

6. Before explaining my task and the existing strategical plans, I propose to say a few words on the topography and climate of Burma, which exercised a preponderating influence on all operations there.

The only natural approach to the interior of Burma is through Rangoon, and thence by road, rail or river to Mandalay. We, unfortunately, had to re-enter the country from the north, and for this there are only two routes. The first is from Dimapur (Manipur Road Railhead), then south through the mountains *via* Kohima and Imphal, then south-east through thick jungle hill country to Tamu, thence south down the notoriously unhealthy Kabaw Valley to Kalembo, across the Chindwin River and then through gradually improving country to Shwebo in the dry belt. The road from Tamu to Shwebo was only a fair-weather track quite unsuited as the main road artery of an army. The other northern road approach was *via* Ledo, and, at the time we are discussing, it was under construction, under American control, as a land route to Myitkyina to link up with the Burma Road.

The only route from the Arakan coast into Central Burma other than a rough foot track through An, was a fair-weather road of small traffic-carrying capacity from Taungup to Prome. Owing to its situation and limitations we were not able to use it until after the capture of Rangoon.

7. Between Eastern Bengal and Central Burma lie the Lushai and Chin Hills, which extend south as the Arakan Yomas and north-east as the barrier between Burma and Assam. They consist of a mass of parallel sharp ridges, running roughly north and south, with many peaks rising to heights of 6,000-9,000 feet. The highest peak of the Arakan Yomas, Mount Victoria, is just over 10,000 feet. These mountains are covered with intensely thick jungle and form a complete military barrier between Central Burma and the Eastern Bengal and Arakan coast, with exception of the two tracks mentioned above.

In the centre of Burma, and containing Mandalay and Meiktila, lies the "Dry Belt," which consists of flat and open country. It has been developed, and an all-weather road system exists, for example, connecting Shwebo, Mandalay, Meiktila, Myingyan and Kyaukpadaung. It was not until we reached this area that we could expect to fight the Japanese under conditions favourable to our superiority in armour, fire-power and mobility. The Arakan coast is discussed in more detail in the part of the Despatch which deals with the Arakan operations (Sec. IX). It suffices to say that immensely thick jungle runs down to the coast from the hills, the only clearings being the settlements. Suitable beaches for landing operations are very rare and most of the water-ways, especially between Akyab and Taungup, are hemmed in by dense mangrove forests.

8. The climate of Burma, from an operational point of view, is dominated by the arrival of the summer monsoon. The exceptionally severe monsoon rains in Arakan virtually stop all movement by land between May and the middle of December. Elsewhere the rainfall is generally very heavy during the monsoon except in the central dry belt. The monsoon has the effect, too, of raising a swell

in the Bay of Bengal from mid-March onwards, until, in early May, days suitable for landing operations are very rare indeed. The monsoon conditions in the mountainous jungle areas make land operations difficult and exceptionally unpleasant, while flying conditions over them become hazardous in the extreme.

The question of health will be discussed in detail with the medical aspect in the Administrative part of this Despatch. It is enough to say here that without modern methods of maintaining health, suppressive drugs, and the discipline required with them, the campaign could not have been fought.

9. Finally, before leaving the subject of topography I make no apology for drawing attention to the huge distances in this theatre. Our road L. of C. from Kohima to Mandalay was 527 miles long, and from Mandalay by road to Rangoon was a further 433 miles.

10. The first task assigned to me in my Directive was to protect the air route to China, to open the Burma Road *via* Myitkyina, Bhamo and Wanting, to Kunming, and to protect the airfields at Myitkyina. I was also to destroy the Japanese Army in Burma, with the proviso that these operations must in no way interfere with my responsibilities for the protection and opening of the Ledo/Burma Road and the air routes to China. I realised at once, however, that I could do nothing permanently to ensure the safety of the air route or the Ledo/Burma Road until I had defeated decisively in battle the main Japanese forces in Burma.

11. The strategical plans which I took over on arrival were as follows.

Operation "Capital" was aimed at the reconquest of Central Burma. It envisaged an advance *via* Kalewa with Fourteenth Army into the Mandalay Plain, with the first objective Ye-U and Shwebo, which are both situated in the more open country in the dry belt, and, secondly, Mandalay. Northern Combat Area Command was to conform in this by advancing south to the general line Mongmit-Lashio. The primary object of this operation was to bring the Japanese to battle in country where we could exploit our superiority in fire-power, armour and mobility, and to provide an "anvil" for the eventual invasion of Burma from the Rangoon end, since it was considered that the clearing of Burma from the north alone was impracticable.

Operation "Dracula" was the invasion of Rangoon by air and sea. This operation was originally planned for the middle of March, 1945. While I was in the United Kingdom in early October, after leaving Eighth Army, the Chiefs of Staff decided that this operation could not take place, since the resources, principally in formations which it was hoped to send from Europe, could not be released. The original plans envisaged a seven division operation, including one airborne division and three air-transported, the remainder for sea assault and follow-up. The requirements from Europe were two Corps Headquarters, one airborne division, and three other divisions, one of which was to replace the G.H.Q., India, reserve division. Although, however, it was not going to take place in the Spring of 1945, it was still intended that a similar operation would take place after the