

so many have contributed towards the combined achievement.

Many Commanders and formations have been specifically mentioned in the first two parts of this Despatch. I therefore propose to confine my appreciation here to the few, whose outstanding claims will be sincerely acknowledged by the many, to whom space does not allow me to pay individual tribute.

453. First and foremost should be acknowledged the debt which is owed to the fighting soldiers, Indian, Gurkha, British, American, African and Chinese.

By far the greatest part of the fighting units in my Command were from the Indian Army. I had already had experience of the excellence of the Indian formations in Africa and Italy, but the campaign in Burma above all showed their versatility and ability to assimilate new ideas and technique, qualities perhaps less expected than the valour which we have come to take for granted. The development of which the Indian soldier has proved capable is one of the most remarkable features of the war, and no praise is too high for those who by command and training have produced this development. The Indian Armoured Corps came into their own for the first time. They fought magnificently, and their gunnery was excellent; their maintenance—without which armoured formations can achieve little—was first class under the exacting test of the dash for Rangoon. The Indian Field Regiments fully lived up to the high standard of the Indian Army. The Sappers and Miners Engineer Battalions, Signallers, R.I.A.S.C. and all the other arms and services did sterling work under often extremely hard conditions. Nevertheless, the heaviest burden fell on the infantryman, more so in this campaign than most, and it is the Indian and Gurkha infantryman, who mastered and conquered a fanatical enemy, that I should like to single out for special praise.

The appalling climatic and topographical conditions under which the campaign was fought were perhaps even sterner tests for the British troops than they were for the troops drawn from India, Africa and Nepal. But despite this the British soldier proved once again that he is second to none. The doggedness which will not allow reverse to become final defeat, his genius for improvisation and his adaptability to constantly changing conditions were all demonstrated. Separated by hundreds of miles, and for many long years, from all contact with the civilization which had hitherto been an integral part of his life and outlook, he nevertheless remained cheerful, undaunted and determined to inflict upon the enemy the defeat which he now knew lay within his power to accomplish. And especially it was the infantryman again, his hardships more often than not increased by the lack of numbers in his platoon and company, who bore the chief burden. The British who served in Burma have indeed deserved well of their country.

There were very few American soldiers under my command, and these were withdrawn before the battle for Central Burma and the dash for Rangoon. Nevertheless, the Mars Brigade fought with conspicuous success in difficult country in the operations which led to the re-opening of the Burma Road. It was a

matter of great regret to me that I was not able to retain this formation in the Command longer.

The African soldier was making history. For the first time divisions from East and West Africa were fighting as complete formations with the British Commonwealth forces. They showed outstanding ability to endure terrible conditions of terrain and climate, and to operate with limited resources and slender communications with the outside world.

The Chinese were well trained and good fighters. They inflicted many defeats on the Japanese in Northern Combat Area Command before they were finally withdrawn, after they had reached Lashio.

454. Having praised the fighting man himself, I will next say a few words about the great formations which won the battles, Fourteenth Army and 15 Indian Corps.

The great battles fought in 1944 in Arakan, and at Kohima and Imphal under the leadership of General Sir George Giffard laid the groundwork for our subsequent achievement. In those battles of annihilation, Fourteenth Army and 15 Indian Corps found their souls, and, whilst redeeming the days of adversity of 1942 and 1943, they destroyed a great part of the Japanese army.

455. After these decisive successes, Fourteenth Army pressed on with the pursuit of the withdrawing enemy throughout the monsoon season. By its close the enemy were back at the Chindwin, and the offensive to gain a hold in the dry belt of Central Burma was launched, with the object of bringing the enemy to decisive battle. Following an advance which gave the Japanese no time to recover their balance, the wide Irrawaddy River—a most formidable military obstacle—was forced at four opposed crossings, and bridgeheads held against fierce counter-attacks.

Then followed the brilliant Meiktila battle in which the enemy was out-manoeuvred, out-fought and so severely mauled that never again was General Kimura able to regroup his forces so as to fight as an army. This success was exploited in the dash to capture Rangoon with mechanised columns and armour, re-inforced and maintained by air transport. In any theatre such an exploitation of success would be noteworthy; in the peculiar and difficult conditions of the Burma war, it was a brilliant feat.

These are achievements of which any army should be proud; an excellent plan triumphantly executed. The troops displayed outstanding endurance against severe physical difficulties and fought magnificently. The versatility and all-round efficiency of the army was fully displayed in the later stages, when, after many months of success in the jungle, it won decisive victories in open and mobile fighting.

456. 15 Indian Corps deserves separate mention. The Arakan was an extraordinarily difficult terrain, with its wide tidal chaungs, huge areas of mangrove swamp and jungle which often stretched without a break from the mountains inland to the sea itself. Improvisation and initiative were the order of the day. It was a remarkable feat to establish in the short time available both fair- and all-weather