

107. The operations of Special Force began on the night of the 5th-6th March, and between then and the night of the 10th-11th March nearly six hundred Dakota and one hundred glider sorties carried 77 and 111 L.R.P. Brigades, totalling 9,500 troops and 1,100 animals, into the heart of Japanese-occupied Burma. The initial rôle of these glider-borne forces was to secure sites for and to prepare landing strips west of the Irrawaddy. Last minute air reconnaissance disclosed that one of the two potential strips selected, thirty-five miles north-east of Katha (called "Piccadilly") had been deliberately obstructed. General Sim, who was present at the starting point when this news was received, was faced with the difficult decision whether to launch the operation, since it appeared that the enemy had got wind of it, or to postpone it until fresh plans could be made. He decided to let the operation go forward and on the first night the landings were confined to one strip only, called "Broadway", which was some twenty-seven miles south-east of Hopin on the Myitkyina—Mandalay railway.

108. The landings at Broadway, and subsequently on another strip ("Chowringhee") some twenty miles south-south-east of Katha, achieved complete surprise and until the 12th March no ground opposition was met. Air attacks did not begin until the 10th and were directed against the Chowringhee strip which, by that time, had fulfilled its purpose and had been abandoned. The Broadway strip was not attacked until the 13th March, when our fighters were present and A.A. defences had been established. The Japanese lost about 50 per cent. of their attacking aircraft.

109. Our losses during the initial fly-in amounted to only one per cent. of the total personnel transported. The only animal casualty was one mule. The smallness of these losses is remarkable in view of the fact that, at the peak period of the fly-in, double the planned effort was achieved, and aircraft were coming in and taking off at the rate of one "landing" and one "take-off" every three minutes.

110. A special American air force, called No. 1 Air Commando, had been formed to co-operate both tactically and administratively with Special Force. It was a composite force comprising some 250 aircraft—long- and short-range fighters, light bombers, Dakotas and gliders. This force carried out the hazardous and difficult glider-borne operations, flying fully laden gliders, some in double tow, over 9,000 foot mountains by night, a distance of 300 miles to the selected area. Equally important was the action of the fighters and bombers of this force, before, during, and after the actual landings, against targets which it was vital to attack. No. 221 Group, R.A.F., also did splendid work in these operations. I wish to express my appreciation of the work carried out by these air forces, without whose assistance Special Force could not have operated.

111. 77 and 111 L.R.P. Brigades were followed by 14 L.R.P. Brigade, whose fly-in was completed by the 4th April. 3 (West African) Brigade, which formed part of Special Force,

was to have operated in the same way as the other brigades of the Force. But before the operations actually started, it was decided to split up the brigade and attach one battalion to each of the 77, 111 and 14 Brigades, to act as a garrison for the stronghold which was to form the base of each of the three above-mentioned brigades. 3 (West African) Brigade completed its fly-in by the 12th April. These formations used airstrips established near Manhton ("Aberdeen"), twenty-seven miles north-north-west of Indaw; Mawlu ("White City"), twenty miles north of Katha, and in the Hopin area. During this second phase some 6,000 troops, 850 animals and 550,000 lbs. of stores were transported with the very slight casualties of 15 killed (all in one aircraft) and six injured.

112. General Wingate originally estimated that about twelve weeks would be the maximum period which troops would be able to withstand the rigorous conditions under which they would be called upon to operate. His original plan, therefore, was (i) to march in 16 L.R.P. Brigade from Ledo, because the route was known to be practicable and this formation would be able to co-operate more closely with General Stilwell's forces advancing in the same area, and (ii) later to fly in 77 and 111 L.R.P. Brigades, retaining the other brigades as a "second wave" which might, or might not, be used to operate during the monsoon, in relief of the three brigades sent in initially. This plan was later modified, however, as General Slim decided to fly in 14 and 3 (West African) Brigades early in April. On the 5th February 16 Brigade marched in from Ledo as planned, via Singkaling Hkamti, after a long march during which it had a few minor engagements, and began operations in the Indaw area in March. 23 L.R.P. Brigade was sent into Burma, but was subsequently employed by the Army Commander in the Naga Hills and Manipur area in co-operation with 33 Corps.

113. It is impossible, in a report of this nature, to give a detailed summary of the varied activities of the five brigades of Special Force which operated independently in North Burma. The damage they inflicted on the enemy, both human and material, was considerable, comprising, at it did, the laying of many ambushes, the destruction or blocking of rail and road communications, and the destruction of supply dumps and other military installations. The operations carried out by these columns, combined with the story of how American aircraft released their gliders, filled with British troops and American engineers, to make their landings in jungle clearings in pitch darkness, forms one of the outstanding episodes of the war, but an account of the operations will not be given until a subsequent Despatch.

114. I have nothing but praise for the organization of the initial landings, and the gallantry and endurance displayed by all ranks in the operations which followed. Events have shown, however, that these operations had less effect upon the enemy than I hoped for. The enemy did not divert troops from his forward areas, nor did he alter his main strategical plan. In fact, the results achieved did not prove to