

Although the enemy was not very active during this period, there were known to be considerable numbers of Japanese as well as Thai troops in Northern Thailand and there were persistent reports indicating early invasion on this front. The distance from our junction with the Chinese on the Indo-China border to the mouth of the Salween was some 300 miles and to guard this we had only one division consisting of two infantry brigades and a few of the Frontier Force Detachments already referred to. The road from the River Salween through the valuable Mawchi mines to Toungoo was practically unguarded. The situation was therefore one which caused me considerable anxiety, especially when it became necessary to withdraw troops from the Southern Shan States to deal with the more threatening situation in Tenasserim.

64. *Tavoy and Mergui.* A few days after my arrival on 27th December, I visited Moulmein and Kawkareik and shortly afterwards Mergui and Tavoy.

The forces at these latter places were primarily for the defence of the aerodromes and though Mergui was to some extent defensible against land or sea attack Tavoy certainly was not—with the forces available. Mergui was, however, 300 miles from Moulmein and communications consisted of the road Ye-Tavoy-Mergui which crossed many ferries and was for the most part through thick jungle. There were a considerable number of known tracks from the Thai border, only a few miles away, by which the road could be intercepted. From Ye to Moulmein there was a railway and no road. Withdrawal from either of these places would obviously be difficult, especially as the total naval forces available consisted of two small motor launches, and other suitable craft were manned by native crews who were not likely to face any operations in the presence of the enemy. In any case there were not enough of such craft to enable the Mergui garrison to be evacuated in one lift. In view of these circumstances and the certainty that sooner or later the Japanese would begin to work up the coast or across the border from Thailand, it was decided that in event of a serious threat the Mergui garrison would be evacuated to Tavoy which would then be capable of defence. Furthermore, provided a stop could be put across one track leading in from Thailand it should be possible for the Tavoy force, if necessary, to withdraw by land towards Moulmein.

65. *Kawkareik.* One battalion of the Burma Rifles north-east of Kawkareik was watching the Thai border at Myawaddy and holding the pass over the Dawna Range which was covered throughout its length with thick jungle. In face of any serious attack its position was obviously very isolated. Although only 45 miles from Moulmein as the crow flies the only road available was 90 miles in length. It traversed two wide rivers by ferries and ran for 30 miles parallel to the Thai frontier and toward the Three Pagodas Pass into Thailand—a very likely avenue for any enemy invasion. The supply route was by launch up to Kyondo on the Gyaing River.

In view of these circumstances I decided to move H.Q. 16 Indian Brigade and one battalion then in reserve, down to Tenasserim as early

as possible both to strengthen the Kawkareik position, watch the Three Pagodas Pass, and garrison Moulmein. With this accession of force it became possible to push a detachment down to the Ye-Tavoy road with a view to keeping open communication with Tavoy.

66. *Lack of Intelligence.* Information at this time, as ever, was practically nil. The thick jungle prevented any considerable information being obtained from air reconnaissance for which resources were very limited, and for political reasons no attempt had been made before the war to organise any source of intelligence in Thailand. There was therefore every prospect of an attack without warning coming at any time. Any offensive action beyond that of patrols or attacks upon isolated posts, was with the forces available, quite out of the question.

67. *Formation of H.Q. 17 Indian Division.* On the 5th January the senior staff officers of the 17 Indian Division having arrived an advanced headquarters was established at Moulmein and Brigadier Bourke assumed the command.

The Commander of the 17 Indian Division arrived on 10th January and then assumed command although the remainder of his headquarters did not arrive until serious operations were already in progress. Although he had little time to study the problems involved he entirely agreed with the plans and dispositions proposed.

68. *Enemy Activities.* During the early days of January many reports were received indicating that the Japanese were concentrating in some strength between Raheng and the frontier at Myawaddy, and on the 11th January the total was given as 5,000 in this area.

On the 3rd some interesting information was received from some police agents who had been arrested in Thailand and subsequently released. They stated that while in captivity they had overheard some Japanese officer discussing future plans which included plans for an advance on Tavoy which was to take place in three weeks time. The information which these men brought back proved to be substantially correct.

69. *Troop Movements.* In consequence of a decision to move the whole of the 16 Indian Infantry Brigade to the Moulmein area, the troops in this area were disposed on the 14th January as follows:—

The Commander 16 Indian Infantry Brigade took over responsibility for the defences about Kawkareik, where 1/7 G.R. and 4 Burma Rifles (which was very weak) were now joined by 1/9 R. Jats and a mountain battery. One company of 1/7 G.R. was posted about Kyungyaung to watch the Three Pagodas Pass into Thailand.

The 4/12 F.F. Regiment of this Brigade was left in Moulmein under the 2 Burma Infantry Brigade with the role of keeping open the road from Ye to Tavoy as far south as the road and track junction at Migyaunglaung.

The 7 Burma Rifles was at this time also ordered to Moulmein.

70. *Operations at Tavoy.* On the 16th January two companies of the 6 Burma Rifles came in contact with a Japanese force, estimated at about 100, at Myitta on the track leading from the north of Tavoy to the frontier.