

206. This Despatch brings to an end the account of my command of 11 Army Group, and I cannot finish it without paying tribute to the magnificent team of officers and men who made up the forces under my command.

Though it is outside the period covered by my two Despatches I must refer briefly to the six months in 1943 in which I commanded Eastern Army out of which Fourteenth Army was born.

In those early days, deficiencies in equipment; shortage of trained reinforcements; lack of welfare arrangements; long service overseas; inadequate leave due to lack of accommodation and transport; indifferent rations; much sickness; slow mails; an apparent lack of interest at home in what was being done and endured on the Burma Front; and an exaggerated opinion of the efficiency of the Japanese had combined to lower the morale and destroy the confidence of the Army.

Without confidence and high morale, equipment and weapons, however good, are useless, and the re-creation of these two qualities was the first task to which we all had to address ourselves during the monsoon of 1943. Confidence could be created by training and improved equipment, morale by confidence and care for the spiritual and physical well being of the troops.

All through that monsoon, the Commander-in-Chief, India, did all that was possible to improve the training and, with his limited resources, the welfare of the troops.

Much was accomplished, and by October, 1943—when direction of the operations was about to pass to the Supreme Allied Commander; Fourteenth Army was about to be formed, and the weather moderated sufficiently to allow us to move—the work done during the monsoon began to bear fruit. Operations started, slowly at first, but with gathering momentum as their first encounters with the enemy showed the troops that the Japanese soldier, though tough and prepared to die rather than surrender, was not so skilful as themselves nor so well equipped.

The Army must have contained almost more diverse races than any other, even in this war, when so many nations have fought as Allies.

There were battalions from British county regiments distinguished in our history, and officers and men from every county in England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales serving in other arms or with units of the Indian and African forces.

The Indian units of which the bulk of Fourteenth Army was composed, came from many famous regiments, recruited from races whose names have been household words since first we went to India: Rajputs, Dogras, Sikhs, Jats, Mahommedans from the Punjab, Gurkhas,

Garhwalis and Madrassis to mention but a few of those who volunteered to fight for the King Emperor.

To the Army were added later divisions from our West and East African Colonies, composed of Hausas, Yorubas and Ibos from Nigeria; Kanjarga, Dagartis and Ashantis from the Gold Coast; Mendis and Timinis from Sierra Leone; Mandingos from Gambia; Nyasas and Yaos from Nyasaland; Manyamwezi and Manyema from Tanganyika; Akamba, Nandi and Kavirondo from Kenya; Baganda and Achole from Uganda; Somalis from Somaliland; Awemba and Angoni from Northern Rhodesia and many others too numerous to mention. All these men had volunteered to fight for the King.

The success of Fourteenth Army is the best testimonial to its officers and men and I cannot add anything to it. Victory was achieved by fine leading by all commanders from the highest to the most junior section leader; by the skill of the men in the ranks; by high courage in battle; by steady endurance under conditions of climate and health worse than almost anywhere in the world; by a determination to defeat the enemy, and by that spirit, which alone enables an army to exert its maximum strength, of co-operation among all ranks and arms.

It has been an immense source of pride to me to watch the growth of confidence and skill which enabled the officers and men of Fourteenth Army to inflict the first major defeat upon the Japanese and by unrelenting pursuit to drive them with crippling losses in men and material in disorder across the Chindwin.

207. Once again I should like to thank General Sir Claude Auchinleck\* and the staff at his Headquarters for their generous and unfailing help, without which 11 Army Group could not have driven the Japanese back from the frontiers of India.

I also wish to give a final word of thanks to my own staff for their hard work and fine team spirit, upon which I was able always confidently to rely however acute the crisis or hard the work.

I want especially to mention my two principal Staff Officers, Major-General I. S. O. Playfair, M.G.G.S., and Major-General E. N. Goddard, M.G.A., whose wise advice, good judgment and unfailing loyalty were a great support to me.

Finally, I have no doubt that the defeat of the Japanese forces in Burma is due to the balanced judgment, determination and skill of Lieut.-General Sir William Slim, upon whom fell the burden of the fighting.

\* Now Field-Marshal Sir Claude J. E. Auchinleck, G.C.B., G.C.I.E., C.S.I., D.S.O., O.B.E.