

or from the coast will thus have great natural obstacles to overcome, whereas the enemy based on Rangoon and the south can operate up and down the valleys with much greater freedom. The poor communications to N.E. India, from which the advance must be made, have already been described.

Nor are the approaches for a sea-borne expedition more favourable. Down the whole of the west coast of Burma runs the steep jungle-clad range of the Arakan Yoma, passable only by a few bridle paths. The south coast, from Point Negrais to the south of the Rangoon river, is the delta of the Irrawaddy, a tangled wilderness of mangrove swamps and creeks, impassable for any but an amphibian force in small boats and extremely difficult even for it. Further east, the Gulf of Martaban is shallow with extensive mud flats which preclude a landing anywhere north of Moulmein. A land advance from Moulmein on Rangoon, which must be the objective of any expedition against South Burma, has to cover more than 100 miles and to cross several large rivers, while exposed to flank attack from Thailand.

The climate practically restricts operations to a period of less than six months, from November to the middle of May, since in the S.W. monsoon the rainfall is so heavy as to render most roads impassable and to restrict all flying operations; and the stormy winds make landing on the west coast impracticable. Finally, the whole of Upper Burma and most of Lower Burma are intensely malarial.

28. Early in June I considered that definite plans for the recapture of Burma could be put in train; and I cabled home outline plans of operations. I said that I proposed to operate in a series of small columns against the line of the river Chindwin from Kalewa to Homalin, with possible separate advances from Ledo and Fort Hertz against Myitkyina. I would then push on to the line Kalewa-Katha-Myitkyina; and exploit any success towards Shwebo, Bhamo and the line of the Irrawaddy.

I pointed out the difficulties due to the poverty of communications both in Assam and in Upper Burma, the unhealthy climate, and lack of trained troops. I asked especially for the strengthening of the Air Force at my disposal. At the same time I instructed G.O.C.-in-C. Eastern Army to undertake a limited offensive, as outlined above, into Upper Burma, with October 1st as date for commencement; and to push troops from Chittagong towards the Burma border, and to improve communications with a view to an advance into Arakan later on. Meanwhile I continued to plan a sea-borne expedition against Lower Burma, with an original target date of November 1st.

29. The succeeding months were a period of frustration so far as plans for an offensive into Burma were concerned. The heavy monsoon, the severe incidence of malaria, and the Congress disturbances of August and September delayed the preparations in Assam for the advance into Upper Burma and interfered with the training of the troops; while the continuance of operations in Madagascar deprived India of troops, ships and landing craft which were necessary for the preparation of the sea-borne expedition. On the 3rd July I had to report that I could see no prospect of mounting an expedition against Lower Burma before January, 1943; and early in September the

G.O.C.-in-C., Eastern Army, informed me that he would be unable to begin operations from Assam before the 1st March, 1943.

In a cable of the 18th July, the Chiefs of Staff had stated the conditions in which a full-scale expedition against Burma might be launched in the winter 1942-43; they were most unlikely to be fulfilled. Also, after detailed discussion with G.O.C.-in-C., Eastern Army, I had to accept his view that an advance into Upper Burma could not begin before the 1st March.

It was obvious therefore that I had to content myself with only very limited objectives for the winter of 1942-43; and I accordingly issued instructions in the middle of September, 1942, defining the object of operations during this period as:—

(a) To develop communications and establish ourselves in a favourable position for reconquering Burma and reopening the Burma Road at the first opportunity.

(b) To bring the Japanese to battle with the purpose of using up their strength, particularly in the air.

I said that my intentions were:—

(a) To capture Akyab and to reoccupy Upper Arakan.

(b) To strengthen our position in the Chin Hills.

(c) To occupy Kalewa and Sittaung, and thence to raid the Japanese L. of C.

(d) To make such administrative preparations as would allow of the rapid advance of a force towards Upper or Lower Burma should opportunity offer during the campaigning season of 1942-43.

30. On the 18th and 19th October I discussed with General Stilwell, the American Chief of Staff to Marshal Chiang Kai-Shek, Chinese co-operation in an offensive into Burma. He produced a plan drawn up by the Generalissimo for the reconquest of Burma which was generally on the same lines on which we were already working, i.e., an advance by land forces into Upper Burma and a sea-borne expedition against Lower Burma. He proposed that a large Chinese force should advance from Yunnan into North-East Burma at the same time as the Chinese Corps being assembled at Ramgarh in India (see paras. 15 and 16) advanced from Ledo on Myitkyina and a British force from Manipur towards Mandalay. We agreed that these plans were generally suitable, but that the date by which they could be put into execution could not yet be definitely fixed.

#### OPERATION FOR CAPTURE OF AKYAB.

31. Early in autumn I set on foot preparations for a sea-borne expedition to recapture Akyab. It was at first intended to be carried out at the beginning of December, but neither the shipping, troops or necessary air force could be made available for various reasons, principally the prolongation of operations in Madagascar. By the middle of November I was forced to abandon hope of being able to mount a sea-borne expedition against Akyab, and decided that the only chance of capturing it was by an advance from Chittagong down the Arakan coast to secure the Mayu Peninsula, whence an attack on Akyab could be launched from short range. This plan had the disadvantage that it made surprise most unlikely, and Arakan