

CEYLON ARMY COMMAND.

Lieut.-General H. E. de R. Wetherall.*

11 (East African) Division.

99 Indian Infantry Brigade.

Royal Marine Group, Mobile Naval Base
Defence Organization (less one A.A.
Brigade assigned to S.E.A.C. in
Southern India).

INDIAN OCEAN BASES.

<i>Addu Atoll</i>	} Containing
<i>Diego Garcia</i>	
<i>Cocos Islands</i>	

} small

} garrisons.

In addition, the following troops in India were assigned to South-East Asia Command, being allotted later :—

Headquarters 33 Indian Corps (Lieut.-General M. G. N. Stopford).†

2 British Division.

19 Indian Division (Did not arrive until October, 1944; in the interim 25 Indian Division was substituted for it).

36 Indian Division (This consisted of two British brigades, and of divisional troops, some of which were Indian; but it was called "Indian" for deception purposes. It was renamed 36 British Division in July, 1944, and I shall refer to it as such throughout this Despatch).

3 Indian Division (Cover name of Major-General Wingate's‡ "Special Force": consisting of six Long-Range Penetration Brigades; 14, 16 and 23 British Infantry Brigades; 77 and 111 Indian Infantry Brigades and 3 (West African) Infantry Brigade. It contained Gurkha but no Indian units. I shall refer to it hereafter as "Special Force").

50 Indian Tank Brigade.

3 Special Service Brigade (consisting of No. 5 Commando and No. 44 Royal Marine Commando).

Details showing when these "assigned" formations were actually transferred to my command, and allotted to Fourteenth Army, will be given later in this Despatch.

In November, 1943, 15 Corps, consisting of 7 Indian Division and 36 Brigade of 26 Indian Division and 81 (West African) Division (which was just moving in), was holding a line in Arakan approximately from Teknaf to Taung Bazaar facing 55 Japanese Division. The enemy Division had its Headquarters in Akyab, its 143 Regiment was on a line from Maungdaw to Buthidaung, with 112 and 213 Regiments disposed in depth behind this line, in reserve.

4 Corps, composed of 17 Indian Light Division and 20 and 23 Indian Divisions, was responsible for the defence of the Imphal and Tiddim areas of the Central front. The Light Division (48 and 63 Indian Infantry Brigades) was holding the Fort White—Tiddim area against 214 and 215 Regiments of 33 Japanese Division, which was disposed generally along the line of the Chindwin River as far north as Mawlaik. 23 Indian Division was in the Imphal Plain, and had under command 80 Indian Infantry Brigade of 20 Indian Division which was coming forward in relief of 23 Indian Division.

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† Now General Sir Montagu G. N. Stopford, G.C.B., K.B.E., D.S.O., M.C.

‡ The late Major-General O. C. Wingate.

In the north of Burma (designated Northern Combat Area Command—N.C.A.C.) the American-trained and equipped Chinese 22 and 38 Divisions under the command of General Stilwell were in the general area between Ledo and Maingkwan towards which they were advancing. They were opposed by 18 Japanese Division, with 114 Regiment between Myitkyina and Sumprabum, 56 Regiment around Katha and Rail Indaw, and 55 Regiment between Wuntho and Shwebo.

In no sector was there close contact but we, and the Japanese, were patrolling to gain contact; and in Arakan we were preparing for an offensive. The Headquarters of Fourteenth Army was at Barrackpore (later at Comilla) and of 15 Japanese Army at Maymyo.

Geography and Topography.

3. Before discussing the numerous plans which were made and discarded for various reasons and describing the operations which actually took place, it is essential to appreciate the extent to which all operations for the capture of Burma are affected by peculiar topographical and climatic conditions such as exist in few other parts of the world.

4. The Indo-Burmese frontier, from where it leaves the sea in Arakan, near Maungdaw, until it joins the Sino-Thibetan frontier on the Salween River north of Myitkyina, follows a series of mountain ranges, the general axes of which run from north to south. The main features of these mountain ranges are their precipitous sides and the fast flowing rivers in the deep valleys. These mountains are at their maximum heights at the north-east end of the frontier, where they rise to heights of ten to twelve thousand feet and more. Their height gradually declines as the ranges run southwards, though in the Naga and Chin Hills there are many peaks of 9,000 feet, until they reach the lesser ranges in Arakan where the maximum heights are seldom over 2,000 feet. The main spine, however, of this range continues southwards, parallel to the coast, towards the mouth of the Irrawaddy and finally disappears just north of the town of Bassein. Throughout these ranges the hillsides are for the most part covered with jungle so dense that it is not possible to move without cutting paths. In the whole length of this mountain system there are only three roads, none of them of good quality, over which wheels can pass. These are the Ledo—Myitkyina road, the Dimapur—Imphal—Tamu road and the Taungup—Prome road, none of which has been completed to a standard which will carry heavy traffic all the year round.

5. East and south of this great mountain system lies the main river basin of the Irrawaddy with its principal tributary the Chindwin to the west and almost parallel to it until it joins the Irrawaddy at Myingyan. The Irrawaddy forms a delta which begins just north of Henzada, but the main mouth reaches the sea just south of Rangoon. The Irrawaddy is navigable by various craft, according to the time of the year, as far north as Myitkyina; and the Chindwin can be navigated up to Tamanthi. These two great rivers provide, therefore, first class lines of communication throughout the year. The valley of the Irrawaddy and other tributary valleys provide access for a system of railways which, starting