

problem in Burma. These were the reasons that were the motive of my qualified acceptance of the Generalissimo's offer. It should be noted that a Chinese "Army" was approximately the equivalent in numbers of a British division but with a much lower scale of equipment.

I am quite satisfied that my decision was justified by the military situation as it appeared to me at the time. Nor had I any reason to know that the Chinese attached great political importance to the acceptance of the offer. The Generalissimo himself showed comparatively little interest in the matter and made no attempt to press me; three-quarters of the lengthy discussions I had with him were devoted to the question of the establishment of an Allied Council at Chungking and to consideration of an ambitious plan for defeat of the Japanese in 1942.

From subsequent experience of the slowness of Chinese troop moves, I think that even if I had accepted the whole of the Fifth and Sixth Armies at once they would actually have reached Burma very little, if any, sooner than they eventually did.

As things turned out, I admit that it would have saved much criticism in China and in the U.S.A. had I accepted the Generalissimo's generous offer whole-heartedly and at once. I do not, however, think that it would have made any difference in the end to the defence of Burma.

12. When I returned to India, I found that the troops I was counting on for Burma were being taken from my control for the reinforcement of Malaya. Already the War Cabinet had ordered one brigade group of the 18 British Division and two brigade groups of the 17 Indian Division to Malaya, as well as anti-aircraft and anti-tank artillery. The remainder of the 18 Division was also put under orders for Malaya shortly afterwards. Thus of the two complete divisions on which I had reckoned one divisional headquarters and one brigade only remained. I still believed the African brigades available and expected the first to arrive in Burma by the middle of February. It was not until that date that I received a cable to say that the leading brigade was delayed. Actually it did not embark in East Africa till after Rangoon had fallen.

13. On 23rd December and 25th December the Japanese made two large scale air raids on Rangoon. They caused practically no military damage but civilian casualties in the first raid were high, and the flight of the population from Rangoon began. From now to the final evacuation of the city, the working of the essential services, the provision of labour to unload ships and the cessation of all business became a major problem for the Government and a serious military embarrassment. The presence on all routes leading towards India of many thousands of refugees, which soon grew to hundreds of thousands, was another problem that occupied both civil and military to the end of the campaign.

TRANSFER OF BURMA TO A.B.D.A. COMMAND.

14. On 30th December, 1941, I received a telegram appointing me to the newly constituted South-West Pacific Command (afterwards known as A.B.D.A.). Burma was included in this Command. I at once recommended that the defence of Burma

should remain the responsibility of Commander-in-Chief, India, for the same reasons for which I had previously urged its transfer to India from the Far East Command (see paragraph 3). I was, however, overruled on the grounds that Marshal Chiang-Kai-Shek must feel himself connected with the new South West Pacific Command. I think that this decision was a serious error from the military point of view. From my headquarters in Java, 2,000 miles distant from Rangoon, and concerned as I was with an immense area and many international problems, it was impossible for me to give as close attention to the defence of Burma as was desirable; nor had I any reinforcements at my disposal to aid Burma. They must come almost entirely from India. Moreover, administration of the forces in Burma had necessarily to be conducted from India; and it is always wrong to separate operational and administrative responsibility.

General Sir Alan Hartley who succeeded me as Commander-in-Chief, India, did everything possible to meet Burma's requirements. What was lacking was the close personal touch of the responsible commander. During the five weeks that Burma remained under A.B.D.A. Command, I was only able to pay two hurried visits; and owing to faulty signal communications, messages and reports from Burma sometimes took several days to reach me in Java. It was during these five weeks that the fate of Burma was decided.

15. I took over control of South West Pacific Command on 15th January, and established A.B.D.A. Command Headquarters in Java, near Bandoeng, a few days later. During the first half of January there had been little sign of enemy activity against Burma. The maximum scale of Japanese attack was still estimated as one division against Moulmein and one division against Kentung with possibly brigade groups against Toungoo and Mongpan. I admit that I did not at this time consider the threat to Burma serious; I over-estimated the natural difficulties of the wooded hills on the Burmese frontier. Nor did I realise the unreliable quality of the Burma units nor the lack of training of the British and Indian troops.

I was certainly guilty of an error of judgment in minimising the danger to Burma, but it is doubtful whether, even if I had appreciated it thoroughly, I could have done much more to help Burma. India had been sucked dry of trained troops by the requirements of Middle East, Iraq and Iran; and those most nearly approaching completion of their training had been sent to reinforce Singapore. Such as could be extracted from frontier garrisons and internal security duties were being sent to Burma as rapidly as possible. The same applies to administrative units. India was deficient of equipment for her own needs and could not meet those of Burma as well. Finally, and most important of all, India had no modern air force with which to support the Burma Army.

#### JAPANESE ATTACK ON BURMA

16. The Japanese advance on Burma began with engagements in the neighbourhood of Tavoy which was occupied by the enemy on 19th January. Meanwhile the garrison at Mergui further south was withdrawn without being attacked. On 20th January, fighting began in Northern Tenasserim with an attack