

strength might have been considerably reduced, and that while I agreed that an assault up the Rangoon river would be extremely hazardous if the Japanese had installed a heavy scale of defence, there was at present no sign that they had done so or intended to do so.

I never received from the Chiefs of Staff or War Cabinet either approval or condemnation of the plan; but the resources required to implement it were obviously not forthcoming. I had stated our requirements at 182,000 tons per month beginning in March if the plan was to be prepared and executed in the winter 1943-44. The shipping programmes for March and April provided less than half of this.

45. Meanwhile in the middle of February I had ordered my planning staff to prepare plans for operations against Sumatra and Java, so as to have available alternative plans, if the Combined Chiefs of Staff decided against the scheme for the reconquest of Burma. Plans for the capture of the Andaman Islands and for the invasion of Northern Sumatra were also examined.

46. I had intended to visit Australia in May to see the progress of the war against the Japanese in South-West Pacific, to learn what I could from their tactical methods and training, and to discuss the co-ordination of operations from India with those in South-West Pacific. I proposed then to suggest a visit to London in June to settle plans for the winter. When, however, I put this programme to the C.I.G.S. early in April, I was instructed to proceed forthwith to U.K. without visiting Australia, to discuss future plans for the war against Japan. I left India on April 18th and arrived in London on April 22nd.

47. The War Cabinet did not favour the plan I had proposed and which the Americans had accepted. It was decided to discuss operations from India against Japan at a conference in Washington to which I accompanied the Prime Minister and Chiefs of Staff, with the A.O.C.-in-C., India, and the Commander in Chief, Eastern Fleet.

The discussions in Washington did not result in any new proposals for action from India in 1943-44. It was decided that—

- (a) First priority should be given to developing the air route to China to a capacity of 10,000 tons a month;
- (b) There should be land and air operations into Upper Burma from Ledo and Imphal, combined with a Chinese advance from Yunnan.
- (c) Akyab and Ramree Islands should be captured by amphibious operations.

In fact, the only difference from my plan for 1942-43 (see paragraph 2) was the addition of Ramree Island to the objectives.

48. On the instructions of the Prime Minister I returned to London from Washington for further discussions. In June, His Majesty the King was graciously pleased to appoint me to be Viceroy of India, and on June 20th I was succeeded as Commander-in-Chief in India by General Sir Claude Auchinleck.

GENERAL REMARKS.

49. This despatch marks the end of my active military career. During the present war, in just under four years, from September, 1939,

to June, 1943, I have directed some fourteen campaigns; in the Western Desert of North Africa, in British Somaliland, in Eritrea, in Italian Somaliland, in Abyssinia, in Greece, in Crete, in Iraq, in Syria, in Iran, in Malaya, in the Dutch East Indies, in Burma, in Arakan. Some have been successful, others have failed.

I should like to express my admiration for the general strategy of the War Cabinet and for the bold and imaginative use made of our limited resources during these first four years of war. I have always been placed during these years at the far end of the Supply line, and have always been short of troops and equipment and air forces for the tasks I have had to undertake; but I have always been conscious that everything possible was being done to support me, that my lack of resources was due to a general shortage, that my difficulties were sympathetically understood and that I was being given all possible help and encouragement. For this I am most grateful.

50. I regret to have one exception to make. During the operations recorded in this despatch I received neither encouragement nor help nor understanding of the difficulties, only criticism for the failure of a bold attempt to engage the enemy with inadequate resources, in hazardous circumstances.

That my plans were not unsound is, I think, shown by the fact that the plans adopted by the South-East Asia Command for the winter 1943-44 have been practically the same as those I laid down for the previous winter; and that the Long Range Penetration Groups which were initiated by Major-General Wingate under my direction have been adopted and extended as a result of the experience I originated. That I had considerable difficulties to encounter is shown by the fact that in spite of greatly increased resources and another year's training and experience, progress in Burma in the campaigning season of 1943-44 has been little, if any, greater than in the corresponding period of 1942-43.

A glance at a map will give some idea of the distances involved in operations from India, and therefore of the magnitude of the administrative problem.

THE SOLDIER.

51. In this my last despatch I should like to pay a tribute to the British soldier. He has shown himself in this war, as in all others, the finest all-round fighting man in the world. He has won so many victories that he never doubts of victory; he has suffered so many disasters and defeats on his way to victory that defeat seldom depresses him. He has adapted himself to desert and to jungle, to open plains and to mountains, to new foes, new conditions, new weapons with the same courage and humorous endurance of difficulties and dangers which he has always shown. His staying power is a sure guarantee of final success.

Whatever the qualities of the soldier, the value of an army depends in the end on the leadership of the regimental officer, and in the British Army this still remains worthy of the men they lead. Whatever method may be adopted in the future to officer the British Army, it must ensure the same standard of leadership and the same close relations with the soldier.