

from maintenance difficulties, withdrew to the Maungdaw-Buthidaung line which he had held at the beginning of operations. This ended active operations in Arakan except for small patrol enterprises.

On May 20th I decided to replace Lieut.-General N. M. S. Irwin, Commander of the Eastern Army who had been for some time suffering from ill-health, by General Sir George Giffard.

15. The result of these Arakan operations was undoubtedly disappointing. But they must be viewed in their proper perspective. They were represented in some quarters as an "invasion of Burma". Actually, as already stated, they had one objective only, Akyab island, and I should not have committed troops deeply into the unhealthy Arakan jungles had I had available the naval and air forces, landing craft and transports for a sea-borne assault on the island.* When it became obvious that these would not be forthcoming, I took the risk, sooner than keep my troops standing idle, of trying to reach Akyab by an overland advance. I was well aware of the difficulties and dangers, and that the troops I was employing were not fully trained or equipped; they had been organised and trained up to the autumn for the defence of Bengal.

16. When these operations were initiated, I had been informed by General Stilwell that the Chinese Armies in Yunnan would advance into Upper Burma in force early in 1943, and I had intended that the IV Corps from Assam should advance in co-operation with them. I had therefore reason to suppose that the Japanese in Upper Burma would be fully occupied and unlikely to move reinforcements to Arakan. Actually, the Chinese made no move; and the IV Corps, owing to administrative difficulties, was unable to be as active as I had hoped. The Japanese were therefore able to reinforce Akyab and Arakan from Upper Burma.

17. That Japanese defences, skilfully prepared and concealed, and held to the last, are difficult to overcome without considerable superiority of numbers and equipment and good training has been abundantly shown in the fighting in New Guinea and elsewhere in the S.-W. Pacific, and in the actions which have taken place this spring on the Burma frontier. We had never the necessary superiority in these respects to assault positions such as Donbaik and Rathedaung; and our tactics were not always appropriate, owing to inexperience. The enemy counter-offensive was skilfully planned and executed; and their mobility and infiltration tactics in the jungle are undoubtedly difficult to counter. It was not possible to feed by air troops which had been cut off from their base by these tactics, owing to the lack of transport aeroplanes.

18. In the initial advance the troops of the 14th Division fought boldly and well. It was only in the latter stages of the fighting, after several months continuous engagement in an unhealthy climate and under the discouragement of failure that there was any deterioration in the endurance and fighting capacity of the troops.

19. Strategically, we failed to reach Akyab and finished in the same positions from which we had started, but the capture of Akyab by an overland expedition was always in the nature of a gamble. We suffered some 2,500 battle casualties and probably inflicted at least as heavy losses on the enemy. The greatest gain from the campaign was experience, of the enemy's methods and of our own defects in training and organisation. The serious loss was in prestige and morale.

On balance I shall certainly never regret that I ordered the campaign to take place in spite of lack of resources.

SUPPORT BY R.I.N. AND R.A.F.

20. Launches and coastal craft of the Royal Indian Navy played a considerable part in these operations, both along the coast and in the Naf and Mayu rivers, and showed much enterprise in a number of small actions, of which the following are examples. On January 27th a launch on patrol in the Mayu river rammed and sank a large launch full of enemy troops, at least fifty of whom were killed. On the night of February 21st-22nd Coastal craft landed a raiding party at Myebon, about sixty miles south-east of Akyab, which inflicted casualties, destroyed stores, and re-embarked without loss. On February 26th motor launches on patrol north of Ramree Island intercepted two Japanese motor launches, sank one and damaged the other, inflicting at least 50 casualties on the enemy.

21. The R.A.F. gave invaluable aid to the Army during these operations, both by attacks on enemy positions in close support and by attacks on other targets in forward areas, such as boats on the rivers or transport on the tracks and roads. The action of the R.A.F. is described in greater detail in paragraphs 32 to 36.

OPERATIONS IN NORTHERN BURMA.

22. My intention had been that during the winter the IV Corps (17th and 23rd Indian Divisions) should advance into Burma and establish itself on the Chindwin river between Kalewa and Sittaung. The only strategical objective of these operations was to assist the advance of the Chinese forces into Northern Burma (see paragraph 2 above) by engaging as many enemy troops as possible.

There were two possible routes leading towards the objective from the Imphal plain in Manipur over the high range into Burma. The road from Imphal by Pael to Tamu (in the Kabaw valley) had been constructed in 1942, from Pael to Tamu it was a single-way mountain road liable to frequent interruption in the rains; the distance from Imphal to Pael is 28 miles; and from Pael to Tamu 36 miles. The other possible route was from Imphal by Bishenpur to Tiddim (145 miles), thence to Fort White and down into the Kabaw valley at Kalemyo; this route had certain obvious advantages in the approach to Kalemyo, since it was screened by hills to the east until close to Kalemyo, whereas an advance to Kalemyo from Tamu was exposed throughout to enemy attacks from across the Chindwin. General Irwin favoured the development of the Tiddim route and placed most of our limited road-making resources on it. A visit to the front early in February convinced me that our

* The landings in North Africa and later in Sicily (November, 1942—July, 1943) took higher priority and there were insufficient resources for both operations (Note by the War Office.)