

39. As will have been seen, much depended in the later stages on how quickly the process of driving a road from India to Burma could be accomplished. The project of a road between Assam and Upper Burma had been the subject of discussion for some years previous to the war, but no action had been taken. As a military necessity, it began to take shape in the late autumn of 1941; the actual orders to begin work at all speed were issued in the middle of December. India was to widen the metalled road already existing from Dimapur to Imphal in Manipur State (135 miles) and to make a road from Imphal to Tamu (65 miles) where only a bridle track existed. Burma Government was to make an all weather road from Tamu to Kalewa and thence to Ye-U (approximately 190 miles) between which places only a fair-weather cart track existed.

Up to February work inside India proceeded somewhat slowly, but thenceforward was pushed on with all possible speed. A motor road, not metalled, reached Tamu just in time for the withdrawal of the Burma Army. Maintenance by this road during the wet season would, however, have been impossible. Great credit is due to Major-General Wood who was specially placed in charge of the project in March, 1942, for the energy with which he furthered the completion of the road, and to Brigadier Gilpin, R.E., and the engineers under him for a fine piece of work in difficult conditions.

Owing to various difficulties, little work was ever done by the Burma Government on the Tamu-Ye-U sector and eventually India had to undertake to complete it. The withdrawal took place before work on an all-weather road could be begun; but some very good work was done in a very short time to facilitate the withdrawal by improvement of the existing cart track.

Report by Lieut.-General T. J. Hutton, C.B., M.C., on Operations in Burma from 27th December, 1941, to 5th March, 1942.

I SITUATION ON ASSUMING COMMAND.

1. *Staff and Services.* I arrived in Rangoon on 27th December and assumed command forthwith. I should like here to pay a tribute to the endeavours made by my predecessor, Lieut.-General D. K. MacLeod, in spite of an inadequate staff and inadequate resources, to prepare the country for war.

Briefly, the position was as follows. The H.Q. staff was totally inadequate and a few overworked staff officers were struggling to compete with problems quite beyond their powers. This was especially the case with the General and Administrative staffs on whose shoulders rested the responsibility for the direction of policy. There was no intelligence staff worthy of the name. For a time there was a serious shortage of cipher personnel and clerks. This was eventually remedied by the employment of a number of women who were organised early in January in an enrolled unit of the Women's Auxiliary Service, Burma.

Such nucleus of services, base or L. of C. organisations as existed consisted of units raised in Burma, partially trained and very weak in Governor's Commissioned Officers (G.C.Os.) and N.C.Os. and with few trained

reserves. While these units did useful work for a time they eventually became unreliable and there were a considerable number of desertions.

2. *Intelligence.* No arrangements had been made to provide for external intelligence before the war and as a result we were usually in complete ignorance of what was happening just over the Thailand border. The same applied as regards internal intelligence. The possibility that the country might be invaded and that it might be desirable to "leave behind" a suitable organisation to give us information had not apparently been considered. Efforts were of course made at once to remedy the defect but it is not a thing that can be done in a hurry.

3. *Responsibilities of Army Headquarters (A.H.Q.).* A H.Q. Army in Burma was at the same time a War Office, a G.H.Q., a Corps H.Q. and a L. of C. H.Q. (owing to the absence of any L. of C. staff). A.H.Q. had, as such, responsibilities which covered exactly the same field as G.H.Q. in India.

This organisation, or lack of it, clogged the whole machine. It also imposed an intolerable burden on the G.O.C. It was impossible for me with my vast responsibilities to keep detailed control of operations on 17 Indian Division's front and it was necessary to allow wide discretion to the Divisional Commander. Unfortunately on practically every occasion when a serious situation arose, I happened to be away visiting some other part of my command. A Corps H.Q. was essential from the first, it was eventually formed after the loss of Rangoon.

4. *The Burma Rifles.* The fighting troops consisted mainly of Burma Rifles. This force was in the process of expansion, a process which greatly accentuated its former weaknesses. Consisting of four different races, Chins, Kachins, Karens and Burmese, speaking different languages which few of the officers understood, it was of very limited value in serious warfare. The G.C.Os. and N.C.Os. were all very junior and inexperienced, some of the former having only two years' service. The language commonly used in the Army was Hindustani which was a foreign language to all the personnel, including of course the officers; of the latter it was hardly likely that the best regular officers would be attracted by service in the Corps—though many of them did good work. The Emergency Commissioned Officers (E.C.Os.) who formed the majority were of exceptionally good quality and consisted mostly of members of big firms who had had extensive experience of conditions in the jungle. Their knowledge of local languages was in most cases good and many also had a smattering of Hindustani.

It was soon discovered that while these units were of considerable value for reconnaissance and patrol work in the jungle, they were not as a whole fit to stand the test of serious operations against an enemy like the Japanese. Eventually a large proportion of the Burmese and some of the Karens deserted, and the active battalions had to be reconstituted without them.

The Sappers and Miners, Army Service Corps, Hospital Corps, etc., were all of similar personnel, mostly Burmese, and the results were similar.