



SUPPLEMENT

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OPERATIONS IN BURMA FROM 15TH DECEMBER, 1941,
TO 20TH MAY, 1942.

The following Despatch was submitted to the Secretary of State for War on the 14th July, 1942, by GENERAL SIR ARCHIBALD P. WAVELL, G.C.B., C.M.G., M.C., A.D.C., Commander-in-Chief, India.

(To cover Reports by Lieut.-General T. J. Hutton and General The Honourable Sir Harold R. L. G. Alexander.)

1 This despatch covers reports by Lieut.-General T. J. Hutton and by General The Honourable Sir Harold R. L. G. Alexander describing the operations in Burma between 15th December, 1941, when the defence of Burma became the responsibility of the Commander-in-Chief in India, and 20th May, 1942, when the last troops of the Burma Army were withdrawn across the frontier into India. The despatch is intended to explain how the general strategical situation affected operations in Burma and to record the actions I took as the Commander chiefly responsible for them. Although the defence of Burma was three times transferred from one Command to another during the period, I remained personally responsible except for a period of about one week at the end of February, 1942.

2. The vital importance of Burma, in a war against Japan, to the Allied cause in general and to the defence of India is obvious. Through Burma lay the only route by which the Chinese armies could be kept supplied, and bases stocked for Allied air attack on Japan itself. From India's point of view, so long as Burma was in our possession, Calcutta and the great industrial centres of North-East India were practically immune from air attack, and her eastern land frontiers were secure from the threat of invasion.

BURMA BEFORE WAR WITH JAPAN.

3. Burma had been included, for operational purposes, in the Far East Command when this was established in November, 1940, with headquarters in Singapore. Administration remained directly under the War Office. So much, however, was the security of Burma of concern to those charged with the defence of India that several attempts were made by successive Commanders-in-Chief in India to have this arrangement altered and responsibility for the defence of Burma transferred to India. The recommendation to this effect made by my predecessor, General Auchinleck, was not accepted. Shortly after my appointment as Commander-in-Chief, India I paid a visit to the United Kingdom and personally pressed this change on the Chiefs of Staff, who again refused to alter the existing arrangement, on the grounds that the question had been fully considered when the Far East Command was established. The Japanese had by this time invaded Indo-China and thus brought danger to Burma much closer, but this fact was not held to justify the change.

On returning to India I paid a visit to Burma and Malaya and discussed the question with the Commander-in-Chief Far East, Air Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, and with the Governor of Burma, Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, and with the G.O.C. Burma, Lieut.-General D. K. Macleod. As a result I cabled to the C.I.G.S. on 11th November, 1941, again recommending the transfer of Burma to the Indian Command. I understand that my recommendation was supported by the Governor of Burma.

I was very greatly concerned by the extent of unpreparedness in Burma's defences of which I became aware during my visit. I realised that the number and training of the troops, their