

laden streams and chaungs into treacherous torrents; rain that washed away our already exiguous roads, turned rivers into raging floods and grounded our supporting air forces. "The Economist," in its issue of the 15th April, 1944, wrote "The monsoons are on their way, and it would be turning a new page in military history if either side campaigned through the rain-sodden and malaria-ridden months ahead." That "new page in military history" has been turned.

Instructions for Monsoon Operations.

6. On the 8th June, the Supreme Allied Commander* issued a Directive which included the following:—

(a) The broad mission of South-East Asia Command (S.E.A.C.) in Burma was:—

"To develop, maintain, broaden, and protect the air link to China in order to provide a maximum and timely stock of P.O.L. to China in support of Pacific operations; so far as is consistent with the above, to press advantages against the enemy by exerting maximum ground and air effort, particularly during the current monsoon season, and in pressing such advantages to be prepared to exploit the development of overland communications to China. All these operations must be dictated by the forces at present available or firmly allocated to S.E.A.C."

(b) The general tasks allotted to me were:—

(i) To secure Eastern Bengal and Assam up to my boundary with Northern Combat Area Command (N.C.A.C.) (General Stilwell's forces).

(ii) Provide the necessary ground forces for the defence of Ceylon.

(c) My specific tasks during the monsoon were as follows:—

(i) *Arakan.*

Maintain an active defence on the general line Maungdaw - Tunnels Area - Taung Bazaar during the monsoon. Prepare to capture Akyab by an advance starting as early as possible in the next dry season.

(ii) *Chindwin.*

First Priority. Re-establish communications on the road Dimapur - Kohima - Imphal not later than mid-July.

Second Priority. Clear Japanese forces from the area Dimapur - Kohima - Imphal Plain - Yuma - Tamanthi.

Third Priority. Prepare to exploit across the Chindwin in the Yuwa - Tamanthi area after the monsoon.

(d) Northern Combat Area Command would come under the direct command of the Supreme Allied Commander from the 20th June, and the boundary between Northern Combat Area Command and Fourteenth Army would be Wakching - Kaiyaw Naukkon (both exclusive Northern Combat Area Command) - Taro - Lonkin - Indawgyi Lake - Lake Indaw (all inclusive Northern Combat Area Command).

* Now Vice-Admiral The Earl Mountbatten of Burma, K.G., P.C., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., G.C.V.O., K.C.B., D.S.O.

(e) The following reinforcements and withdrawals were to be made:—

(i) 82 (West African) Division would be concentrated in India during August.

(ii) 22 (East African) Brigade would arrive in Ceylon during July.

(NOTE: This is an independent brigade; 11 (East African) Division and 28 (East African) Brigade (independent) were already in Ceylon in June.)

(iii) 19 Indian Division would be available as a relief when one British or Indian division returned to India for rest.

(iv) The first brigade group of 36 British Division to be ready to move under the command of Northern Combat Area Command by the 1st July (the remainder by the 20th July), in relief of Special Force.

(v) 3 Commando Brigade would be withdrawn from Imphal as soon after the 1st July as operations permitted, but might again be made available at a later date for operations in Arakan.

7. In accordance with this Directive, I issued operation instructions to the Commander, Fourteenth Army, Lieut.-General W. J. Slim*, for operations during the monsoon and the move of 36 British Division which was to go by road and rail to Ledo and thence by road to the Myitkyina area.

To complete the picture, the rôle allotted by the Supreme Allied Commander to General Stilwell's forces in North Burma (Northern Combat Area Command) was to protect the Mogaung - Myitkyina area by establishing an outpost line; Lonkin - Talawgyi - Kazu - Fort Harrison - Seniku.

The Chinese Expeditionary Force (C.E.F.) had orders from the Generalissimo to cross the Salween River and join General Stilwell's forces in the Myitkyina area.

8. Such were our tasks: but before continuing the narrative, a word about communication and roads is necessary. I shall give an account of road construction in a later section, when discussing engineering work, but the tracks which did duty for roads in the forward area may conveniently be described here, as they will be frequently referred to in subsequent paragraphs:

(a) A road from Palel to Tamu existed, but it rapidly deteriorated when the monsoon started, and to quote from my Chief Engineer's report "The mud had to be seen to be believed". In these conditions, only 4 x 4 lorries† were permitted to run south of Palel, though the rule had to be relaxed occasionally for specialist vehicles.

(b) The road south from Tamu down the Kabaw Valley can only euphemistically be called a road—it was a sea of mud varying in depth from six to eighteen inches. In the worst places corduroy roads, over which jeeps and 30-cwt. 6 x 6 lorries† could pass, had to be built.

* Now Field-Marshal Sir William J. Slim, G.B.E., K.C.B., D.S.O., M.C.

† A 4 x 4 lorry is a four-wheeled vehicle, all four wheels of which can be driven by the engine. Similarly, a 6 x 6 lorry is one in which the power can be transmitted to all of its six wheels.