agreed that all preparations should be continued with the object of an advance into Upper Burma from Yunnan (Chinese force), Ledo (Chinese Corps from Ramgarh) and Manipur (British IV Corps), to begin on the 1st March if the progress of road-making and administrative situation permitted.

33. On IV Corps front, 23rd Indian Division had advanced two brigades into the Tamu area in the Kabaw valley, while 17th Indian Division moved forward towards the Chin hills down a new road which was being constructed towards Tiddim. There was some patrol incidents in the Kabaw and Chindwin valleys but no major action.

In northern Burma Kachin levies based on Sumprabum did some excellent work in harassing Japanese forces north of Myitkyina. In the Hukawng valley a small force of Japanese and rebel Burmans advanced to Shingbuiyang in October but withdrew after bombing attacks by the United States Air Force.

OPERATIONS OF THE R.I.N.

34. The main work of the Royal Indian Navy in the period under review has been convoy duty. Several Japanese submarines were known to be operating in the Indian Ocean, but no ship in convoy was lost. A number routed independently were sunk, chiefly in the vicinity of the Mozambique Channel, but generally speaking enemy submarines were not numerous. Ships of the R.I.N. made a number of depth-charge attacks on possible submarines, but no sinkings were claimed.

On the 11th November H.M.I.S. *Bengal*, commanded by Lieutenant Wilson, while on passage from Australia to India convoying the

Dutch tanker *Ondina*, encountered two Japanese armed merchant cruisers south of Cocos Island. Though the enemy was greatly superior in strength, H.M.I.S. *Bengal* closed at once and fought a most spirited action at close range, sinking the larger of the enemy ships. The Dutch tanker gallantly supported *Bengal*. This action reflected the greatest credit on the commanders and crews of *Bengal* and *Ondina*.

Launches of the R.I.N. and of the Burma navy operated from Chittagong in support of the army's advance in Arakan.

AIR OPERATIONS, OCTOBER-DECEMBER.

35. With the improvement of the weather after the monsoon, a systematic air offensive was begun against the enemy airfields and communications in Burma, to the extent that our resources allowed. Attacks were made both by day and night and had undoubtedly very considerable effect. The air force also provided direct support for the Army in Arakan and Assam; defended by fighters Calcutta, Chittagong and other vulnerable points; protected shipping in the Bay of Bengal; carried out visual and photographic reconnaissance; and dropped large quantities of supplies in the Chin hills for the local troops, at Sumprabum for the Kachin levies and for the garrison of Fort Hertz.

The Japanese air force showed only sporadic activity. Between the 25th and 28th October the enemy made a series of heavy raids on airfields in the Dinjan area which the Americans had lately taken over. One of these caused considerable damage, since the warning system proved ineffective. In December, the enemy attacked our forward airfields in the Fenny and Chittagong areas and the docks at Chittagong; he caused little damage. At the end of the year he made a series of small attacks by night on Calcutta. These did little damage but caused an exodus of labour.

SUMMARY.

36. From the above it can be seen that the Indian Command had a full and eventful year in 1942. It had been rudely awakened from a somewhat detached interest in the war by the shock of Japan's aggression and the wholly unexpected disasters in Malaya and then Burma. When the danger approached closely, both the armed forces and the nation were unprepared to meet invasion. Ever since the beginning of the war India had sent troops abroad almost as quickly as they could be trained, and had kept in India, except for the minimum necessary for the defence of the N.W. Frontier and internal security, only new formations under training, with incomplete equipment. In 1942 a considerable proportion of these half-trained formations had been sent to Malaya or Burma in the hope of holding up the enemy. So that in March, 1942, India had not a single fully-trained division. The Air Force, as shown, was similarly ineffective and the Eastern Fleet was unable to control Indian waters. So India stood in greater peril of invasion than for some hundreds of years.

That India was able six months later to pass from a defensive to an offensive basis may be counted something of an achievement, especially in view of the administrative difficulties and internal troubles that were encountered. Prompt assistance was sent from the United